Articulating Dance Improvisation: Knowledge Practices in the College Dance Studio

Dissertation

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Abstract

College dancers develop knowledge through physical, cognitive, and affective processes. This dissertation explores the dancer’s knowledge through an ethnography of one cohort of college dancers as they prepare for and perform in a concert of new works. This study focuses on danced knowledge—the competencies and capacities that dancers cultivate through a system of dance practices—by specifically targeting the epistemological beliefs of college dancers engaged in improvisatory dance practices. Through an investigation of the epistemologies of this small group of college dancers engaged in improvisation-based performance and choreography, this document opens for discussion the nature of knowledge that arises at the intersection of body, mind, and art.

Using ethnographic participant/observation strategies and drawing from autoethnography, institutional ethnography and narrative inquiry, I have come to understand this population’s danced knowledge as fluid, interdependent, and contextual. Rooted in the physical practices of the form—messy, sweaty, tiring, and exhilarating—their understanding of knowledge is not merely about physical skill. Instead, while physicality is central, knowledge is constructed dialogically and interdependently with dancers developing their understandings in relation to each other and mentors as well as to the system and the values of the artistic form.
Herein, I argue that danced knowledge in this population: 1) arises from sensation, 2) is constructed through dialogue, 3) is mediated by fallibility, and 4) is enabled through connectivity to the discipline and to a community of dancers.

This study has implications for educators in dance and beyond, suggesting that the opportunities made available by an improvisatory mindset allow students to integrate physical/sensory, cognitive/analytic, and affective/emotional modalities to develop complex epistemologies. Furthermore, specifically within dance, this study has implications for college dance curricula, namely, the integration of improvisatory practice with opportunities for students to refine and articulate their understandings in ways that are accessible to a general population.
Dedication

For my grandmother Mildred Babbage Polk Weeks, whose stories of her aunt Mildred Ditto Babbage, a newspaper editor, have inspired me.
There are no solos. Even when dancing alone, we are in constant relationship.

To Alex, Ally, Becca, Caitlin, Joanna, Leigh, Katie, Katie, Kelly, Meredith, Sarah, and Vicki: you shared so much with me; I humbly thank you. Your danced knowledge is simply stunning. Annie, thank you for sharing your process with me in such a vulnerable way. I’m so delighted to continue to dance for and with you and so lucky to have you as a reader, colleague, and friend. Laurie, my almost family, thank you for your continued support, your striking dancing, and your insightful way of being in this world. Thank you Norah for opening your class to my curious eyes. Michael, there is but a glimpse of portrait in this document, only because I have yet to explore the depth and resonance of my experience in this piece. Thank you, from one of your birdwomen.

To my committee: Candace, Karen, and Jan. Candace, beyond the joys and terrors of your close readings, your approach to dance scholarship has forever enhanced and enabled my ways of knowing the field. Aesthetics and Criticism changed my life and having you as an advisor was invaluable. You are able to strike that delicate balance of encouragement and challenge and for that I am most grateful. Karen, three years ago during a summer technique class, we were moving across the floor and you came over to me, explained something, placed your hand just above my sacrum and pressed. I began the phrase and charged through the space as I had never done before. Thank you for changing my dancing in ways like that, many times over. Thank you for reading my bad
papers; thank you for teaching me what a comma splice is; thank you for our friendship, in *Birdwomen* and beyond. Jan, odd as it may sound, the notion that a group of researchers could sit in a circle and talk about one another’s work in a generative, lively fashion was mindblowing. Your research class taught me to first be interested, then be critical. That way of looking enabled this study.

I began dancing at age 16 and felt as if I had come home. Two years later, I entered one of the most rigorous undergraduate programs. Throughout those years, I faltered, questioned everything, and had a few breakthroughs. A few years later, what I learned there fell into place and I committed myself to a life as a dance artist. To my amazing undergraduate classmates: thank you for your continued inspiration.

To my graduate cohort: thank you for the office venting sessions, the shared syllabi, the many collaborations, and the spirit of embodied inquiry. Special thanks to Anna, Kate, Yen-Fang, and Yu. Most importantly, to Annie Beserra and Adriana—to you two, two very different thank yous. Annie, your masterful critical thinking and generous spirit inspired me to not only do, but to think about that which we do. Dancing *Jenkins Farm Project* fundamentally shifted my understandings of liminality, performance, and audience relationships. I look forward to future projects. Beyond that, our friendship is dear to my heart. Adriana, your complex epistemology captivates me. Smart, physical, and critical, you embody danced knowledge. Thank you for your kind friendship and your uncompromising standards. Indeed, the ideas in this dissertation are nothing you don’t know—as they are what you do.
Abby, Ming, and Mimu, thank you for the warm home, fried tofu skins, never-ending conversations, and the glorious perspective of childhood.

To Kim and Winx: thank you always. My sense of leadership comes straight from my work with you on the Young Women Leaders Program at the University of Virginia.

To Dr. Ellis: thank you for your advice and your skill; I’m thrilled to begin dancing again.

To the dance departments at Ohio State University, Oberlin College, and the University of Utah: thank you for all the challenges and opportunities.

I value my relationships above all else but during this period of intensive writing, I’ve ignored too many voicemails and emails. To my friends: thank you all for understanding. And now, I’m back.

I’ve been blessed with an amazingly strong, supportive, and individuated family. To Louise, Alan, Stewart, & John: thank you.

Karim, I love you. This last stretch would have been a miserable one without you. Thank you for your love, support, and cheerleading. I am at home when with you and I am with you, even when we are apart.

Lastly, I am most excited about returning to the studio. To my creative partner Peter, I look forward to discussing our dissertations in the past tense and our projects in the present! To my dancers, Laurie, Annie, Meghan, Annie, Adriana, Hannah, Keira, Dinah, Mandy, and whomever else I can recruit to come slice, drop, sweat, hit, and soar with me for this next project: send me your schedules, I’m ready to work.
Vita

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Prelude

March 2010. The cherry blossoms are in bloom. The birds are chirping so loudly that they seem to be hollering. I am thinking about the statement I boldly made a moment ago: “I’m a dancer.”

I just got off the phone with a friend of a friend, a yoga teacher and runner who may undergo the same surgery I had. In fact, I had two. I explain to her how after the first surgery I returned to yoga and pilates—even running after two months—but as soon as I tried to start dancing again, I couldn’t. It was 10 weeks after surgery and I was determined to rebound and perform a portrait, unpacked again, this time in Chicago. That solo, an element of my research design for this dissertation, is a striking piece of choreography, but my memories of it are bittersweet. This, I had thought, is my chance to redeem myself. I knew that being slated to perform four months after surgery was a stretch, but I was going to do it. After all, I was running. What’s harder on a body than that? Dancing.

In my kitchen, I would gently mark through the material and feel okay. I can do this. This is important. I am coming back. Then, hours later, sitting at my computer working on this dissertation, a deep ache would arise. If I tried to stand and walk, my leg would melt beneath me. I’d reach out and grab something, concentrate on pressing

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1 For the non-dance reader, I recommend referring to Appendix A, a glossary of common dance terms. Marking, for instance, means to dance using partial effort. It is like estimating in math, or outlining in writing. The dancer conserves energy, while still integrating the movement, as when learning, or enabling the choreographer to see a specific section or interaction. In this usage, I marked the movement to test my ability to execute it and to revisit the sequences.
Figure 1 Image from *a portrait, unpacked*. Photo courtesy of Kathryn Enright
through my leg, firing any muscles I could get to. *This is just weakness. I can get stronger. I’m a dancer.* Later, getting into or out of a car, I’d flinch, knowing the chance of a sharp pain was 50/50. Unwilling to admit a connection between these pains and my attempts to dance, I continued to mark through the solo.

A long arabesque standing atop a table. From a low side lunge, one arm extended to the side, making small, code-like gestures. Standing, encased in a dress made of copper wire and trying to fly out of it.

Finally, I called a friend whose dance career is also in limbo after a similar surgery; I admitted my pain and she described her struggles and successes with physical therapy. Clearly, I had a longer recovery ahead and a January performance began to seem unlikely. In the doctor’s office, I could hear him in the hallway with a teenage athlete. I’d heard it all before—torn labrum; arthroscopic surgery; sitting, walking, standing, that’ll all get better. But, returning to a high level of athletic performance? That remains a question.

He came in; I explained the situation. *I want to dance. I’m having trouble.* His response, in short, was: another surgery. As it turned out, my repair hadn’t completely healed. Well, he said, if I wasn’t a dancer, if I didn’t need such extreme range of motion, I probably would have never noticed. So no performance. Instead, a second surgery the week before that show went up.

So here I sit, having just told my story to a woman in the midst of her own challenges. I explained to her that I am really happy with the surgery and that I am quite sure that I’ll return to yoga and fitness, and I remain hopeful when it comes to dancing.
She responded by stating, emphatically, that as a yoga teacher and runner, her needs are similar to mine. I was able to calmly explain that what worries me is my capacity to leap, to throw my leg in the air, to fall to the ground; what I don’t say is that I need to take massive risks in unstable positions, in extreme range, and know, know, that my body will recover. I need to be able to approach choreographic ideas with abandon. In the moment, I need to know that I can negotiate a way out; in the long run, with baths in Epsom salts and a whole lot of ice, I need to know that I’ll be fine. Dancing is different. It’s not the same. No one understands what we do. To her, I go on to explain that I had to stop dancing because of the injury, and surgery was my only hope for recovery.

What is it about dancing that enlivens such passion? Why do so many people tell me that they love dance yet know so little about it? How can we feel so passionate about something that is barely understood by the general public? Would others want to do this if they knew what it was like to do it?

Last summer in a yoga workshop, most of the participants commented that it was the only experience they had had where they grew so close to a group of people. I realized that in dance I have this experience all the time. I have fierce, intense relationships that develop out of the hard work it takes to make and perform a piece of choreography. I’m asked to share my feelings, my body, and my intellect everyday. It’s normal and yet it is extraordinary. The first interstitial segment in this document (p. 123) began as an assignment for a research class. My classmates responded in awe—marking at the vulnerability of my tale. I was shocked, and my only response, was: “Imagine being vulnerable every day, with your body.” With writing, at least, you
are looking at the symbols on paper, only occasionally glancing up at me, my flesh and breath and affect. But the dancer is there, standing, leaping, falling, right in front of you. The body is the medium, and as I suggest later in this dissertation, a tangled one at that.

I learned much of *a portrait, unpacked* over two days in Wisconsin. It was −12 degrees Fahrenheit. I’ve never felt so cold, and the crispness and intensity of that weather colored my understanding of the piece. I stepped into the studio with the choreographer, Michael Estanich, feeling alert and directed. It was an amazing two days. The studios at the University of Wisconsin, Stevens Point are beautiful, large, light-filled, and the temperature is constant. Michael taught me material for the piece; unlike Annie Kloppenberg’s process in *Indelible Marks* of which you’ll read in this document, Michael came to rehearsal having pre-determined the steps in his own body. But as I learned the movement phrases, I began to play. We knew the piece would include a table covered in clay, and he had a heavy steel table that enabled me to teeter above, fall onto, and hang from it, without it moving. At one point, we placed the table on its side so that the top faced the audience, and wondered if I could slide down the front. I brazenly dove over the edge, realizing the second that my feet left the floor that I was aimed head-first towards the floor and the heavy steel table would follow on top of me. Luckily Michael was close by, and he swiftly reached out to brace the table.² Little choices, little risks, little bursts of adrenaline make dancing even more alluring to me.

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² After discussing it with them, I refer to Michael Estanich as Michael and Annie Kloppenberg as Annie, in the same way that I refer to the informants by their first names (albeit pseudonyms). Annie, and the other graduate student, Laurie, do not have pseudonyms by their own agreement. It is worth noting that almost every faculty member in this department is addressed by her or his first name; as such, the seeming familiarity students demonstrate in referring to faculty members by their first or on occasion only last names is not a mark of disrespect and is a reflection of the culture of the department.
I recently had a conversation with musicologist Mary Hunter where she quite directly articulated the query I’ve undertaken in this project. Speaking of the many avocational classical musicians, she asked, “Just what is it that they think they are doing?” (personal communication, 11/30/2009). In fact, I wonder, just what do I think I’m doing? It’s a question that provokes grand statements about the importance of dance and I’m in agreement with all the arguments for dance as an important—albeit undervalued—art form. But on a micro level, just what do I think I’m doing? I’m 32; I just had hip surgery; I dance in small projects and have no unrealistic aspirations of dancing for a large professional company; I’m an artist and scholar—I could have a fine career if I stop performing now. Yet I wake up at night hoping that I can perform again. Craving it. There’s a magic in the rehearsal process and in the act of performance, and I covet that way of being, that way of knowing in the world. Performance, from the outside, may seem like a putting on, a layering on of movement, or character, or musical style—and perhaps Hunter will find that her avocational classical musicians are indeed trying out ideas of identity. But dancing for me, as for many of the participants in this study, seems to have more to do with stripping away. In Chapter 7, I write about Goffman’s notion of everyday life as performance. The irony is that performance (in the common parlance, with prescribed performers and viewers) doesn’t feel like an act, it’s a matter of finding within yourself the power, weight, direction, and precision of movement. It’s about articulating the physical. It’s about feeling naked. Vulnerable, and yet whole.
A portrait, unpacked was the second piece in the concert that is discussed in this dissertation; it was preceded by the Performance Improvisation Ensemble and followed by Indelible Marks. When I watch the DVD, looking back at it today, I can barely see my dancing. I see that several of the production elements weren’t right: my hairstyle makes no sense, the dress is unflattering, the copper wire sculpture approximates the theatrical idea, but something is wrong. I watch the piece and remember a senior faculty member coming up to me after the show and saying “I hope you’ll keep working on it because it just isn’t in your body yet.” The night she’d come, the music had malfunctioned and two tracks played simultaneously. I was rattled and it already felt like a shoddy performance. I felt the loneliness of the solo form, no one with whom to commiserate, “Ugh, that was a bad run,” contextualizing it as just that, one run. But she’s right—I agree that it wasn’t fully “in by body.” But what does that mean? In large measure, the pages that follow attempt to wrestle with that question.

I have just rewound the DVD and am forcing myself to watch my dancing. This is research after all, and my mixed feelings about the piece can’t override my intention to include it in this dissertation. Somewhat objectively, I can see strengths and weaknesses. Beyond the overall presentation, I can see where I am holding back, where I could have taken more risks. In retrospect, I see that my dancing is tentative. I’m glad I didn’t repeat a tentative performance in January. Maybe someday I’ll dance the piece again, or maybe it’s a piece of my past.

There are also beautiful moments. At one point, I stand facing the audience and my weight sloshes side to side. Then I sweep sideways, my limbs and torso fluidly reach
then drop and recover, like a sail flapping in dead air, finally caught by a strong gust of
wind.

It’s hard not to make this prelude feel self-indulgent—a trip into my own
neuroses. Does it matter that I dance? Do I need to dance to write about it? Should the
reader care that I’m on the precipice of not dancing? I believe these things matter. For
the allure of dancing creates a context for danced knowledge, the topic of this
dissertation. Dancing is magnificent and it is horrifying. You have to be honest about
your self, your work, your body, and your community. You ask people to watch you do
something; you ask them for money. You must be exposed and brave. To dance means
risking the possibility of feeling like a failure, or being afraid of failure, and coming to
terms with that. It means you might get hurt: you might not be cast, or you might break
your foot. But the reason this matters, is that in truth, these are things that everyone
experiences in life. Dancing simply highlights our humanity. We all put ourselves out
there. We all seek recognition. We all try our best. We are all afraid of failing.

In dance, these pains and pleasures are apparent. Foregrounded. They are part of
the process. Bruises, tears, fierce arguments with business majors—in many ways, dance
majors have to fight for their discipline. They are advocates for the body, for art, for
feeling, making, doing, and thinking. The art form requires that they do it publicly, with
their bodies. But what they (we) do is what everyone does. Dancing is a blown-up,
exaggerated version of living.

I’ve been in an audience and my life has been altered by what I’ve seen. I see
dance all the time that I hate. I close my eyes, count the lighting instruments, critique the
technique of the dancers. But when I see something compelling, I feel marked. I know something about what it means to be human. To be sad, to be fallible, to be loved, to be vulnerable. The body is everything. It’s what we have and it’s what we’ll lose. It shifts and changes. It becomes inscribed: stamped with race, class, gender, ability, nationality, age, religion. And those lenses, as well as the systems that restrict and enable them, matter; but beyond the body as a coating, the body is an actor. With, in, and through our bodies we move in all of our different ways.

The kind of dance of which I write, contemporary improvisation-based concert dance—the blown up, exaggerated version—is, of course, only one sort of dancing. Social dance forms, classical cultural forms, street forms, codified genres, they too provide an enactment of living. They are a way of highlighting the qualities, stories, and realities that shape our lives.

This dissertation is a journey into the dance studio to have a look at one sliver of what dancing is about. Not what the dances we make are about, which is a whole different question, but to the act of dancing. What is it about moving the body in a complicated way that becomes so compelling for dancers and avid dance audiences alike? Just what is it that we think we are doing in the studio? How are those beliefs developed? And why do they matter?
Chapter 1

Introduction

I’m trying to situate myself in relation to what I’ve learned more than letting it wash over me. I’m trying to constantly reassess every time something happens.

I was consciously trying not to watch other people. I was just doing it. I was going to feel it. I was going to do it. So I messed up a lot...But it felt okay, to be doing that.

It was just knowing exactly what was happening, but at the same time not being on autopilot. It wasn’t, ‘Oh, I know what’s going to happen,’ it was knowing in the moment, so not predicting, because it was always different.

As much as I have some concept or layer, I can go into that layer and dig deeper...It’s constantly shifting.

...that constant feeling that you are never going to match up, then once you finally think you are somewhere you see something else and you are like, ‘Ugh!’ And I guess that’s what keeps me going.

You have that relationship [in improvisation], but how can you take that into life...I take a risk, whatever that may be, in life, and things start to implode—when someone stumbles or falls here, it’s okay because someone is going to come in and help fix the scene.

We are learning how to work.³

What Does it Mean to Know in the Field of Dance?

Situating oneself, constantly reassessing, consciously trying, knowing by feeling, having a sense of certainty, knowing in the moment, comparing oneself, noticing

³Quotes by participants in this study from interviews and group conversations. I have chosen to footnote all participant quotes. When presented in a narrative format, I footnote the first paragraph of the description. With other data, I provide a footnote with each passage, generally noting the participant and means of collection.
improvisation in life, believing someone will help, learning to work: these efforts are all situational and personal dimensions of danced knowledge. The aim of my work is to open for discussion the knowledge practices that are cultivated within the college dance studio by looking closely into what happens there through the voices and experiences of a small group of college dancers.

Like collegiate athletes and other performing arts majors, college dancers develop rich and complex physical and performative epistemologies. However, unlike the basketball player whose reliance on physical knowledge is goal and team-oriented or the actor whose physicality serves a character or idea, the dancer negotiates both athletic and aesthetic realms. Given the marginal position of the discipline in the academy and in society, little research has queried the dancer’s ways of knowing.

Danced knowledge, the competencies and capacities of dance artists, actively develops via in-studio practices. By practices, I simply mean the activities in which this population regularly engages. While I develop this idea of danced knowledge within this document, I avoid a universal view of dance. Instead, I document a specific group of people and a particular time span, prioritizing the analysis of discrete events rather than developing a philosophical theory of the form based on broad characteristics.

Incorporating strategies from feminist sociologist Dorothy Smith’s (1987, 2007) institutional ethnography, my focus “in time and in actual local sites of people’s bodily existence” (Smith, 1999, p. 97) considers these lived experiences not as isolated phenomena worth representing as such, nor as access points to universal themes of
existence, but as points-of-entry into a system of knowledge so as to provoke broader discussions about students’ beliefs about and experiences of knowledge.

An ethnographic investigation of embodied learning and knowing in the college dance studio, this study focuses on one cohort of twelve dancers, querying the educative and epistemic properties of the creative process leading up to a performance. This study follows these dancers as they prepare for a concert that includes both choreographed and improvised pieces. However, in both processes, improvisation serves as a basis for the creative process. The qualities, texture, and tones of their stories convey the variance and individuality of these dancers. It is not what the students learn, but how they conceptualize and engage with their discipline that is my subject. The narratives of experience herein speak to a knowledge that is expansive, fluid, and recursive. While from this data I generate a conceptualization of danced knowledge, the validity, as qualitative research scholar Patti Lather (2001) argues, will be in my ability to provoke comparisons and arguments among a broad community of dancers and those interested in the body as a site of learning. I have encountered and hereby acknowledge other views by experts in the field, and other graduate students; even I myself sometimes question the assertions of these young dancers. Indeed, the topic is ripe for discussion.

I investigate the learning of college dancers from two vantage points. First, at the level of the individual, I ask questions of dance epistemology: in the daily practices of dancing, how does the dancer develop knowledge? Second, from a pedagogical perspective, I ask: How do in-studio practices contribute to learning in dance? Better
understanding the knowledge development of the dancer from these two perspectives will advance collegiate dance pedagogy and curriculum design.

**Why Study the Dimensions of Danced Knowledge?**

On an applied front, the arts are critical sites of learning (Heath, 2001; Heath, Soep & Roach, 1998), with implications for knowledge and practice beyond the activity itself. Dancers develop knowledge, understand embodiment, and conceptualize challenges with a unique set of sensibilities: physical, sensorial, artistic, and critical. There is a dearth of literature on the demands on the college dancer or the multidimensional learning of this population. This is not surprising as college dancers make up a sliver of the student population; dance is not even coded as one of the 85 majors in the National Survey of Student Engagement (2009). In this national survey of students at over 700 institutions, dancers would be “other arts & humanities” majors. Dance, and the learning practices out of which it is woven, has been neglected by scholars seeking to expand the research on educational theory. Therefore understanding the processes through which dance learning is constructed—and what is lost when such learning is excised from educational curricula as a whole—is increasingly important.

On a theoretical level, dancing is also a critical site of inquiry into basic processes of learning inasmuch as it is a site where multi-modal learning (visual, kinesthetic, aural, embodied) intersects with complex forms of attentional/observational learning (Rogoff et. al., 2003; Lave & Wener, 1991); where discursive practices for learning to talk about embodiment and embodied learning are highlighted (Bresler, 2004); and where creativity is an aim.
Increasingly, in higher education, the acquisition of content knowledge and the development of the student are seen as contingent variables. The activities of the students, curricular and extra-curricular, predict student success more than the demographic characteristics of a population (Kuh, 2005). Dance serves as an exemplar of this engagement because of the amount of time students spend in dance-related activities, including daily technique classes; academic, dance, and creative classes; rehearsals; physical conditioning; or socializing with other dancers. In 1988, when education scholars Brown, Collins, and Duguid advocated for “an epistemology that begins with activity and perception” (p. 29), they pointed towards knowledge that is central to dance studies—knowledge that oscillates between cognitive and sensorimotor, and that is often articulated metaphorically. Indeed, learners are inextricably embodied. Linguist George Lakoff and philosopher Mark Johnson (2003) suggest that the metaphors in language subtly point to the embodied nature of cognition. The language of dancers, while contextually specific, also provides an entry point for a discourse on knowledge development, given the amount of attention dancers spend physically articulating concepts and verbally articulating sensations. These behaviors make up the bulk of studio practice. Because the content of the learning is the body, dance offers a site where

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4 It is important to note that this is not a comparative analysis and it is not my intention, nor does my data set provide me with any ability to position the structuring of a dance major as superior to other disciplines. Instead, I seek to look closely at the practices of engagement and knowing. And, as the dancer narratives suggest, this engagement in learning has both positive implications, in that students feel that they are growing personally and professionally, and negative ones, in that many refer to feeling overwhelmed and discouraged.

5 By “physically articulating concepts,” I refer to the common practices within the dance studio wherein a choreographer asks dancers to embody an idea, quality, or movement task. For instance, in this study, dancers experimented with qualities such as recklessness; movement generation tasks such as remembering and retracing spatial pathways; and specific physical techniques such as defining and collapsing points in space.
embodiment is explicit, in which ways of knowing oscillate between enaction and reflection. Yet, studies of this phenomenon, so promising in its implications for learning theory, are nearly non-existent.

Since learning and knowledge are created and situated out of groups and activities as well as artifacts and material environments (Star, 1996), it is necessary to look at how educational contexts are created and reproduced over time and through space (Hiller & Rooksby, 2002). Approaches to dance education in higher education have grown out of a range of philosophies of dance. Unfortunately, little scholarship has investigated how pedagogical lineages intersect with the systems designed to promote and produce learning in contemporary dance departments. In this study, I look at the dancers’ physical, interpersonal, and societal environments—the ways that studio practices within the academy foster the distinct knowledge set that is danced knowledge.

Need for the Study

This is not a prescriptive but a descriptive analysis. A dancer may read this study, furrow her brow and say, as a colleague said to me after hearing me read a paper at a conference: “Well, you didn’t say anything that I didn’t already know, but you said it

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6 See Hagood (2008) Legacy in dance education: Essays and interviews on values, practices, and people for a recent effort to redress this missing literature. See also Hagood’s (2000) History of dance in American higher education.
7 A history of dance in higher education, particularly in light of pedagogical lineages, is beyond the scope of this dissertation. Instead, I focus on dance epistemology, in the context of the present structures in the particular department wherein the ethnography took place. Because of the centrality of lineage in dance knowledge, I do, however, attempt to provide a sense of pedagogical lineage when appropriate; for instance when the dancers are discussing particular technique classes or composition classes, I use footnotes to give the reader a brief historical context and understanding of the movement values of that teacher. I also provide a brief outline of the genesis of dance in the academy in Appendix C.
8 The range of choreographic processes, philosophies on improvisation, and techniques of dance training vary widely. While the descriptions of particular studio practices in this dissertation should not be read as standard or normative practices, nor are they abnormal or unusual. In other words, these are particular exemplars, not standard examples or outliers.
very eloquently.” I agree, in part. The intention of this dissertation is to describe and analyze several dimensions of danced knowledge—knowledge that is already being cultivated in dance studios. I hope that readers from dance will be intrigued to look closer into their own cultures and practices, and that readers from without will find resonance with the intertwined physical, cognitive, and affective practices, widespread in dance, that hold promise for conceiving of varied forms of knowledge throughout the academy. I am not arguing that the usefulness of dance is for others to “make a dance about” their topic; I am not advocating for the incorporation of dance activities into any other classrooms. Instead of using dance as a tool for another purpose, I am interested in the elements of this explicitly and pervasively embodied knowledge that can often cross disciplines. I believe that my approach, focusing on the experiences of dancers and using narrative to creatively render them for the page, can provide a foundation for a conceptualization of dance in higher education that takes into account the intra- and inter-personal dimensions of a knowledge that arises through sensations, is constructed through dialogue, is mediated by pain, and is enabled by connectivity.

By splitting open the sometimes sloppy and sometimes remarkably astute ways that dancers verbalize physical experience, in the ensuing chapters I explore the dimensions of knowing that emerge in the everyday practices of dancing. As a dancer, I situate the crux of the issue within the act of dancing, not the idea of dance or performance. My choice to write as a dancer rather than a dance educator is deliberate: little dance education research speaks from inside dancing. Towards this end, I
selectively vary the written tone, ranging from a traditional scholarly distance to a more creative, evocative tone.

**What is Danced Knowledge?**

In line with literatures on enactive knowledge, knowledge-in-action, embodied knowledge, and sensational knowledge, danced knowledge is best understood as the ways dancers mobilize knowledge, developing both competencies and capacities; in other words, how dancers fold their understanding of what they are doing into further doing. Beyond skill, danced knowledge includes elements such as curiosity, creativity, and desire.

Danced knowledge, as understood by the participants in this study, is an enactive knowledge (of action and interaction) in which physical and linguistic understandings are interdependent, yet conflicting. Like all arts, dancing is related to the language and texts that surround it, and this relationship is sometimes fraught. The result is an epistemology that oscillates between the known and the unknown, and that which one can describe and that which one can only struggle to describe. The practices, both everyday and extraordinary, that constitute dance training facilitate the development of this unstable system of knowledge and cultivate both curiosity and desire in young dancers. Learning in dance, physically negotiated through the dimensions of time, space, and weight in relation to context, content, and peers, is constructed dialogically through interpersonal reflection and meaning-making.

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This knowledge is oscillating in that it shifts between moments of achievement and recognition and moments of awe—when dancers realize that the more they learn, the less they know. As many mainstream theories of epistemic development in college suggest, the dancers in this study describe a development from fixed to complicated knowledge sets. For instance, shifting from believing as Margaret says in her reference to a high school dancer’s mentality, that dance is about executing “turns, multiple turns” or believing, as Mary says, that dance is about discovery: “once I’ve really found something, I can—I can investigate, how. And how to get back there.” But beyond that developmental trajectory, two other elements are key to a dancer’s developing epistemology: 1) knowledge is expansive, fluid, and recursive—one must constantly seek, question, and re-discover and 2) knowledge is procedural—it is a confluence of iterative work over time.

Danced knowledge develops through sensory experiences that students situate within broad personal narratives. It develops through interactions—as students engage with the unstable practice of dancing, they also interact with one another and with ideas about themselves. It develops through work: through sweat, elation, confusion, and perseverance. It develops through feedback from teachers, choreographers, and peers. Moreover, it develops through what I call synergistic articulations of mind and body, the oscillating sense that, as Sydney writes, “you have thought. So now you can do.”

Dancers demonstrate this knowledge through performance, physical risk-taking, creating, and seeking out new challenges. Operating in the unknown is not easy. Indeed,

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10 See Appendix D for an overview of epistemic cognition in college student development.
11 Margaret, September interview; Mary, December group interview
12 Sydney, journal
the process of cultivating danced knowledge can call into question elements of identity. While the physical challenges of dance—both pleasures and pains—create an internal reward mechanism, they also forebode. Fears of injury, or simply not being “good enough” loom, as do concerns about future employment in a tenuous field. The context of dance learning in higher education fosters vulnerabilities as students worry about the future, especially given the current state of the field, face constant evaluation by grading and casting, and have a spectrum of concerns about their bodies. Dance in higher education also fosters strong relationships among students and with faculty and allows students to explore a range of knowledges in dance, knowledge that exists beyond “turns, multiple turns.”

On Dance in Higher Education

For over a hundred years, dance has had a place in US higher education. In that time, modern dance in America was born, and has hybridized into the many existing forms of contemporary dance, creating varied contexts for the dancing student. In a different way than dancers in professional conservatories, college and university dancers have also been college students: in the larger sense their living and learning have been influenced by the continuous rhetoric of university reform and equally pervasive cultural discourses of the body. While college dance has had a range of purposes—physical health, aesthetics and moral development, cultural edification, self-expression, professional training, and scholarly inquiry—the question of mission has remained a heated one: dance to learn or learn to dance? What this question points to is the locus of

13 While the first dance major was started in 1926, dance classes have been taught in women’s higher education since the early days of women’s higher education. An overview of dance in higher education is included in Appendix C.
knowledge. Is the action itself the result of learning? Or must the action spur additional growth?

Offering a vignette to introduce his article on Margaret H’Doubler, the founder of the first dance major in US higher education, dance scholar Thomas Hagood (2000/2001) describes the moment after teaching a section of Doris Humphrey’s Passacaglia and Fugue in C Minor to a group of college dancers, when he was challenged by his mentor, Claudia Melrose:

‘That was very nice Tom, but what were they learning?’ I replied, ‘They were learning a section of Humphrey’s Passacaglia.’ Claudia responded, ‘No, Tom. What were they learning?’ In a flash I realized that I couldn’t answer her; I hadn’t really thought about the ‘what.’ I realized the need to make a personal search for substance in dance education. (p. 32)

A useful exposition of Margaret H’Doubler’s legacies and ideas follows, but Hagood’s article does not answer Melrose’s question. Or, perhaps in evading the question, Hagood implicitly answers with H’Doubler’s position that students are not learning when learning predetermined steps. Indeed, the split legacy of the Wisconsin and Bennington models of dance in higher education—dancing to learn versus learning to dance—leads to an assumption that these are two conflicting philosophies. This debate continues.

Nonetheless, most collegiate programs function in both realms, offering an “eclectic”

14 Doris Humphrey (1895-1958) was one of the pioneers of American modern dance. Her movement style was based on a swinging, breath-based, fall and recovery cycle. Her choreography marked an important transition from the solo works of the pre-modern dance period, such as those of Isadora Duncan, Loie Fuller, and Ruth St. Denis, to works for ensembles. She authored the seminal, The art of making dances (1959). See: Siegel, 1993; Reynolds & McCormick, 2003, pps 141-178.
15 Margaret H’Doubler (1889-1982) developed the first university dance major at the University of Wisconsin in 1926. A basketball coach sent by her boss to develop a dance program, she eschewed the professional modern dance world, that of Humphrey, Martha Graham, and Hanya Holm, and instead developed a dance program based on kinesthetic sensations that strove to use dance to develop creative, healthy women—not professional dancers. See: Ross, 2000; Brennan, Wilson, & Hagood, 2007.
16 Unlike H’Doubler’s Wisconsin model, Martha Hill, who had performed for Martha Graham, created at Bennington a dance major and a summer institute with an emphasis on modern dance technique and performance. She later developed the program at Juilliard See: McPherson, 2008.
(Bales & Nettl-Fiol, 2008) education by training dancers in the physical practices of multiple dance genres but also seeking to cultivate the intellectual rigor of young artists and theorists. I contend that while dance in higher education can enact both charges—developing critical thinkers and movers as well as competent performers and choreographers—as a discipline, dance still lacks significant scholarship on what, and more importantly, how Hagood’s students were learning.

**Overview of Chapters**

I present this dissertation in two parts. The first section includes the methodology and literature review and two related appendices for readers wanting additional contextualization. Those chapters should give the reader a basis for understanding the narrative second half of the dissertation by providing a rationale for the research design, an overview of approaches to writing about dance, background information on how dance developed as a discipline in the academy, and theories of epistemic development. The methodology chapter provides the reader with a sense of the choices I made in conducting this study both in the data collection and the writing process. The literature review covers a range of issues in writing about dance by looking at works by dance critics, theorists, and ethnographers. The second section includes the ethnographic analysis and creative writings. The first narrative chapter concerns the practices and values present in the rehearsal process and technique class. Titled “Situating Sensations as a Means to Develop Knowledge,” in this chapter I argue that the integration of rich sensorial experiences into beliefs about one’s progress, or trajectory as a dancer is fundamental to danced knowledge. The first “Interstitial” follows. All three interstitials,
as discussed in the methodology chapter, are creative writings, like the prelude, designed to give the reader a glimpse into my highly subjective experience as a dancer. Looking at dance from three locales—within the studio, outside on the college campus, and on stage—in these three brief writings, I negotiate the inside/outside experience of dance scholarship. The fifth chapter “Dialogical Constructions of Danced Knowledge” concerns the ways that through conversations both in and out of the studio, dancers co-construct their understandings of dance and then mobilize these within their dancing.

“Pain as a Way of Knowing,” the sixth chapter, looks at the relationship of body and identity through disruptions caused by pain and injury. I argue that the danger of not dancing intensifies a desire to dance and to remain “a dancer,” creating a complicated negotiation of body and identity. The final narrative chapter, “An Interdependent Way of Knowing,” suggests that danced knowledge exists only in a web of connections and that the social dimensions of the knowledge prompt strong connections to the discipline itself.

The concluding chapter suggests implications for practice and theory by looking at ways that dance curricula can foster the development of students who are able to articulate danced knowledge, looking at ways non-dance populations may benefit from this type of knowledge, and lastly by looking at what future lines of inquiry would serve the understanding of danced knowledge.
Chapter 2

Methodology

All dance artists create through physical, cognitive, and affective interplay in the studio. Using a multifaceted research design, this study extracts dancer narratives from a data set composed of observations, interviews, and in-studio conversations with student dancers and frames those narratives with scholarly analysis. In this chapter, I address the process and product of this dissertation study. I begin by tracing my initial research design decisions, noting the complexities of representing time-based art and paradigm as well as theoretical influences. Next, I address the site and population of the study. I then reflect on my data collection intentions and completions, and conclude by addressing the analytic process and remaining issues of confidentiality.

Design of the Study

In dance scholarship, with the exception of Cynthia Novak’s (1990) ethnographic work on Contact Improvisation, embodied dance ethnographies primarily study communities other than those that constitute concert dance. Dance and cultural studies scholar Jane Desmond (2000), however, calls researchers to combine ethnographic and textual analyses of local concert dance practices:

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17 Contact Improvisation is a dance practice born of the 1970s. While at present, it is a common practice in the contemporary concert dance world, it was initially something of a counter-culture movement. Therefore to consider it as an exception to the statement of this sentence is only partially accurate. Another exception is Jennifer Fisher’s Nutcracker Nation, which sits between ethnography and history and considers the most popular concert dance event in the US, the Christmastime ballet, The Nutcracker. There is a broad literature from the fields of anthropology and ethnography looking at cultural dance practices, see: Browning (1995), Farnell (1995), Hahn (2007); Ness (1992), Sklar (2001, Royce (2002), Sutton (2002), and Williams (2004).
I suggest that we use the potential of fieldwork—that is, the sustained participation in and observation of communities, institutions, and practices—and apply this widely to a variety of sectors in the U.S., including modern dance and ballet companies, dance institutions such as archives, training schools, community dance centers, and even our own scholarly organizations. (p. 43)

I based this research design on just such a model, an in-depth ethnographic analysis that utilizes the production of a graduate concert in a dance department as an entry point to analyze danced knowledge. The concert consisted of MFA candidate Annie Kloppenberg’s culminating project in choreography, titled Indelible Marks; Michael Estanich’s a portrait, unpacked, in which I danced; and a pre-concert showing of improvisational work by students in the Performance Improvisation Ensemble. Each element of this concert afforded me a unique point-of-entry to the epistemic contours of the knowledge that develops in dance. Investigating the development of a choreographed piece furnished the opportunity to query the accumulations of prescribed material and dancers’ shifting relationships to the previously determined, what we call “set” movement. Studying improvisation offered access to danced knowledge that, though cumulative in bodily intelligence, is fleeting and unstable. Reflecting upon my own dancing challenged me to develop language for the sensations of dance from the inside. Beyond marking the endpoint of a targeted rehearsal period, studying a concert also offered for consideration and analysis a major structural element of the college dance education.

**Recording a Time-based Art**

There are two camps regarding the ephemerality of dancing. The first suggests that it is passing, leaving only the traces of imprinted bodies, memories, and artifacts. As
critic and scholar Marcia Siegel (1996) writes, “Dance is an ephemeral, a fleeting art” (p. 29). Unlike other performing arts disciplines that leave scripts and scores behind, dance evaporates. The second camp, which includes many movement notators, argues that scripts and scores are symbolic translations rather than remnants of an actual performance, and that dance neglects its own literacy (with only a sliver of dancers reading the most common dance script Labanotation) rather than a uniquely vaporous subject matter (Williams, 2005). Writing about dance events by dance critics has served as a de facto preservation tool and writing by scholars as an intentional preservation. Whether using codified symbolic or descriptive terms or writing in metaphoric response, dance writers have made experience into document. Not only do many dancers (myself included) not read notation, but also many of the students in this study report reading very little of the existing literature about dance. This is worth noting, for writing about dance is not only the medium of dissemination but is the medium for my rendering and analysis of a series of events and encounters. Thus, the problem, beyond preservation of a form, is that of transmission to future generations of dancers. In the final section of this chapter, I discuss my choices in writing style as it relates to the aim of re-rendering experience.

There is a vast divide between popular dance literatures, like dancer biographies, and academic texts and the latter tends to be dense and theoretical. Though this can be a common problem in academic writing, given the overtly visceral nature of the form, I believe dance calls for more enlivened prose. But could sweaty stomachs and bleeding toes make it onto the page? How can reading a book about dance provide a sense of what
it is like to dance in the way that reading Loic Wacquant’s (2007) *Body and soul: Notes on an apprentice boxer* provokes nausea through the tale of his foray into boxing on Chicago’s South Side, or the way that Robert Murphy’s (2001) *A body silent: The different world of the disabled* reminds readers that they too will slip away from a physical form, as he describes the slow process of leaving his? Indeed, as the reader from the social sciences might note, the problem of ephemerality is not unique to dance, or the arts, for while performances evaporate as they occur, so do human experiences. The experience of schooling, for instance, is a fleeting performance; for that reason, I turn frequently to literatures from sociology, anthropology, and education studies as a way to ground my methods in current studies of social experience.

Dance is visceral. It is an intellectual pursuit as well, but rather than elevate the intellect and discuss a theoretical body, in this study I foreground the physical experience and discussions thereof to emphasize the experience of dancing in space, through time, and with weight. The participants in this study are distinct individuals who respond to their environments through a combination of unique prior experiences, internal impulses, and nurtured competencies. Although the moment of performance is fleeting, as are all moments, dance as a practice is accumulative. The individual concerns of the participants and the communal nature of performance shaped my research design. In recognition of the danger in conceptualizing dance without a sense of time, place, or culture, I selected an ethnographic research design, studying a group of students over the period of a creative process rather than a phenomenological analysis of instances of dancing. As movement anthropologist Drid Williams (2005) writes:
[Phenomenology] denies any ontological status to dances (to rituals, ceremonies, and dramas) except when they are being performed. To agree to [Jane] Harrison’s position [that “things” are permanent and exist in time whereas “events” are gone forever once performed] is to commit oneself to the notion that events have no permanent, near-permanent, or long-range character in human social life; only things have duration in time, but this is an indefensible position. Events in human social life include the signing of declarations, court trials, wars, christenings, marriages, funerals, and much more. These events have long-range, enduring properties and characteristics. They also have lasting consequences. To deny ontological status or duration in time to them is absurd. (n.p.)

This dissertation explores how college students negotiate disciplinary knowledge that is constitutively physical and discursive by looking at linguistic and physical articulations both in moments, such as the “breakthroughs” that students describe, and in the ways that they perceive their development over time—their narratives of experience. Epistemic properties of dancing emerge here via the narratives of these student dancers.

Narrating the experience of dancing cannot capture movement, but it can convey visceral images and sensations. Writing from within dance by using my body as a means of exploring the topic and using the tools of the discipline to write about dancers, for instance using Laban Movement Analysis (LMA) as an observational tool and recording in-studio conversations to look at how conversations function as an element of the creative process, has been imperative, for each keeps the actions of dancing central.

Selecting a Methodology

Beliefs about topic profoundly influence a researcher’s approach to data collection. Dance theorist Susan Leigh Foster (2005), writes:

theory encourages you to ask what is enabled by a given proposition and what is foreclosed … theory helps you discover new things. An integral part of investigation, it provides a flexible corpus of assumptions that are always subject to change depending on what you uncover during your ongoing research. (p. 22)
Engaging in the critically iterative research process Foster describes allowed me to generate new ways of understanding my research topic while also revealing new data. As the processes that constitute knowing in dance involve multiple senses and mediators, from the embodied to the social, I accessed and translated these modes of awareness and enactments of knowledge through a research design and writing process that is both creative and analytic.

The goals of this study have necessitated a qualitative mode of inquiry. Qualitative research queries the how rather than the what (or the how much). In dance, a parallel is Laban Movement Analysis, which indicates how to move whereas Labanotation, a dance script, provides instructions for the direction, height, and duration for moving a defined body part. Both movements and movement qualities are important in dancing, and both quantitative and qualitative modes of inquiry are necessary in dance studies at large.\textsuperscript{18}

Qualitative research studies generally require an open premise and often an under-examined topic; the researcher begins with an interest, direction, a sense of the literature, and a population or phenomenon. When one knows little about the subject or population, the researcher must continually circle back to the premises of the study, reevaluating assumptions and expectations. This study is qualitative in part, because little research

\textsuperscript{18} The researcher determines methodology by considering the demands of the research questions. Quantitative studies determine how much defined variables matter in a given context. For instance, does participation in a dance workshop significantly increase fitness levels in the average participant as compared with those of the non-participant? Mixed-methods studies work well when several types of information are required to understand a phenomenon. To suggest the best practices in post-surgery rehabilitation for ballerinas, for example, a researcher might interview several dancers, hoping for evocative descriptions of their healing; observe dancers in physical therapy and rehearsal; and/or interview therapists. She or he would also collect data on the rate of improvement, degrees of extension, perceived pain, or improvements in strength.
explores the experiences of college dancers (Atler, 1997; Bracey, 2004; Stinson, Blumenfield-Jones, & Van Dyke, 1990).

All research is reductive. The researcher decides how to represent parts of phenomena. A qualitative method enabled me to construct accounts of how dancing and learning occur by developing rather than testing ideas. Qualitative research is by nature both active and interpretive. Norman Denzin and Yvonna Lincoln (2005), who advocate for postmodern practices, distill the project of research as representation:

Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations, including fieldnotes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to the self. At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural setting, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. (p. 3)

This study is an effort to understand the experiences of dancers within a creative process, and as such, I focus on actual events as experienced by my participants and myself. To achieve this, I began with a theoretical orientation that draws from the theories of autoethnography and institutional ethnography as well as my life experiences as a dancer. The strategies of Laban Movement Analysis supplement my methodology with specific descriptive tools. My desire to incorporate both interpretivist and empiricist methods reflects my understanding of life as containing both experiences and structures (natural and societal).

**Institutional ethnography.** Feminist sociologist Dorothy Smith’s (1987) institutional ethnography is a means to investigate the interrelations of persons,

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19 For an analysis of the choreographic process as a system, see Fournier, 2003.
institutions, and researchers. Institutional ethnography charges the researcher to connect
the daily experiences of individuals to the social structures that influence them, while
critically examining the role of the researcher. The theory developed in response to
Smith’s observations that women’s work (their everyday, often unpaid work) and
women’s analyses were absent from fields like sociology because, “women have been
largely excluded from the work of producing the forms of thought and the images and
symbols in which thought is expressed and ordered” (1987, p. 18). Distinct from
frameworks that prioritize deep explorations of the human psyche or widespread data
collection searching for universal truths, researchers who use this theory look at everyday
life as problematic, utilizing multiple methods. Institutional ethnography suggests taking
the normal acts of living as a starting point, and mapping from that point to the social
relations that mediate experiences. Institutional ethnographers start with experience and
look outwards to institutions; “Institutional ethnographers believe that people and events
are actually tied together in ways that make sense of such abstractions as power,
knowledge, capitalism, patriarchy, race, the economy, the state, policy, culture and so on”
(Campbell & Gregor, 2004 p.17). They position this empirical stance as requiring
embodied knowledge, writing that researchers:

cannot stand apart from what they know and what they learn about the world.
This is because (according to the social organization of knowledge) they enact the
world they inhabit and know about, in concert with other people, and of course,
with the technologies that people operate. (p. 23)

**Autoethnography.** Developed out of the symbolic interactionalist movement in
anthropology, autoethnography is a sub-strand of qualitative inquiry that asks researchers
to write from a personal standpoint to tell rich, evocative, sociological stories. Two of

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the major developers of the theory, Carolyn Ellis (2004) and Laurel Richardson (2005) call researchers to develop a visceral dimension in sociological writing. Ellis (2004) in *The ethnographic I: A methodological novel about autoethnography*, lectures in her fictive graduate seminar, “The goal is to practice an artful, poetic and empathetic social science in which readers can keep in their minds and feel in their bodies the complexities of concrete moments of lived experience” (p. 30). Because a task of dance writing is to translate multisensory experiences into prose, the creative style of writing espoused by autoethnographers has the potential to foster the sort of movement descriptions that evoke experience. The risk of autoethnography, however, is that the theory allows for looseness with details and creative reworking of events in order to evoke the sympathies of the readers. This opportunity for departure from the truth conflicts with my second guiding methodology, institutional ethnography; in this study I do not alter timelines or create composite characters.

A debate surrounds autoethnography in the August 2006 *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*. In brief, in this issue Leon Anderson puts forward analytic autoethnography as an alternative to evocative autoethnography (as proposed by Ellis, 1996; Ellis & Berger, 2003; Holman Jones, 2005). He suggests “five key features…(1) complete member researcher (CMR) status, (2) analytic reflexivity, (3) narrative visibility of the researcher’s self, (4) dialogue with informants beyond the self, and (5) commitment to theoretical analysis” (p. 378). In counterpoint to the practices of

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20 As dance writer Edwin Denby suggested in an essay written for dance students: “Dance criticism has two different aspects: one is being made drunk for a second by seeing something happen; the other is expressing lucidly what you saw when you were drunk” (p. 254). This quote is addressed as an example of visceral writing in Chapter Three.
evocative autoethnography, Anderson asserts that insider ethnographies can continue the tradition of the Chicago School by “documenting and analyzing action as well as …purposefully engaging in it” (p. 380). Evocative autoethnographers dismiss Anderson’s appropriation of their terminology (Ellis & Bocher, 2006). I contend that the integration of personal experience with systematic, rigorous collection and analysis that Anderson’s analytic autoethnography affords in combination with the visceral writing style of evocative autoethnography holds value for dance studies because many dance writers are actively and transparently engaged in both the practices and analyses of dancing, and the field of dance education is in need of empirical methodologies that are conversant with those of education disciplines.

Situating myself within dance studies, my intention has not been to employ either analytic autoethnography or institutional ethnography in whole, but to look to these literatures as informative to the development of an evidence-based, dance-specific method. I drew from these literatures in designing this study and when making decisions over the course of the project. Additionally, Laban Movement Analysis (LMA), a theoretical framework that emerged from within the Western dance field, provides me with useful data collection tools.

**Laban Movement Analysis.** A broadly conceived and applied dance theory, Rudolf von Laban’s (Laban & Lawrence, 1947) Laban Movement Analysis, previously called Effort/Shape theory or Labananalysis, is a system of assessing quality in movement. It is the *how* of movement. A tool for dance and movement studies, LMA has been used by many dance scholars (e.g. Novak, 1988; Bales, 2006; Lidbury, 2003)
and movement researchers (Dayanim, Goodill, & Lewis, 2006; Foroud & Whishaw, 2006) as well as in such contexts as animal behavior studies (Foroud & Pellis, 2003; Vasey, Foroud, Duckworth, & Kovacovsky, 2006).

In multiple ways of looking at movement, the theory draws dichotomous and categorical variables with which to categorize a mover. Laban Movement Analysis renders movement effable through multiple qualitative domains. The system initially consisted of three dimensions of movement—Body, Effort, and Space, and has been expanded to extract Shape from Space as a unique fourth element. While the range of categories within each dimension can be initially overwhelming, an analyst rarely describes a mover or a movement using every variable. Instead, she or he notes dominant characteristics.

Like any theory, LMA can be approached strictly or loosely. The primary consideration when applying any theoretical framework is the usefulness of the system given the application. LMA is constructive when describing movement. Because it contains a language set that is both specific and vernacular, it affords the dance researcher an opportunity to write clear movement description. I use LMA to describe the movement styles of the participants, choreographies, and improvisations. I have found it most useful when trying to describe a mover’s style, for instance by comparing the self-generated phrases of Anabel, Margaret, and Carrie in Chapter 4.

**Site of Study**

This study took place at the Ohio State University. The Department of Dance (“the department”) is located in a former museum on the campus’s main drag. Housing
two libraries, a theater/lecture hall, offices, storage, and dance spaces, the building feels foreboding with cumbersome circuitous routes down marble hallways and stairs and through rotundas to get to studios and offices. The building security involves doors that lock at varying times. For instance, on a weekend a student might enter the building to go to a library then need to go out of the building and around to the back to re-enter via keycard to access the studios—whereas during the week access through the center of the building is available. In what follows, I present a “tour” of the dance building, using the second person construction to help the reader experience the pathways of the space (Piirto, 2002a; ex. Dicks, Soyinka, & Coffey, 2006; Hahn, 2007)

We will approach the department around 11am from the back of the building, nearest to the campus “oval”: Entering, you have a choice to go up or down a red metal staircase. Looking up and right you see OSU DANCE painted in giant black letters with red lines of motion sweeping across the graphic. If you peer over and down the stairs, you see a cluster of tables and chairs, bulletin boards, and hear the din of florescent lighting. Walking upstairs, you arrive in a foyer with two benches, more bulletin boards, and, depending on the season, either a mass of snow boots or flip-flops. Students must leave their street shoes outside of the studio to keep dirt, snow, and salt off the dance floors. Peering into the studio, you will most likely see either a ballet class or a modern technique class. If it is ballet, students will be towards the end of the barre period of class either watching and listening to the teacher, or performing an exercise as the pianist plays. If it is a modern class, they will still be warming up, but they may be doing center exercises, floor work, phrases of movement across the floor, or any number of actions,
depending on the theoretical foundation of the instructor. As the dancers roll, extend, or bounce, an accompanist may be playing the drums, a computer set-up, or the piano. Variations on this picture are taking place in each of the four large studios, which vary in size and shape. Recent improvements have included televisions and sound systems in each studio and curtains that can cover the mirrors in two of the spaces. The floors are well-maintained black marley, but affixed to the walls are crumbling soundproofing tiles and the ceiling tiles are decaying.

Proceeding through two large red metal doors, you walk backstage and approach two smaller studios. One, renovated during the study period, is a “smart” classroom/studio hybrid. Bright, with white walls and honey-colored wood floors and a new elevated wood teaching station housing a computer connected to projectors, speakers, and a smartboard, the space is ideal for classes like kinesiology or labanotation that oscillate between lecture, discussions, video-viewing, and movement. The only reminder of the aging building is the incessant buzzing of the overhead lights. This studio is matched by another small studio, in which a faculty or guest artist may be preparing to teach her or his repertory class. These studios are just off-stage, which you will have noticed because several signs have warned you to be quiet, and from the wings you can see a lecturer and a large screen. The college uses the theater during the day for dance and other large lecture courses, often art history. Like much of the building, it suffers from the age and repurposing of space, and is often either freezing or sweltering. Annoying in a lecture, this is dangerous in a studio class and on occasion teachers must cancel a class because a studio is too cold.
Passing by the theater, a small pilates exercise studio, and out to the main rotunda, you may stop in the Music and Dance Library, which houses one of the largest dance collections outside of the New York Public Library. Heading downstairs, you will come to a long hallway of basement offices housing the dance faculty. Turn left down another hallway for the dance office, a small lunchroom, a classroom, a set of couches and mailboxes, more offices; take another left down a hallway, then right and you are in the area of tables and chairs which you saw when you first entered the building. Nearby you find a costume shop, a computer lab, a student lounge with vending machines, and locker rooms.

The state of the facilities depends wholly on perspective. Coming from a small studio or a department with little space, it seems giant and plentiful. Coming from a city, it seems huge and, most amazingly, free. For me, having earned my BFA in a much newer building designed for dance, the building feels decrepit and unhealthy. But what dance artists need is space—and that trumps all complaints.21

Morning through midday the studios are consistently occupied by courses for dance majors. Classes begin at 8:45 with technique for the freshman; optional ballet, modern, and somatic classes; and a few academic courses. Daily, from 10:30-12, all other undergraduates are expected to be in technique class, although students can sometimes substitute another class for a variety of reasons. Students have a lunch break,

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21 On reading this, Annie comments in agreement, comparing her current rehearsal space in New York City where the space she rehearses in is “equally run-down and studio 6 would be considered big... The space I’m in right now leaks every time it rains, so rehearsal involves finding a small army of buckets to catch the increasing numbers of drips, then negotiating your way around them as you dance.” Likewise, writing this dissertation, in a city where rent for studio space is $25 per hour, my craving for free rehearsal space is intense.
from 12:00-12:30, then those cast in faculty and guest artists’ repertory have rehearsal from 12:30-2:30. Often students grab the lunch slot to quickly rehearse or show a piece for composition class. Later in the day, composition, improvisation, notation, and performance classes fill the studios while history, video, and writing courses occupy the classrooms and computer lab. Dance department classes in technical theater and dance technology happen in the building’s theater and across campus in a black box theater equipped with multi-media technologies.

As in any space, there are both normal and unusual events in what students call the “dance building.” Walking around observing class, you might catch a student quickly changing her clothes in the corner of the studio; unusual in most college classrooms, many dancers think little of quickly stripping to their underwear and changing from “dance pants” to “normal people clothes” before racing to another class. On any given day, you might also peer into a studio and notice that several students are sitting out with injuries and watching others dance. Injuries abound and there is always ice in the hallway freezer for those that are acute. There are also the unusual happenings: one student in this study described the morning after a night of partying when, between exercises, she stepped out of the studio to throw up in the hallway trash can. After a few visits, she was alarmed by the volume of vomit, later finding out that her friend who was in the alternate group of dancers, was also making similar dashes to the trash.

Many of these students engage in the risk-taking behaviors endemic in college cultures, but in contrast to many disciplines, dance departments maintain strict attendance guidelines. In this department, students can miss 10% of a course before facing grading
penalties. Not only does this motivate students with hangovers to drag themselves to
class while their non-dancer roommates skip a lecture or two, it also means that students
who are sick come to school and that, combined with a form where touch is standard,
means that illnesses sweep across the department. Huge antibacterial containers sit in the
corner of each studio, next to first aid kits equipped with band aids, foot tape, paper
towels, and spray cleaner that is used to clean up blood from floor-burned feet and knees
or burst blisters.

You will occasionally see someone crying in the hallway, overwhelmed or hurt.
As the day progresses, more and more dancers will be studying and stretching and
waiting for class, or rehearsing composition studies on the cold marble floors when all
the studios are full.

You might be surprised that most dancers are not underweight, but nor are most
overweight. Most of the students are women (92%); most are Caucasian, 21% percent of
the students are African American and 25% are students of color, as compared with
university averages of 7% and 14% respectively. When you peek into rehearsals later
in the day, you are bound to find some studios where the dancers are drenched in sweat
and others where the group sits in a circle talking or drawing. You’ll see a lot of paper
coffee cups and dancers quickly eating meals ranging from carrots and yogurt to fried
chicken strips and fries from the fast food place across the street. Some, but not many,
dancers will be smoking outside. In good weather, some will be improvising under a
nearby tree. And a few will even be racing home to doll up for a sorority function.

22 The departmental numbers come from the Chair, Susan Petry and the university numbers from
The connections that dancers develop to the form and to one another create a learning environment arguably different from that of most disciplines in terms of the time spent, physical rigor, emotional vulnerability, interpersonal skills, and creative development required. Like the crafted, explicit, Living-Learning Communities touted by university administrators (Andrade, 2007/2008; Stassen, 2003), a dance building functions very much the same way. As you read this dissertation, I encourage you to hear the voices and see the movements of twelve inhabitants of this space, but to recognize that you are only getting a glimpse. This is not the story of this department and is far from the story of contemporary dance in higher education. Instead, it is an opportunity to learn about discrete experiences of 12 individuals in a shared context.

**Population**

Twelve BFA students constitute the core group of research participants, although their participation has varied. These students were dancers in Annie Kloppenberg’s MFA project titled *Indelible Marks* or were dancers in a repertory class called the Performance Improvisation Ensemble (PIE). Four students were only in the *Indelible Marks* cast, seven students were only in the PIE class, and one student was in both groups. The students were primarily from the junior class, with two sophomores and one freshman.

The dance department is recognized as a premiere dance education center and houses an undergraduate BFA program, an MFA program, and a new PhD program. Unlike many dance programs, this department is large with 90 undergraduate majors, 37

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23 Anabel, Mary, Jenna, Carrie, Margaret, Mae, Josephine, Reese, Claire, Sydney, Jillian, Mamie—all pseudonyms
graduate students, 14 tenure track faculty, 5 other faculty, and 6 staff members at the time of the study.

Participants were recruited from two already existing cohorts in the department: students cast in a graduate student project and students involved in an improvisation group. While there was some maneuvering involved in continuing the improvisation group, discussed below, these groups were not assembled for the research process. Indeed, had I had a hand in selecting groups of students for the study, I would have looked to bring together a group inclusive of more cultural, ethnic, and gender groups and members representing a wider variety of aesthetic preferences. But my intention was to look at already established groups, and so my core participants are as they were previously constituted. It bears repeating that this is not a sample. There was no attempt to assemble a group of students representative of the range of perspectives within dance in higher education and put them in a constructed situation. As such, I avoid using the terms “sample” or “subjects” and instead use “participants,” “dancers,” and “students.”

**Indelible Marks**

I began considering whom to study after a meeting with my advisor in January 2008. We discussed several options, mostly wondering what faculty repertory would be offered the following year. We discussed the benefits and challenges of studying dancers in a piece in which I would also be dancing and the challenge of setting up such a study. Days later, I explained my predicament to my classmate and friend, Annie Kloppenberg. Her response was to ask me to dance in her work, as she was casting a group of undergraduate students and two graduate students. I was surprised because although I
had danced in one earlier work of hers, her movement is firmly situated in the LMA dimension of Weight and I tend to dance in Space and Time. I also worried about the potential for conflict in our friendship. This is still a negotiation. My advisor prompted me to imagine how I would deal with writing about instances wherein I would need to document Annie’s struggles or shortcomings. My prior knowledge of working with Annie suggested that there would be little risk of that. Furthermore, given that the subject of my study is the dancer’s knowledge and the unit of analysis is the dancers, while these are constructed in relation to Annie they are also somewhat independent. If my study had concerned the relative success of a piece of choreography, or creative process, or dancer/choreographer mentoring—anything where Annie herself or her choreography would be a subject of study, I might have shied away from the opportunity. Focusing on the dancers and the dancing rather than the choreographic process has enabled an overlap of research site and friendship. I have also allowed myself the space to like or not like the piece as I found my way in it, as I would with any piece, rather than trying to maintain an impossible neutrality.²⁴

Rehearsals began in the middle of Spring Quarter 2008, just under a year from the concert date. At about that time, a surgeon advised me to take three months off dancing before making a decision about hip surgery. Annie and I decided that I would observe

²⁴ Annie responds, “I considered the work from Terrain [an earlier piece, created in Fall 2008 and performed in Winter 2009] a study for this piece and some of the content and methodology carried forward even though the final product differed pretty significantly. Also, I have an interest in dance studies and writing (maybe differently that some of my graduate cohort), so the nature of marrying that kind of theoretical analysis to our collective creative process and expanding the nature of inquiry in the context of the whole excited me despite the potential conflicts/challenges to our friendship, collegiality, working relationship, etc., whereas for others the latter might have trumped the enthusiasm for the project.”
rehearsals for the rest of Spring Quarter and then make a decision about dancing in the fall.

In Annie’s first rehearsal, we sat—then a group of three sophomores, one freshman, and four graduate students—in a circle on one side of a studio. Annie described her inspiration for the piece: desire lines (Bachelard, 1958), the term that landscape architects use to describe the phenomenon that occurs when people wear pathways into the earth—often shortcuts across grass in lieu of geometric sidewalks, for example. I explained to the group my desire to understand “What it’s like to be a dance major” and “How you know what you know.” As I explained the study, two of the dancers grew particularly animated saying “That’s so cool” and “People totally don’t understand what it’s like” and I got a clear sense that they would participate. I explained that dancing in the piece and being in the study, while interrelated, were not conditional and that they could dance for Annie and not be in the study or could drop out of the study at any point (see Appendix A). I asked each participant to email me to express interest or decline participation as a way to see if I had a population before engaging in the official informed consent process. All the undergraduate dancers emailed me expressing excitement about the study. In the fall, one of the graduate students from the Spring rehearsal set, who had since graduated, dropped out of Indelible Marks. Joining the group was a freshman, with whom Annie had worked over the summer at a dance festival.
Performance Improvisation Ensemble

In Fall 2007, three graduate students, Noelle Chun, Adriana Durant, and Annie Kloppenberg, taught a course called the Performance Improvisation Ensemble (PIE) as a component of Chun’s MFA research. They offered the course as an open repertory course, meaning that there was no audition, and any dance major could enroll. As it happened, the course inspired the students to continue rehearsing and performing for the rest of the year and more students joined. I was not involved in the class or subsequent organization, but did try to support the group by attending their performances. I grew interested in studying the group because it consisted of a fair number of students (about fifteen). I knew that the graduate students who had taught the class were eager to see the students develop more compositional skills and I had heard from the students that they were frustrated by self-organizing.

I saw an opportunity and approached the chair of the department about whether the department could offer an advanced performance improvisation course in Fall Quarter 2008 that would be open to advanced improvisers and from which students would be invited into my study. I saw the benefits as: 1) an organized regular meeting that I could observe, 2) an opportunity for the students to learn from an instructor, and 3) more credit hours, in an enrollment-based budget model, coming into the department. I met with the students in late Spring Quarter to gauge their interest. It was overwhelming, and I conveyed that to the chair. When I returned in the fall, I learned that the class would indeed happen and had been assigned to a faculty member. The week before school began, she and I met, at which point she realized that she had been assigned to teach this
class and to serve on a search committee—both occurring at the same time. Together we decided on a compromise structure for the class, with her teaching one day a week and the students meeting in small groups for the second meeting time.

In the first class meeting, the faculty member explained the altered structure of the class. The group of students included seven of the eight eventual class members, three graduate students, three interested undergraduate students who had not been in PIE, and two students who had been a part of the PIE course the prior year but already knew that they could not participate because of a conflict with another repertory class. Knowing that this would not be the final group, I only briefly explained my research, saving further explanation for the following week. The next week the eight students—six juniors and two sophomores—who would become members of the class gathered. I described my interest in studying the group and distributed informed consent forms. I asked the students to either leave the form in my box or bring it to the next class.

By the third week of Fall Quarter 2008, all informed consent forms in hand, I officially had twelve core participants—eight from the improvisation course and four more from *Indelible Marks* (one student was in both groups). I spent October through February interviewing, observing, dancing, and casually conversing with these women. There were moments that were clearly research and others that blurred that line. After the culminating concert, I concluded with more interviews, which continued through the initial stages of writing.
Data Collection

Wanting to write about dance as dancer without wholly shifting my identity to that of researcher, I derived several data collection strategies from the literature on qualitative research across multiple disciplines.\textsuperscript{25} Amid teaching and applying for jobs, I realized that my plans to conduct multiple interviews with each participant, conduct full-day observations, write narrative fieldnotes, and create elaborate maps were not feasible. However, while there are many things I would do differently, I found that having multiple data collection strategies, whether or not they were equally applied, did seem to generate complex data in several forms, and I believe that this gave the participants many ways to enter into the study. For instance, while some students immediately responded to all interview requests and seemed excited to talk to me for hours, one participant never had an interview with me, but did produce an elaborately detailed journal. Because I am not quantifying the data, I am attributing equivalent weight to the stories told in many forms. My learning became multi-modal as well.

Because “what the ethnographer finds out is inherently connected with how she finds it out” (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995, p. 11), the methods of data collection for this study spanned from the experiential to the material. Ethnographer Clifford (1986) writes, “insiders studying their own cultures offer new angles of vision and depths of understanding. Their accounts are empowered and restricted in unique ways” (p. 9).

However, higher education scholar Labaree (2002) cautions, “there remains a need to develop a more sophisticated understanding of the researcher as both object and subject in qualitative research, by continuing to move away from locating insiderness and Outsidereness on a continuum or within a conceptual matrix” (p. 117). Throughout this study, my position as a researcher, as well as my experiences in the research process, have required careful consideration.

I tacked between autoethnographic, experiential description, and traditional qualitative and dance research strategies. Anderson’s (2006) descriptions of his methods provided a useful means for engaging in the analytic process. To understand the practices of preparing for a skydiving jump—the process of “getting into the zone”—he also faced the need to prepare to jump himself. As a compromise, he chose to actively observe his peers as they ascended for low-risk jumps, those for which he could prepare less, but when ascending for higher risk jumps he concentrated on preparing for his own jump.

Faced with the predicament of classroom-based research and interested in the experience of studio work, not only could I not interrupt a class or rehearsal to ask students what they are thinking about or noticing, but it would be counterintuitive to ask students to try to analyze their attentions and embodiments while paying attention and embodying. Similar to Anderson’s predicament, I could not attend to a participant across the room when I needed to catch another dancer who was running and leaping towards me. In this vein, my data collection methods involve reflecting upon experiences, remembered or recorded, rather than altering that experience. Like Anderson’s
“opportunistic researcher,” I have engaged as a dancer and observer in the rehearsal and class practices—events that I would participate in even without an explicit research agenda.

**Interviewing.** Qualitative interviewing can range from highly structured scripted interviews to natural conversations in the field (Fontana & Frey, 1997; Rubin & Rubin, 1995). Using Schwandt’s (1997) definition, I conceptualize an interview as “a form of discourse between two or more speakers or as a linguistic event in which the meanings of questions and responses are contextually grounded and jointly constructed by interviewer and respondent” (p. 79 qtd. in Fontana & Frey, p. 716).

My desire was to interview each participant individually twice during the study. In actuality, I completed seven one-hour individual interviews during the first three weeks of the study and two one-hour group interviews that included nine participants during the weekend before finals week of Fall Quarter. I conducted interviews with seven participants in the quarter following the concert, with sessions ranging from thirty minutes to an hour (see Table 1). I conducted the interviews in several locations. When conducting interviews on weekends, I used the department conference room and when interviewing students during the week, I used the office of a faculty member who was abroad. I also conducted several sessions at my home, one sitting outside on the OSU common space, and one at a coffee shop. I conducted both group interviews over a weekend in the department on couches that sit off the center of the main hallway. While this is a public space, the department was deserted on the day of the interviews, so the
location was both comfortable and private. I audiotaped or videotaped the individual
interviews and videotaped the group interviews. This generated approximately fifteen
hours of interview data, and I transcribed all parts pertinent to the study.\textsuperscript{26,27}

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<th>Journal</th>
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<td>Winter</td>
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Table 1. Interview and Journal Completion

**Observations.** *Indelible Marks* rehearsed twice a week during the second half of
Spring Quarter 2008, everyday for a week before Fall Quarter 2008, and three times per
week (totaling six hours weekly) during Fall Quarter 2008 and Winter Quarter 2009. I
attended nearly every rehearsal. I missed one rehearsal for a job interview and missed a

\textsuperscript{26} One interview audio recording was corrupted and nearly incomprehensible. I listened to it and deemed
transcription impossible. In this case I recorded my memories of the interview and followed up on some of
the ideas of that interview in later conversations with the participant.

\textsuperscript{27} In the early interviews, I spent some time asking about high school dance experiences and college
selection; as I continued the study these questions seemed less salient and I did not transcribe these sections
of the interviews. Also, on rare occasions where the student went far off topic and seemed to be gossiping
with me or telling me something that had a clear side note or “off the record” intonation. In those cases, I
did not transcribe that portion of the interview.

\textsuperscript{28} I was not able to transcribe this interview due to a malfunction in the recording equipment.
few rehearsals when Annie was working with only one or two dancers. In Spring Quarter, still unsure of my dancing status due to injury, I observed every rehearsal, either videotaping or writing notes. In Fall 2009, I attended most rehearsals whether or not I was called. I negotiated the balance between researcher and dancer in two ways: when I was not needed for rehearsal I watched and took notes, when I was dancing, I paid attention to my dancing. In six rehearsals, I relied on technology, either audio or videotaping portions of the rehearsal. Most often, I concentrated on my own dancing, occasionally jotting down notes after rehearsal for the study. I often had my audio recorder with me and would sometimes spontaneously record a conversation; this was not always the case, and there were many times when I wished I had recorded a critical conversation.

I attended eight of ten PIE class meetings. I facilitated one and a half classes, using those to contribute to the group and to spend time allowing for discussion and conversation. For most class sessions, I sat to the side of the studio and took notes or videotaped the class. On occasion, if the class chose a particular area to serve as front for an exercise, I would move locations to serve as an audience. When the class sat in a circle to discuss an improvisation or a reading or to plan for the week, I joined the circle. The times I facilitated the class, I did not take notes; and I danced with the group, then taped the improvisations and conversations. I had intended to attend breakout sessions—the self-directed second class meetings of the week—on occasion but, due to scheduling, this was not possible. In addition to my notes on the class, I videotaped two full classes. After the course ended, Annie and I met with the students and encouraged
them to keep working on their own, and asked them to perform as an “opening act” for the concert in February. I attended one informal performance of PIE, had Annie videotape a rehearsal I could not attend, and attended two rehearsals. After the concert, the group continued to meet and perform and I attended one of those concerts.

**Journals.** In the mid-year group interviews, I distributed gift bags to the participants that included journals that I designed along with pens and treats for studying for finals (see Appendix E). I asked the participants (including those who didn’t come to a group interview) to use the journal over the winter break as much or as little as they would like. I explained that I would ask them to return the journals as dissertation data but that I would scan them and return their writings to them. I was not sure what to expect, but when I asked for the journals the third week of Winter Quarter, I found that the students had put a lot of work into them and that most students completed the whole booklet. Two students did not complete the journal. I scanned each page of the journal and created multi-page PDF documents for each participant. I used only the textual portions of the journals as data.

**Commissioning a Piece.** From the outset, I knew that I wanted to commission a solo to dance as a way to plunge into the process of danced knowledge as a counterpoint to my dual observer/dancer roles in the other components. I commissioned a new piece by Michael Estanich, a choreographer and assistant professor at the University of

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29 While this is not a traditional practice in dance, we modeled the idea after the series at New York’s Dance Theater Workshop that invites presented artists to adjudicate a pre-show of emerging choreographers, performed in their studio spaces.
Wisconsin, Steven’s Point. I had met Michael during my first year of graduate school. I had danced for Michael in a prior work and I felt drawn to his dramatic, highly physical work. He and I had begun talking about creating a solo together in September 2006. The process of the work was highly collaborative and despite a long conceptual gestation, the physical creation of the work was condensed into two days in December 2008 in Wisconsin and two weeks in January 2009 in Ohio. I wanted to approach the piece as normally as possible and apart from keeping all artifacts (notes, video footage, costume sketches), I conducted no additional data collection procedures during the process.

**Images.** I found photographs to be a very useful tool in parsing the data. As Novack (1990) writes:

> Photographs, by their very nature, are representations of a moment within the flow of ongoing events and thus can be deceptive. Nevertheless, when viewed with a sense of movement in mind, they may provide a provocative counterpoint to the written text. (p. 21)

The primary use of photographs is in Chapter 4. These photographs were taken by Kathryn Enright, a graduate student studying photography as well as dance. These photographs were particularly useful as Enright was completing an assignment on documentary photography. Other photographs were taken by students as part of the required documentation of their PIE breakout sessions or as press photographs for the concert. I also include five photographs taken of PIE in the year following the study because they feature study participants and nicely illustrate several movement concepts. In future studies, I will take more photographs as, even compared with video, I found them to be a useful way to illustrate ideas and parse complicated data.
Analytic Framework

Firmly affixing meanings is less pertinent in this study than the meaning-making process, which is germane. How students describe dancing matters more than the answers to direct questions. This, in turn, is a “dancerly” way to think about meaning—that the value lies in the quality of the effort rather than the steps or words—but it also aligns with contextualist approaches to discourse (Watson, 2006). Engaging in a directed conversation is much like dancing improvisationally. As when dancing, I have a score—a set of parameters. In this case, I dig for descriptions and stories of dancing, but with no expected path. Questions and directions are both choices and surprises. If, instead, the focus was what people said, I would have many fewer concerns about accuracy—the work would come down to detailed transcription. However, qualitative work is not about dictation; it is about analysis.

Working from a social constructionist paradigm (Guba & Lincoln, 1994), it is my belief that through meaning-making processes individuals come to understand themselves within the multiple systems. Yet, informed by institutional ethnography, I also realize that our capacity to interpret and understand ourselves in relation to given events is mediated by structures that confer power to some and restrict access to others. Towards this end, I have endeavored to look both at the understandings that are constructed within the narratives in this study and to draw from the post-colonialist notion of reading against those same narratives to see what is missing, and often, what is assumed.
I rely in particular on methods of narrative analysis, discussed in the following section, but in the course of the analytic process, I also drew from the ethnomethodological conceptualization of “accounts” as Baker (2001) describes them:

These accounts are best understood as sense-making work through which participants engage in explaining, attributing, justifying, describing, and otherwise finding a possible sense of orderliness in the various events, people, places, and courses of action they talk about. … Accounting, then, is more than reporting or responding; it is a way of arranging versions of how things are or could be. (p. 781)

In addition to this notion of accounting as a way of organizing experience into an orderly, knowable entity, the notion that persons use ”membership categories” also influenced how I began to understand the student’s processes of identifying as “a dancer.”

By always asking: “I wonder what this means?” — in light of ideas of narrative, sense-making, and identity—in relation to all data, I infused the analytic process with an eye for accuracy. In an age of post-modern post-truth, I told myself what I tell my students when they are learning to write critically about dance: while there might not be a right, there certainly is a wrong. Todres and Galvin (2008) assert: “verification is a project that is only meaningful within a correspondence theory of truth. Rather, we wish to seek interpersonal relevance and resonance” (p. 580). The notion of relevance and resonance adds two more questions to my process: “Why does this matter?” and “Does this do anything?” In other words, I approach the notion of resonance—especially in making decisions about the selections of interviews and rehearsal descriptions—as an opportunity to engage the visceral sensibilities of the reader. I discuss the style of writing I employed to attempt this later in this section. Beyond looking for data that seemed to
illustrate sense-making processes, in both eliciting and presenting selected passages, I looked towards what Teresa Kelly and Linsey Howie (2007) call “descriptive testimony” (p.141). While they use this term in reference to their final renderings of participants’ life stories, the term was a guidepost for me in looking at raw data for stories that seemed to describe experience in a way that highlighted both the physical experience, the meaningfulness to the student, and affective dimensions.

Using a Narrative Style. One critique of evocative approaches is that rather than systematically assessing a research problem, they manipulate the sympathies of the reader (Coffey, 1999)—that they may be more “spin” than research. I was particularly wary of this research problem, given my desire to write about my own dance experiences. I addressed this issue in two ways. First, I have separated out three highly personal narratives as creatively written interstitials. I believe that these further my research aim of giving the reader a sense of the felt experiences of a dancer. These highly subjective accounts are meant not only to provide a glimpse into the structure of a dance education, but also to provide a layer of transparency in authorhood. For I believe that my intuitive way of thinking about movement—while watching, studying, performing, and rehearsing—comes across in these stories in a way that it is hard to make transparent in scholarly analysis—though it is certainly present. I hope these will whet the reader’s curiosity, but be given far less scholarly weight than the chapters. I looked closely for guidance to Hahn’s (2007) Sensational knowledge: Embodying culture through Japanese dance and her use of descriptive passages that open each chapter as well as her “orientations”—call-out boxes that guide readers through an embodied experience. My
second attempt at avoiding evocative manipulation of the reader was through the common practice of participant and peer response. I gave the drafts of selected passages to the students involved and asked them to identify material that seemed overblown or grandiose. I sought to present the material without sanitizing it, but also without glorifying it.

In considering the selected narratives, I was aware of Anna DeFina and Alexandra Georgakopoulou’s (2008) assertion that:

Narrative is an embedded unit, enmeshed in local business, not free-standing or detached/detachable. Viewing narratives as more or less self-contained texts that can be abstracted from their original context of occurrence thus misses the fact that both the telling of a story, and the ways in which it is told, are shaped by previous talk and action. (p. 381)

Their contention, that “narratives are emergent, a joint venture and the outcome of negotiation by interlocutors” (p. 381) was a particularly useful one in this study, for not only was I present in the interview process, but in many cases, I was a participant in the rehearsals, or observer of the classes that they described, or I had in the past studied with the teachers of whom they spoke. In that way, my questioning, prompts, head nodding, were not only a demonstration of empathy, but also a recognition of experience (Ellis & Berger, 2003). Yet, despite being a dancer, I am in a very different position than are my participants. For one thing, they are at least ten years younger than I am. They are just selecting and beginning their careers. In terms of our identity continua, I am trying to figure out how to stay a dancer, as they become dancers. To some of their experiences, I relate as a peer; to some I can relate given my earlier experiences in a similar BFA program; to others, I simply cannot relate. To address this context, without bringing
myself too far into the body chapters of this dissertation as a character, I have made use of footnotes. While I do not include what I think of as basic interviewing techniques, such as reflecting content (i.e. So it sounds like you took a lot of ballet…) or affect (i.e. Am I right that that felt like a loss?) or prompting description (i.e. Can you tell me more about what that experience was like?), when I participated in the interview with direct questioning or responding, I have tried to include that information in the footnotes to contextualize the statement. Furthermore, I have tried to spatially contextualize the studio descriptions and group interview narratives, for I believe that understanding the architectural space of the dancers in this study provides a reader with a sense of how learning is situated within and without the open, but bounded space of the studio. I hope that presenting the building in a second-person tour earlier in this chapter began that process.

**Initial Strategies for Data Analysis**

To maintain a recursive relationship with the data, I engaged several analytic strategies during the data collection period. Taking from grounded theory (Corbin & Strauss, 1998) the practice of allowing initial data to direct further data collection, after I collected each unit of data, I organized the material. Instead of using coding methods that could be overly reductive early in the research process, I indexed my data. This indexing method differs from open coding (Corbin & Strauss, 1998) in that the goal is organization, not the breaking of data into quantifiable theoretical units. Nonetheless, it is a way to identify a preponderance of themes, activities, or perceptions, and as such can provide the researcher with a sense of the salient structures within the data.
I quite quickly found, however, that searching for themes led me astray. I was parsing the data into snippets that seemed to define the dancer’s experience as a collection of variables like connectedness, achievement, creativity, or growth. With these ideas identified, I found that I was approaching interviews looking for these dimensions—and indeed this is a technique of grounded theory. However, I found myself disinterested in the possibility of suggesting that certain variables defined learning in dancing. Blessed and cursed by a basic understanding of quantitative methods (used in my master’s thesis) it seemed too likely that I would end up suggesting, based on twelve people in two groups at one school—that certain things mattered to dancers. I realized that the allure of grounded theory was the operationalization of analysis, but that I would need to employ a more nebulous strategy to come up with relevant and resonant ideas.

Having worked from transcripts in indexing, I returned to the video and audiotapes of the interviews. I began listening to and reading the transcripts simultaneously and grew increasingly interested in the storytelling features within the interviews. I then re-read the transcripts and highlighted passages that I found particularly compelling. Not sure how these stories would hang together, I nevertheless began to think about the project as a series of dancer “tales” (Van Maanen, 1988) and began to think of a construction along the lines of sociologist Annette Lareau’s (2003) *Unequal childhoods: Class, race, and family life*, which demonstrates her theory of social inequity by focusing on differences in parenting styles, highlighted through in-depth descriptions of eight families. Conceiving of the individual as the unit of analysis (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996) was an option, but as the reader familiar with Lareau’s work
has likely already noted, her use of individual stories was an in-depth investigation of a theory built on a much broader initial sample. For me, the danger was over-generalizing.

Next, drawing from discourse analysis, I decided to try and identify not the themes, but the underlying messages, or discourses, present in the conversations, rehearsal descriptions, and narratives from interviews. Discourse analysis can refer to several ways of analyzing speech in relation to identity. As Charlotte Burck (2005) explains, in this mode:

Identity is not seen as a fixed entity, but as constituted and reconstituted through discourses and descriptions (Davies and Harré, 1997; Wetherell, 1998), although material and discursive aspects are seen to be crucially linked. Discourse analysts seek to identify the discourses and interpretive repertoires that individuals draw on to make sense of their world, and to examine their consequences and limitations. Discourse is here regarded as a set of meanings, metaphors, representations, images and stories (Burr, 1995), and as an institutionalized use of language (Davies & Harré, 1997), which produces particular versions of events and the social world. Discourse analysis is located in a social constructionist paradigm. (p. 248-249)

While there are many options today for the qualitative researcher using digital tools, I found that after trying to divide and reorganize my data either in many text files or in the program Scrivner (which I use for writing), the amount of data was dizzying and incomprehensible. I began living with the data. I went through several printer cartridges printing and reprinting data, I had myriads of post-it notes, colored pens, and manila folders. I literally cut and taped quotes and passages on the walls. While I had written earlier analytic memos these seemed dry and cautious and so, with brightly colored pens and with Indelible Marks playing on my TV and audio interviews playing from my computer, I messily began experimenting by looking at each piece of data—these ranged from Carrie’s lengthy story of her injury (Chapter 6), to Mary’s one sentence “We are
learning how to work” (Chapter 4), to Mamie’s scattering of words in her journal (Chapter 5)—and asking myself what it says, what it assumes, and why it matters. I thought of it as brainstorming rather than analyzing (of course, that is a semantic distinction). I then began sorting the material, not so much into categories, but into groupings that shared a similar quality, if not content. With post-it notes on folders laid out on the dining room table in a map of sorts, I could see how the stories mattered and what feelings emerged. Unlike the earlier list of themes, these categories were labeled things like: work, pain, justifying dance, pleasure, significant experiences, and adamant identity. These were less like the psychosocial variables I first identified in my indexing/coding and more like organizing principles.

Stuck amid ideas, folders, data, and rich stories, I had no idea what to do next. Prompted by a reminder from a committee member that “writing is analysis, after all” (Nespor, personal communication), I began writing about, and with, the data. I organized the data into four main “abouts”: improvisation and challenge; sweat and story; pain and survival; and the nature of knowledge. These have morphed into the four body chapters of this document. As all researchers do, I let go of several strands of thinking. For instance, although worry about future prospects was a predominant theme in the interviews, I chose to let that surface across the narratives, rather than pulling it out as a distinct topic.

Other themes from the data are not represented in this dissertation. Some, I have chosen not to analyze because I felt that even with the student’s permission, they might be potentially injurious to the student’s standing in the department, such as discussions
about frustration with particular faculty members, considerations of dropping out, and risk-taking behaviors. While I think these are important dimensions of these participants’ experiences, I think it is more prudent to save this data for possible inclusion in a future book project after the students have some distance from the department and the experiences.

**Narrative Analysis**

I began to engage in narrative analysis practices later in the process of writing. While drawn to using narrative as a writing tool, and committed to a political choice to keep the dancers’ voices and *in situ* dialogues intact, I initially understood narrative analysis in terms of William Labov’s highly structured formulation.

What follows is Labov’s (1972) structural models of narrative:

Abstract: What was this about?
Orientation: Who?, What?, When?, Where?
Complicating Action: Then what happened?
Resolution: So what?
Coda: Return to present – end of story
(qtd. in Frost, 2009, p. 11)

While this structure was useful in helping me parse some stories, often those told as exemplars in response to a particular question, it was not until I read DeFina and Georgakopoulou’s (2008) social interactional approach to narrative analysis (SIA) that I realized the usefulness of analyzing “small stories” (Georgakopoulou, 2006) and I began to re-look at the context of the stories, large and small.

Another important narrative analysis technique is that of James Paul Gee (1986) who uses poetics as a way to uncover meaning by transforming talk into line segments and stanzas. This technique enables researchers to see patterns that emerge; for instance,
Burck (2005) gives an example of a narrative, that, when divided into stanzas, clearly shows a thematic repetition: “Gee’s poetic transcription revealed important organizing themes in the self-account which would have been missed otherwise. The most striking feature of re-transcribing this extract is the highlighting of what I have called the ‘refrain’ (p. 255). Likewise, Nollaig Frost (2009), in comparing analysis done using models of Labov, Gee, and a reflexive model, suggests that dividing transcripts into stanzas “brought texture to the story of getting up in the night and having to be the one to stay at home by telling me that Anna [the research participant] feels that she has no choice but to do this” (p. 17-18). In other words, the poetic model, by dividing and grouping ideas together, not only parses the data into chunks, but reveals affect by demonstrating repetition and retaining quality (rather than just extracting narrative actions).

In this study I did not employ Gee’s techniques per se; however, in retrospect, I see that my first rewritings of the data into a dialogical prose containing gesture and affect had a similar motivation and effect. When possible, I tried to use literary techniques to convey the performativity both as a means to address context and to separate ideas.30

Looking at data as layered, much as the dancers conceive of dancing itself, I looked for what Catherine Reissman (2001) describes as “turning points” in stories, recognizing that, as she writes: “personal narratives are, at core, meaning-making units of discourse.

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30 As an artist, I am particularly sensitive about dabbling in art forms in which I have no training. Additionally as one who believes “the thing is the thing” (Miller, personal communication)—in other words, that art is an entity, not a representation, I nervously observe arts-based research dissemination. Poetry is a discipline. While writing creatively is itself a departure from my training as a choreographer, I take this risk, given training in dance writing in Aesthetics & Criticism and later assisting with an undergraduate version of this course. I have furthered such study though writing manuals like Lamont’s Bird by Bird; Pipher’s Writing to Change the World; and Prose’s Reading like a Writer. This issue is addressed well in Piirto’s (2002b) “The question of quality and qualifications: writing inferior poems as qualitative research.”
They are of interest precisely because narrators interpret the past in stories rather than reproduce the past as it was” (p. 705). As such, I grew interested both in how the dancers interpreted significant events in terms of their present position but also, increasingly, in how the ambiguity of the future seemed to arise in recollections of the past and descriptions of the present. In a sense, these dancers, while revealing the “social positioning” that Reissman urges researchers to look for—that is, how the narrator relates to those around her—in these interviews and in studio and group discussions, there was frequently also a positioning along one’s own trajectory of development—what I call a “narrative of experience” in Chapter 4 that is past, present, and future.

The stories presented herein are both “constructions and claims of identity” (Linde, 1993 qtd in Burck, 2005 p. 252) but, importantly, are also fluidly so. Here, the SIA approach of DeFina and Georgakopoulou, with its emphasis on the interactivity of talk, is germane. Arguing that Labovian techniques privilege a single view of past events, they write:

A major task of narrative analysis for us is to unravel and account for the ways in which storytelling reflects and shapes these different levels of context, as opposed to e.g. focusing on story content and the goings-on within a story referentially and taking them as a relatively unmediated and transparent record (see Atkinson and Delamont, 2006: 173–81). (p. 383)

While recognizing that a departure from an initial research stance is permissible within qualitative studies inasmuch as the data must take precedence over initial expectations or driving theories, nevertheless, I found myself looking for ways to remain connected to the philosophy of institutional ethnography, even as I moved away from the enormity of the research charge to illuminate ruling relations. I found that SIA’s
alignment with “methods that allow for local, reflexive and situated understandings of narratives as more or less partial and valid accounts within systems of production and articulation” (De Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2008) fundamentally connects with Smith’s emphasis on local sites of actual work. Thus, I believe that this method of narrative analysis can provide a foundation for a broader, institutional ethnographic reading of dance in higher education, in time.

This section has primarily concerned written and spoken stories, but before describing the multimodal data analysis procedures, I will note one last metaphor. While the notion of research as a journey is something of a trope, this quote from Kelly and Howie (2007) whose research included narrative accounts of psychiatric nurses trained in Gestalt therapy, raises the dialogical nature of storytelling—something that connects, I believe, to the dialogism addressed in Chapter 5. They write:

In the telling of their story, the research participant takes the researcher on a journey and the researcher can be likened to a companion on that journey. In this sense, the research participants are dialogic partners or coresearchers in the study. In the Gestalt framework, the dialogic relationship refers to an interpersonal approach based on the concept that as human beings, we are inherently relational and that we become fully human in relationships (Mackewn 2000). (p. 138)

As a researcher with a master’s degree in counselor education, I found that the humanity of the research interview was something that I experienced akin to my (limited) training in counseling. I had to be careful not to exploit this relationship, knowing that given my dual relationship with the participants, what could feel like a conversation was actually data collection. In one interview in particular, I could tell that the student needed to talk out her conflicted feelings about the major. She said that it felt good to talk about her thoughts and feelings, and when I examined the transcript, it was very clear that she
was talking to Ashley-as-older-dancer and not Ashley-as-researcher. The emotional timbre of the conversation, which happened at the end of the year, in retrospect was likely not only a product of the content the student talked about—feeling frustrated and under-valued in the department and considering quitting—but also an instance of an exhausted young dancer and an exhausted graduate student. While I could defend many of my comments by citing a more autoethnographic and conversational interview style, in actuality I believe that comments like the following demonstrate a level of fatigue and self-disclosure that are less useful than a more participant-focused interview approach: “I have that question for myself all the time, like, things that I love versus things that I’m good at. You know, for some people it seems like those are the exact same thing, but it doesn’t really feel that way to me…” In analyzing the interview process and the context of the interviews, I realize it is important to consider my personal context as well.

**Multimodal Analysis**

As discussed earlier in this chapter, in designing the study, I anticipated needing to collect various types of data, endeavoring to understand the complexity of danced knowledge. While some of these collections were more fruitful than others, finishing data collection with an array of data was exciting, and terrifying.

Bella Dicks, Bambo Soyinka, and Amanda Coffey (2006) call for multimodal methods in ethnography, suggesting that: “meaning is produced through the inter-relationships between and among different media and modes” (p. 78). They conceptualize worlds as multi-media, not just collection tasks, and this notion was particularly clear in that the studio processes within the study mirror many of the
collection activities. For instance, the dancers had journals for the research study, but Annie, the choreographer, also supplied rehearsal journals so we, the dancers, could record thoughts, draw, map, and generate material from therein. In addition, as evidenced throughout the body chapters, Annie’s use of digital video recordings meant that there was often a camera on—sometimes mine recording the entire rehearsal, other times Annie recording specific phrases or longer sections of improvisations. There became a fluidity between the two, with me asking to watch her rehearsal tapes and her use of one of my tapes in developing the section I call “Falling” described in Chapter 6.

Noting that data are representations of the field, not distinct phenomena, Dicks, Soyinka, and Coffey also note that these “diverse and shifting” (p. 78) representations are intertwined. They write:

It follows that in order to understand the meanings of any environment, we need to understand how its various semiotic modes and media work together to produce a particular ensemble of meaning-effects (and these need to be understood, crucially, through including the ‘consumption’ side of the communicative process: i.e. the ways in which actual users/participants interact with and interpret them). To aid interpretation of these meanings, they somehow need to be representable in a permanent form so that we can analyse them at leisure. But as soon as we use recording technologies (cameras, fieldnotes, video), we are working with a much reduced range of media and modes than those occurring in the field. (p. 84)

While I found it both instructive and necessary to collect multiple modes of data, it was verbal, written, and kinesthetic data that I found I could analyze. In the journals I collected a range of visual materials—drawings and collages—that I found intriguing but also mystifying. Like my avoidance of poetic representation, I found that I had no frame of reference for analyzing the content or construction of these works. I had initially planned to use them as jumping off points in interviews, but found that there was so
much experience to talk about that returning to a methodological artifact seemed to be an inorganic choice. However, as many of these journals contained detailed and thoughtful visual works (and several of the students are visual artists as well) this data set, likely important, is simply beyond my scope of practice.

In addition to analyzing vastly different texts—interviews, videos, performance tapes, my journals, group discussions, diagrams—I also found that Patrice Keats’s (2009) assertion that stories “attempt to preserve a particular perspective of life or an event in action” (p. 181) and her conclusion that using spoken, written, and visual data benefits the participants by allowing opportunities for self-knowledge in several modalities, resonated as the participants spoke of learning from digesting experiences within the interviews, discussions, and journaling. Also following Keats’s suggestion, I read these texts as relational—not looking for one to validate another, but, for instance contrasting the vulnerabilities expressed in one medium with the same participant’s self-assuredness in group activities.

These differences in presentation raise a salient question about performance. This is evident in this population, for whom performance as commonly defined is a cultural practice and a key competency. In considering performativity in the interview context, qualitative research scholar Norman Denzin (2003), in a chapter titled “The cinematic society and the reflexive interview,” suggests that: “‘life as theater’ (Brissett & Edgley 1990; Goffman 1959:254-55), is no longer a metaphor. It has become interactional reality. Life and art have become mirror images of one another. Reality, as it is visually experienced, is a staged, social production” (p.
His assertion that “reflexive texts question the very notion of a stable, unbiased gaze” by disrupting notions of distanced spectatorship became increasingly important as instability and disruption, as well as notions of authenticity and attention to moments grew increasingly salient in the material.

**Structuring**

On the iterative research process, organizational theorist Barbara Czarniawska (2002) writes:

> Every reading is an interpretation and every interpretation is an association tying the text that is interpreted to other texts, other voices, other times, and other places. Much more important than a specific interpretive or analytic technique is the result—an interesting recontextualization. (p. 747)

By the time I had divided, considered, and spread my data around my house, I began to fantasize about creating an installation wherein one could walk into and through these stories and images, following thematic threads or randomly encountering ideas. Not surprisingly, the linearity of a dissertation confounded me. Reading Czarniawska, I began to focus on the notion of “interesting.” It is a word that those of us who teach writing and dance composition hate, for it is a word of taste and value, not description or analysis. Like “nice” or “fun” it conveys little. Yet, we all know when something is interesting to us. And, as psychologist Todd Kashdan argues (2009) in asserting that curiosity is a fundamental need, being interested is key to engagement. I found myself tacking between what interested me, and what I believed would interest my reader—whom I have conceived of as an educated person interested in, but not familiar with contemporary dance. Even with that conceptualization, my advisor pointed me towards many instances of “dance language” within the text. To address that issue
without overusing parentheticals, I include a glossary with common dance terms. I wrote 
this glossary and sent it to two colleagues who suggested changes, then gave it to two 
non-dance friends, and made further changes. In instances where I use a term from 
Laban Movement Analysis in a very specific way, I sometimes footnote it or describe it 
in the text.

**Editing**

I made several choices in editing transcripts. I initially followed a close 
transcription technique, transcribing all utterances and noting significant pauses. 
However, the result was difficult for a lay reader to understand. Furthermore, false starts, 
stutters, and verbal tics—for instance the use of “like” or “you know”—obscured the 
content of the transcripts. Instead of reducing the transcripts using poetic devices (Gee, 
1986) I looked at ways to reduce the text into dialogue. As Anne Lamont (1995) 
suggests in her writing book *Bird by Bird*: “good dialogue gives us the sense that we are 
eavesdropping” (p. 67). But she also notes that writing good dialogue is nothing like 
recording actual talk.

While I avoided reworking the students’ comments, I did extract the meaningful 
sections and attempted to punctuate in a way that conveyed most clearly the rhythm of 
the speaker. I did make one replacement. Several of the participants used the vernacular, 
“I/she/he was like…” which I frequently replaced with “I/she/he said…,” for clarity. 31 
Another choice I made after consideration had to do with “you know” and “you know 
what I mean” or “right?” These sometimes appeared as verbal tics, punctuating all talk,

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31 I used Oliver, Serovich, & Mason’s (2005) *Constraints and Opportunities with Interview Transcription: 
Towards Reflection in Qualitative Research* to aid in making this decision.
and sometimes showed up when the students spoke of challenging or sensitive topics. When these phrases were frequent and not followed by pauses, which I interpreted as an expectation that I would respond, I have omitted them. When the participant really seemed to be asking me, I included them.

**Writing Style**

Using creative rendering of stories allows the reader to enter the research site using the conventions of poetics or fiction writing. David Carless and Kitrina Douglass (2009), for instance, represent the data from their study of the sports participation of men with disabilities through poetry, arguing that including these “messy” stories, “can contribute to a richer and more complex understanding of others’ lives” (p. 1547). My use of a narrative prose is likewise an example of illuminating the messiness of embodied experience.

Les Todres and Kathleen Galvin (2008) suggest that “evocative and poetic forms of writing” are useful in “facilitating experiences of recognition” (p. 569). The authors advocate for what they call embodied interpretation, which is a responsive, evocative rewriting of transcripts. They write:

Embodied interpretation is different from traditional descriptive phenomenology in the Husserlian sense, which uses language in rigorous, precise and rational ways to show the boundaries of experienced phenomena. There is a tendency within this more traditional concern to use language in summative ways that can over-sterilize or even deaden the aliveness of the shown phenomena. Within this emphasis, significant meanings can become imprisoned within a scientific notion of essences. The particular challenge is to find words that are faithful to the phenomenon in all its complexity, sense and texture. A more aesthetic phenomenology therefore uses language in more evocative and poetic ways. (p. 569)
While I did not follow their methodology, and the dialogues in this dissertation are edited from direct transmission, I do endeavor to keep the “aliveness” of dancing. I do this by writing in a way that travels in and out of the studio in a narrative voice—aiming to avoid the voice of the omniscient academic. The tension of experience and representation have been ever present in trying to write stories of bodily experience. This is not a unique struggle. As dance ethnographer Tomie Hahn (2007) writes: “Each writer, each dancer, is inclined to reveal the nature of dance from a particular perspective. My impulse is to contribute to dance scholarship by writing what I know, what I have embodied, inspired by ethnographic practices” (p. 7). Like Hahn, my perspective is a dancer’s, and that perspective drove many of the research design and stylistic choices herein.

Confidentiality

I tried from the outset to convey to the potential participants the level of confidentiality that this study could and could not provide. The informed consent form is included in Appendix A. In short, what I conveyed to the students was that, frankly, pretty much anyone in the department at the time of the study or anyone who knows them intimately, would see through any efforts to keep each identity concealed. In a discipline wherein one’s body is the medium, in such a small group, and in referring to a publicly performed piece and improvisations all efforts are likely to fail among insiders. However, I explained that participants would be referred to by pseudonyms to provide a level of confidentiality to a wider readership. I also knew that there would be a possibility that the students would not want pseudonyms in the piece, in essence, wanting
credit for their participation. Wanting to keep that as an option, I wrote my IRB exemption request and conveyed to the students that if, after reading the entire work, they all requested use of their real names, I would honor that.

My way of protecting the participants’ confidentiality was to repeatedly remind them that they would have the final say over what information would be included in the document. I did this both in the interviews, and by sending drafts of chapters to the students whose voices were included as each chapter was completed.

As discussed earlier, I also kept some data out of this dissertation, knowing that it may be useful in a book project after these students have graduated from college and are no longer in the department. I believe that this information has the potential to create problems for the involved students and while they may give me permission to use it, the likelihood that they may regret that decision seems too high at the present moment.

In other instances, I worked closely with the participants to balance the needs of the dissertation with the willingness of the students. For instance Carrie’s story, is deeply personal, it is only because of her honesty about her feelings, and struggles that I believe the reader can come to understand the nature of living and learning through injury. When I spoke with her about using it, I could tell that it felt like a risk but both she and I knew that while potentially exposing, it was also an important story to tell.

Conclusion

What follows is a rendering of two years spent considering knowledge through dancing: talking with dancers, reading, listening to them talk among themselves, watching dance, and writing. I query these physical and verbal dialogues. In the next
chapter, I look to previous dance writings to situate this project within the literatures that have thus far shaped the field of dance studies.
Chapter 3

Writings on Dances and Dancing

_Criticism can’t provide a print analogue for dance. Why should it? For one thing, criticism is irrevocably subjective, however fair minded it may be; description can only offer some accurate facts, a pinpointing of style, and an evocation of a work’s essential nature—a vision filtered through particular eyes and a particular sensibility._

Deborah Jowitt 2001

When writing about dance, the position and worldview of the writer influences outcome; when discussing dance, non-linguistic actions such as gesture and affect work to texture and shape communication. Both discussing and writing about dance have played an important role in each phase of this ethnography of college dance students. Language informs how dancers develop their understandings of kinesthetic experiences and is fundamental to danced knowledge. The types of words students use, the role of discursive negotiations of the creative process, and the function of accepted contradictions both in the studio and out reveal how dancers present and grapple with ideas about dancing. In another realm of the field, writing about dance elucidates knowledge. The dance scholar uses written language to interpret the multisensory enactments of danced knowledge. In this chapter, I consider the use of language—in particular, written language—to communicate understandings of dance. Beginning with an overview of the development of dance literature over the past century, the chapter then sets the foundational literature for this study by considering contemporary debates in dance studies and looking at issues within the discipline of dance ethnography. While
divergent literatures, each has contributed to my decisions in crafting this study and interpreting the data.

**Related Dance Literature**

Modern dance and ballet came of age in the United States from the 1920s through the mid-1960s. Alongside these developing forms, dance critics emerged as public dance scholars. From 1927 to 1962 as the first full-time, dedicated dance critic at the *New York Times*, John Martin developed a theoretical framework for modern dance. He sought to establish dance writing as a critical genre independent of music criticism. An advocate for this new dance form, Martin saw modern dance as a uniquely American art form, and as an expression of actual experience. Audience members, he believed, had sympathetic kinesthetic reactions to the essences portrayed by the dancers. In his theoretical tome *The modern dance* (1933), Martin writes, “It is essential when approaching the dance to carry along the expectation of response to movement and a reliance on the faculty of ‘inner mimicry’” (p. 25). Martin defines “inner mimicry” as the process by which viewing a sensation transmits the sensation to oneself with the example, “when we see someone sucking a lemon we are more than likely to feel a distinct activity in the mouth and throat” (p. 17). Direct and persuasive, Martin’s writings have an authoritative tone. Writing of Graham in 1931, he explains to his readership that her success stems from her presentation of an essence, rather than an explanation thereof:

In arranging these movements into form, Miss Graham has developed a style that has much in common with modern painting and sculpture. It is economical of means, though no longer scanty, and eliminates all but the essentials. It is strong of accent, and consequently distorted. It credits its audience with the ability to respond to esthetic impulses and never stoops to platitude or explanation. When it
has furnished the suggestion, the onlooker is counted upon to supply the completion of the experience in his own receptiveness. (p. 109)

Although in this passage Martin presents his view of dance as involving reciprocity between artist and audience, with each role clearly defined, he also explains to the reader what the dance is doing, explaining effect rather than quality.

A poet and dance writer, Edwin Denby wrote accurate, evocative description of choreographies and performances. In A game for dancers, Gay Morris (2006) compares Denby and Martin, stating, “Denby’s focus in writing and his standard in dance was ballet, as Martin’s was modern dance” (p. 74). Indeed as Martin praises communication in the earlier passage, here Denby (1943/1998) highlights the style and technique of ballet:

It distributes the energy in the body (holding back most of it in the waist and diminishing it from there as from a center)—this is a method of keeping the urgency of the movement in relation to a center of gravity in the body. The peculiar look of ballet movement is not the perverse invention of some dead aesthetic dictator. It is a reasonable method that is still being elaborated by experiment. (p. 86)

Spanning fifty years from 1937 to 1983, Denby’s writings about both ballet and modern dance created images of dances through description and evaluation, as above, and artful metaphor. Of Graham’s “Appalachian Spring,” he wrote: “A passage of Miss Graham’s first solo looked to me as if she were a hillside girl darting after the little beasts her playing flushed from cover,” and “It is touching how gently the piece persuades you of the value of domestic and neighborly ties by giving you a sense of rural isolation” (1945/1998, p. 165). He conveys to readers a sense of how the performance sparked his imagination and how a reader might have interpreted the show.
Like Martin’s writings, Denby’s essays teach the reader something about dance. Although Martin often imparts general dance knowledge, Denby conveys something specific about each dance piece. Denby achieves this outcome by linking a detailed observational strategy with a figurative tone. In an essay he prepared for Juilliard students, “Dancers, buildings, and people in the streets,” Denby (1954/1998) encourages dedicated observation: “Dance criticism has two different aspects: one is being made drunk for a second by seeing something happen; the other is expressing lucidly what you saw when you were drunk” (p. 254). Here, not only does Denby provide an apt description of the whirling experience of watching dance, he points to the difference between experiencing and writing. Rather than posit the critic’s task as accurately representing the concert, by choosing the word “expressing,” he signals the shift towards the personal experience of the dance writer while maintaining an emphasis on description of “what you saw.”

The legacy of Denby’s style is evident in the writings of Deborah Jowitt. A dance critic for the Village Voice from 1967 to 2008 and the author of dance history books, as well as articles, book chapters, and anthologies of her critical writing, Jowitt continues the practice of close observation. Jowitt’s dance reviews intertwine description and elucidation. Writing about her own viewpoint on criticism in “A Private View of Criticism,” she states:

What I’ve come to believe is that the best dance criticism (at any rate, the dance criticism I admire most) stays intimately connected to the work itself—neither leaping over it into romantic fancies or distant theorizing, nor smothering it in irrelevant ideas, nor making it the pretext for a brilliant display of temperament. (1976, p. 207)
By the 1970s, Jowitt’s call for descriptive, evidence-based criticism indicated a
new standard for dance writing. Yet, in the late 1960s, one “brilliant display of
temperament” that resulted in a dance writing phenomenon befitting its subject was that
of Jill Johnston. Writing for the *Village Voice*, Johnston shifted from a traditional
outsider—critical stance to an insider style of writing that forecasted and participated in
the upending of austere, modernist dance art in the postmodern Judson period of
revolution. A colleague of Johnston’s, Jowitt (1998) writes in the introduction to
*Marmalade me*, an anthology of Johnston’s work, “As a choreographer might collage
apparently unrelated movements, perhaps combining them with speech, slides, film, and
the manipulation of objects, Johnston broke up the linear flow of thought through non
sequitur and disruptions of syntax” (p. xxvi). One of many examples of the style to
which Jowitt alludes is Johnston’s article “Rainer’s Muscle,” which introduces Yvonne
Rainer’s *Trio A*, a piece that exemplified the Judson postmodern aesthetic:

I’m sentimentally attached to it as one might be toward a baby whose birth you
attended and subsequently watched in its expanding versions of itself. *Trio A* was
the germinal origin of the dance. The woolen underwear, a pretty tough fabric, to
be covered (though never obscured) by a multifaceted garment made of the same
sturdy stuff with certain additional embellishments. I’ve seen *Trio A* a number of
times and still think I haven’t really seen it. The underwear metaphor isn’t a good
one from the view that you’ve never seen such intricate underwear. (p. 65)

Johnston’s ecphrastic style takes experience and, rather than translate it into
language, reacts to it with language. In narrating her experience of the piece, a reader
might get a sense of the piece and a sense of her, but her style has no urgency. She is not
trying to tell the reader something; it is as if she is writing in her journal, and that journal
happens to be a newspaper.
Bridging newspaper dance writing and dance in academia, Marcia Siegel developed a methodology for dance analysis in the performance studies department at New York University. Siegel (1998) utilizes the parameters of Laban Movement Analysis but, given that she believes it “conceives of movement from the performer’s point of view, not from the audience’s” (p. 94), she suggests that if dance critics “take note of the actions, energies, objects, places, people, [and] sounds” of a dance, they can “come up with a sort of vocabulary belonging to that dance” (pp. 94-95) She emphasizes dance evidence, as does Jowitt, but further, Siegel promotes the theory that each dance contains a specific language set, a lexicon, available to the astute, active viewer. Propelled by critic/scholars like Siegel, dance writing changed from adulation to explanation to description with evaluation.

Another dance critic cum dance academic, Sally Banes contributed to the development of postmodern dance theory in her *Terpsichore in sneakers: Post-modern dance*. There she defined post-modern dance as the period of dance following modern dance, defined by the “breakaway period” (1977/1987, p. xvii) of the Judson era. Of the core concern of the Judson dancers—the trouble with defining dance—she writes, “the post-modern choreographers proposed that a dance was a dance not because of its content but because of its context—i.e., simply because it was framed as dance” (p. xix). This quote introduces the second edition of the text, but it also provides a way of looking at Banes’s extensive body of dance writing, which, though disparate, is consistently concerned with the foundations of the discipline and with the dialogical relationship
between art and life, framed by dance. Andrea Harris (2007) writes in the most recent anthology of Banes’s writings:

The principle that guided Banes as a youthful creator and performer of dances—that the boundaries between art and life are indefinite—comes full circle in her writing. Banes sees dance as an integral part of culture and believes that it can affect how we experience and understand our environment. (p. 10)

Banes’s (1977/1987) writing on Deborah Hay is illustrative of the descriptive, historical style to which Harris comments. In this passage Banes describes how Hay directs the audience’s attention. Banes develops a theory of the choreographic effect, that it “heightened the spectator’s consciousness,” through movement description and historical reference:

By redirecting attention in real time, the dances heightened the spectator’s consciousness of attention and perception.

Thus, the vitality of Hay’s early dances, like City Dance (1963)—with its hurried, complex dispersions—and All Day Dance (1963)—with its childlike, energetic jumps, slides, and somersaults contrasting with dancey turns and kicks—was no more or less accurate or appropriate, in terms of timing, than the pared down, monotonous pace of No. 3 (1966), in which three helpers toppled and dragged three stacks of bricks while Hay ran evenly in circles. (p. 115)

Banes also generates theory in her Dancing Women: Female Bodies on Stage (1998), where she disentangles feminist dance history from derivatives of film theory. Banes refines the central feminist question—that of the role of women in ballet—by rejecting frameworks that begin with an assumption about the position of women (i.e., women as victims). Instead, she constructs a picture of women by forefronting the dancing of the ballerina. Herein she revisits an old issue but raises new questions about feminist scholarship, the ballerina, and performance paradoxes.
As the field of dance studies has risen within the academy, many dance scholars have relied on the techniques of postmodern literary analysis. While post-structuralism—a loose term applied to, but not always accepted by, critics of structuralism—emerged in French literary theory circles in the 1960s, this theoretical position made the most significant impact in the United States in the late 1970s and 1980s. Perhaps the most salient notion of post-structuralist thought is destabilization. By rejecting the idea that sign and signifier are a fused unit and instead suggesting that meaning is continually negotiated, this theoretical breach ruptured truth-seeking projects. Rejecting the notion of truth, intellectuals like Foucault, Derrida, and Barthes, instead propose that through language we reconstruct meanings—too often repeating the hegemonic narratives. Words, then, cannot firmly attach to things or ideas. Writing, therefore, represents a construction of the author that is reconstructed by the reader.

In 1988, dance theorist Susan Leigh Foster, in *Reading dancing: Bodies and subjects in contemporary American dance*, applied post-structural theories to dance performances. She describes her work as:

hermeneutical rather than sociological . . . [M]y observations about viewers’ responses are designed not to pinpoint the reactions of particular viewers at a single concert but to suggest types of responses that grow out of the dance’s ability to require that we attend to it in a particular way. (p. 243 n. 55)

Like Banes, Foster addresses the work of Deborah Hay in relation to time:

“Although they are intended to take place in a quotidian time and space rather than an imaginary land of past or future, her dances attempt to transform their location and the viewers’ perceptions into a more harmonious environment” (p. 6). Unlike Banes, Foster’s project is not historical, but paradigmatic, as she intends to “articulate a theory of
representation in dance” (p. 3). Randy Martin (1997) writes of Foster’s text, “The elusiveness of the ways in which dancers produce meaning is rendered into a set of structural categories that are evident in any set of human practices” (p. 330). In other words, Foster uses Hay’s work as an exemplar of an idea of making dances, rather than an instance thereof.

Combining literary theory and post-colonial studies, scholar Brenda Dixon Gottschalk’s writings flip the grand narratives of innovation and genius. Pointing to the appropriation of Black dance forms and aesthetics in White concert and social dance forms, Gottschalk’s persuasive analysis and evocative writing pushed dance history to be a more dynamic, less fixed field. Building on the foundation of her 1998 *Digging the Africanist presence in American performance: Dance and other contexts*, which examines the Africanist aesthetic in multiple contexts, Gottschald’s 2003 *The black dancing body* examines the understandings of the black dancing body and the historical implications of racialized conceptualizations of body and movement. Creating a multi-vocal text, Gottschalk presents interviews with influential artists, theoretical frameworks, and her readings and expansions of the words of the artists. Gottschalk suggests that dancers live in a world wherein images, impressions, and stereotypes construct and reconstruct this body: “I do not believe there is such a phenomenon as Black or White dance—or even a Black or White dancing body. *They are cultural milestones, not racial markers*” (p.14). Through “spontaneous reactions and subjective responses” (p. 47), the aggregate uncensored voices of artists, from hip hop choreographer Rennie Harris to German dance theater artist Susanne Linke, build visceral, emotional (and complex, and
problematic) understandings of Black dance, White dance, and stereotyped bodies. While Gottschild herself frames the voices in her text, she gives each independent voice significant weight.

In the 21st century, as dance scholars within the academy work to establish dance studies as a viable academic discipline, the divide between those working towards a dance-specific methodology and those for whom cultural studies and critical theory hold the most cross-disciplinary promise has created a tension. For those seeking dance-specificity, cultural studies seems to ignore the actual dancing, while to the cross-disciplinarians, a focus on the act of dancing ignores pertinent cultural issues (Franco & Nordera, 2007). This debate, sometimes framed as phenomenology versus critical theory (Franko, 2007), is prominent today. A closer viewing of many sorts of dance writings (dance criticism, dance ethnography, and dance education) and broad definitions of dancing and dance epistemology begets a multi-dimensional view of dance that is not singular in concern. Successful dance writing that is, in Jowitt’s terms, “intimately connected” with dance can and should connect the multitude of experiences that constitute dance to the socio-historical frameworks within which dance operates.

A Political Debate in Dance Studies

Dance studies research has been divided into roughly two camps: (1) those who study dancing and dances in order to know more about dance itself and (2) those who study dance in order to know more about something else, often a culture. This divide is addressed in Dance discourses: Keywords in dance research. In this book, editors Susanne Franco and Marina Norder (2007) ask:
Is it possible to think of these apparently contradictory approaches as complementary or reciprocally useful? In other words, can the means that characterize a specific methodology find a place in an interdisciplinary project without losing value? And might they, on the contrary, nurture the goal of never ceasing to ask new questions about dance and its history, an aim all dance scholars share? (p. 2-3)

In his contribution to this volume, Mark Franko defines this rift in dance studies as a methodological debate between “formalists” and “contextualists.” Franko defines the formalists as “those who favor movement analysis over all other critical methods” (p. 18). In particular, he points to movement analysis and phenomenology as indicators of a formalist sensibility. He defines contextualists as researchers who favor the methods of critical theory. Although he references methodology, Franko presents the foundation upon which the divide rests—defining the discipline—through his contextualist lens. He writes, “Dance Studies is fundamentally interdisciplinary in the way it conjugates specific knowledge of structured movement systems and choreographic protocols as well as performance styles with the critical approaches to power and representation that would otherwise remain relatively disembodied” (p. 16).

Franko’s bias towards the contextual understanding of dance studies is clear. Writing about method and discipline, he implies that the origins of the actions of the researcher define the researcher’s relative openness, “For the formalist sensibility critical theory is imported from outside the discipline. It is of the nature of the strictest disciplinary conception of Dance Studies therefore to diminish the interpretive importance of context” (p. 18). Yet, if by extension, these formalists were to rely only on methods generated within the field of dance, not only would they shy away from critical theory but they would have to ignore any sort of supplementary historical or
archival research, interviewing, observation, or any of the multitude of research practices that are not dance derived. Franko decries insularity but presents only cultural studies as an alternative. Moreover, he conjoins movement analysis and phenomenology, pointing to the work of several French scholars who employ movement analysis and phenomenological methods. These two tactics, while perhaps complementary, are certainly not corollaries.

This debate concerns justifying dance—what David White calls the “dance wars” (qtd. in Harris, 2007, p. 10). Franko’s two parties value dance either because it happens (phenomenological) or because it happens in cultures (anthropological). Franko’s formalism/contextualism is just one way to divide dance scholarship, however. A longer list of beliefs in the value of dance include because dances have happened (historical), because dances can happen (kinesiological), because dances are understood by the doer (psychological), and because dances are perceived (neurological).

Although Franko does not address his repeated pairing of movement analysis and phenomenology he does try to address the problem of the variety of historical approaches by creating a problematic division between historians who use critical theory and those who do not. He writes, “history without critical theory can of course just be considered a supplement to movement analysis, and in this sense a subset of history” (p. 18). By this definition, to be a contextualist, a researcher must employ critical theory or else end up relegated to a lower caste of formalist.

Germane to my study of knowledge practices in college dance is the issue that Franko’s explication of the divide between formalist and contextualist muddles both
standpoint and method. Standpoint is one’s school of thought, training, and worldview; method is one’s ways of going about doing things. Certain theoretical assumptions require certain methods. Methods stem from research questions. Both standpoint and method are tied to the researcher’s values (politics), theoretical or otherwise, but standpoint and method are not interchangeable. What Franko presents as methodological is actually political. In her response to Franko’s essay, Isabelle Ginot (2007) accurately reframes this debate from methodology to standpoint by writing about formalism and contextualism each as a “current of thought.” Then she begins to consider method. She writes, “The silence that separates these two points of view, these two ways of looking at the works, no longer seems insurmountable but concerns the disparity of the respective methodological tools” (p. 259). Ginot accurately addresses the philosophical separation first, then queries the doing.

Because dance scholars are still working to refine dance as a scholarly undertaking in higher education, defining the discipline is an ongoing task. The debate on disciplinarity is summarized by dance scholar and educator Melanie Bales (2008) as:

Those who see dance as a cultural artifact produced by political and identity struggles or, disparagingly, as an art practice unable to be seriously considered apart from other structures or fields of study. [and] …those who feel dance, like art with a capital A, should be seen as the artistic expression of an individual or a spirit, capable of transcending, or at least transforming, some of the very issues at the core of cultural studies. (p. 11)

Bales describes one end of the spectrum (Franko’s contextualists) using the visual perceptual verb “to see,” whereas to the other (Franko’s formalists) she attaches the kinesthetic sensorial verb “to feel.” This slight difference illustrates the gap between the two standpoints, for seeing requires a subject/object, the inside/outside process of taking
visual information and synthesizing it into an image. When we figuratively see ourselves (as in “Now I see that that comment I made was hurtful”), we perceive an objectified memory of a past event. We can sometimes re-feel the situation but we cannot re-do, instead we “reflect” or “revisit” in order to move on. This notion of memory, or history, as objectified—as a set of recalled or discovered relics—is critical. As critics of phenomenology point out, to disregard time in research practice is problematic. As for those who “feel” that dance should be a distinguishable discipline, Bales uses “feel” in the sense of “believe,” or “understand,” not in the kinesthetic sense. But, the two usages are intertwined. At this end of the continuum (the formalists), Franko puts movement analysis and phenomenology. The methods of each prioritize sensation. However, movement analysis can be used as an observational tool as well.

Both Bales and Franko temper their dichotomizations. Bales writes that few scholars are at the extreme ends of her dichotomy while Franko suggests that he does not think the two positions are in opposition, just divided. What Bales reveals in this passage, the part that Franko skips, is that the divide is political. While the dance (with a capital D) party “feels” about dance, they think it “should be seen” by the academy as stand-alone, as worthy of standing alone. Franko is right that this desire for autonomy is expressed through an authority of method. Movement analysis has been developed within dance and, thus, is used to justify a focus on dance in studies of the body.

**Phenomenology and Movement Description**

Over the past twenty years, one set of dance researchers has looked towards anthropology and ethnographic methods to understand danced knowledge, dances, and
dancing through accounts of specific events and participants, while another set has turned to phenomenology to represent the inner experience of dancing. Phenomenologists believe that phenomenological approaches can elucidate a dance epistemology through exploration, of a “body logos,” thinking bodies. Dance philosopher Jaana Parviainen (2002) writes, “Knowing in dancing always has something to do with verbal language; nevertheless, it essentially concerns the body’s awareness and motility… we acknowledge that dancers know something” (p. 13). Later in the article she suggests, “When speaking of bodily knowledge of specific practices, such as dancing…expertise involves bodily knowing that cannot be articulated” (p. 22). Here we have the assertion that danced knowledge is related to the verbal yet it cannot be articulated. This sweeping concept, absent of movement evidence, puts forth an unbounded ephemeral body. Yet in dancer accounts, the specifics of dancing are both material and discursive. Parviainen’s ephemeral bodily knowledge highlights what is, for many, the central flaw of phenomenology: that the moment of experience is fleeting.

Similarly, in The routledge dance studies reader, Sondra Fraleigh (1998) dismisses the criticism that phenomenological approaches ignore time, writing: “It is not devoid of past and future, since both are lived as part of the present” (p. 135). She presents the framework as useful for considering dance essence, “Something is discerned which characterizes or typifies the dance, so it is recognized as itself and not some other dance” (p. 137). She suggests, thereby, that the dance analyst must bring to the viewing knowledge of other dances with which to compare. However, she also presents phenomenology as the best effort towards viewing dance without bias “to describe
through some direct” means (p. 138). In my view, like grounded theory, phenomenology as a theoretical framework struggles with the ideals of open-minded viewings and the researcher’s ever-present biases.

On the other end of the spectrum, dance ethnographers like Barbara Browning (1995), Tomie Hahn (2007), Sally Ann Ness (1992), and Cynthia Novack (1990), look at Western and non-Western cultures by embodying dance practices and writing about the experiential and cultural dimensions of them. In *Nutcracker nation*, Jennifer Fisher (2003) takes a socio-historical approach to concert dance. She describes her approach:

In order to expand upon aesthetic categorizations and stereotypes of *The Nutcracker*, I needed to do fieldwork among “my people”—participants in ballet’s only yearly ritual performance, including dancers, artistic directors, volunteers, parents, backstage staff, teacher, students, and audience members. (p. xii-xiii)

In the social sciences, the postmodern turn prompted a crisis of representation. Dance ethnography and anthropology have seen a shift from objective, observational studies to embodied, participatory studies. In “Being a body in a cultural way: understanding the cultural in the embodiment in dance,” dance anthropologist Sally Ann Ness (2004) analyzes several past and present dance anthropologists and ethnographers, looking for the kinds of understandings that develop out of embodied research in dance. Considering the current trend of phenomenology, Ness asks whether embodied scholarship necessarily begets a phenomenological standpoint.

Ness begins with a passage from dance ethnographer Browning’s *Samba* in which Browning describes learning to dance by ceasing writing and instead thinking with her body. Ness writes, “The cultural aspect of human movement in Browning’s perspective
is necessarily studied via thoughtful, intellectual bodily practice” (p. 124). Hence, an embodied methodology stems from the research questions. Furthermore, while Ness does not make this point directly, what the article supposes and Browning exemplifies is that the word “thinking” becomes a construct. The meaning of thinking is definable and malleable, in context. For Browning, thoughts are not just inner dialogues in the mind and feelings are not just bodily sensations. While this distinction seems similar to dance phenomenologist Maxine Sheets-Johnstone’s (1999) idea of a “body logos” (a thinking body), these ideas are two separate constructions of thinking. While Browning widens the usage of “to think,” the others repackage sensation as thought in an effort to validate kinesthetic intelligence. Although this contrast is not the thrust of Ness’s article, she highlights a similar point and uses the writings of a range of ethnographers to look at how, in written texts, accounts of embodiment reveal epistemic standpoint.

Ness writes that the change to embodiment has an epistemological justification. According to Ness, this “suggests that there is something new to be learned, some otherwise inaccessible understanding to be gained of human movement as a cultural phenomenon, through the methodological shift to embodied practice” (p. 124). Given that phenomenology has been presented as “the way of gaining knowledge,” (p. 125) Ness questions whether that choice is actually the best.

The article also includes an analysis of passages that Ness defines as of the observationalist school, including the work of James Mooney (1896), A.R. Radcliff-Brown (1948), and Edward Schieffelin (1976). Ness notes that both Mooney and Radcliff-Brown describe generic body parts. Of Mooney she writes that the “definitive
article, ‘the,’ modifies body parts and/or bodies identified: ‘leaders,’ ‘hands,’ ‘feet,’ etc.
Agency is understood in terms of these preexisting and enduring individual bodies and/or subindividual body parts” (p. 126). Watching from the outside, these writers write in the present-perfect, using action verbs, and a declarative mood. However, in her example of Schieffelin, Ness argues that his interest in social action and social structure is evident as he “begins to move beyond the present tense” (p. 130) when noting not only what the Kaluli dancers do, but what they do not do and what they are not supposed to do.

Ness looks at Gertrude Kurath (1957), John Chernoff (1979), and again, Barbara Browning (1995) as exemplars of a participant/observation strategy. While Ness presents Kurath as a signifier of methodological change, in Kurath’s writing Ness sees little fundamental difference as compared to the observationalists. Yet Chernoff, she writes, exemplifies “two other characteristic consequences of embodied methodology: the employment of a subjunctive mood and the adoption of an instrumental or purpose-oriented processual descriptive strategy” (134). As does Browning, Chernoff uses a “nonpresent futuristic” tense, writing things like “a good dancer will change” (p. 134) to describe dance practices in terms of desire and quality rather than simply outcome. Of embodied ethnographies, Ness concludes that they are 1) “temporally complex or plastic, sometimes conditionally subjunctive or futuristic, as opposed to declarative in mood”; 2) explanatory, in a how-to sense; 3) concerned with the “contingency, fallibility, and the uniqueness of individual performers”; and 4) focused on “integrating relationships” among actors (p. 137).
The conclusion Ness comes to in regards to the phenomenological perspective is that embodied ethnographies do not align with the immediacy of phenomenology. Instead, they tend to be “more focused on nonpresent, nonactual, temporal characters than the observationally weighted approaches” (p. 139). And while they do emphasize the individuality of participants, they tend to draw the moments at hand “in relation to nonpresent realities, historical and remembered, as well as potential and imagined” (p. 139).

**Dance Ethnography and LMA**

In ethnographic research, LMA serves as a way to translate dance experiences into clear and evocative description that is readable first on a vernacular level for general audiences and as a specific language for educated readers. For instance, we understand movement described as a “dab” in an everyday embodied sense. We dab moisturizer onto our faces or whipped cream onto berries. In the more clinical sense, the attuned reader can recognize this movement as a direct, quick, and light action, wholly unlike wringing and only spatially different from flicking (Laban & Lawrence, 1947).

LMA can function as an analytic tool through which to generate understandings and narratives of dance practices. Unlike the formalists that Franko envisions, in the more practice-oriented research textbook, *Researching dance: Evolving modes of inquiry*, Mary Alice Brennan (1999) positions movement analysis (her discussion includes but is not limited to LMA) as one element of a comprehensive research practice:

The manner of movement data collection varies in relation to the purpose of the research, the theory underpinning it, the location of the dance activity, the time allotted, and the background and skill of the researchers. Since movement analysis is used within the broad context of a larger research goal rather than as an
end in itself, the investigator seeks as many additional resources as possible for information about the movement and its context. (p. 297)

Brennan lists other conventional qualitative research activities such as archival, historical, and interview methods. The danger of viewing LMA as a closed system is evident in a project like Alan Lomax’s (1968) choreometrics. Flawed not only methodologically (Keali’inohomoku, 1976) the project, in more paradigmatic terms contained the epistemological flaw, summarized by Joan Frosch’s (1999) description of choreometrics’s “tidy categories” (p. 256). Choreometrics used LMA as a closed system, categorizing and quantifying movement based on parameters that the researchers assumed to be universal. More successful LMA applications use LMA as a research tool informed by standpoint, theoretical, methodological, and analytic tactics. In this sense, it is a tool for the “contextualist” researcher. Dance ethnographer Deidre Sklar (2001) describes her use of LMA as a tool of translation:

Qualitative movement analysis, based on the work of Rudolf Laban, provided a bridge between the dancer who learns via kinesthetic sensation and the fieldworker who learns via visual apprehension. Qualitative movement analysis relies on tacking between the two. (p. 3)

Ness (1992) uses the language of LMA descriptively throughout her ethnography Body, movement, and culture: Kinesthetic and visual symbolism in a Philippine community. While she does highlight this method, LMA is evident in her final product. A few examples include her references to “posture and gesture” (p. 144), “pathways” (p. 147), “dynamic principles” (p. 146), and “spatial fluency” (p. 146). In the following example, Ness uses specific LMA terms and references, but she also uses movement description to connect the dance to history and to the imagination of the reader:
As the Cebuano-derived name indicates, the *tinampilan* (pounding) segment introduced a distinctive and salient symbol of the local movement habits: resilient quickness. The group formations of the *sayaw* were repeated in this segment, so that the muted opposition noted earlier reappeared. The step itself, however, for which the segment was named, gave the group figures a different energy.

The *tinampilan* step sequence featured a moderately difficult pattern of weight shift, as a series of three steps, the first of which crossed behind and the second and third of which stepped in place. The step demonstrated agility as well as accuracy. It was not the step of a soldier marching off to battle, but more similar to that of a sailor dancing a jig. The diminished but rapid pattern of weight shift, as well as the maintained pose of the upper body, resembled those of Philippine war dances performed in connection with the sea-to-land raiding that occurred well into the 1800s. (p. 144-145)

The conceptual values of LMA do not dominate Ness’s writing, nor does she seem to clarify the movement principles of the *sinulog* through double-coded terminology. Instead, she accesses an LMA-like viewpoint when describing the dances for the reader. In this passage, LMA appears in the ideas of “resilient quickness” (elements in Effort), “weight shifts” that constituted the stepping pattern (floor patterns), and the “maintained pose of the upper body” (body attitude). However, Ness’s main communicative tactics access the reader’s associative memory and historical evidence. A poetic choice, unlike the clarity of LMA, Ness’s choice to counterpoint a “soldier marching off to battle” and a “sailor dancing a jig” requires a specific, relevant cultural imagination. She does not mean a literal soldier and sailor, but the kind one might encounter on a school trip to Williamsburg complete with historical reconstructions and an entertaining spectacle in the evening. Although evocative, without the foundation of the preceding LMA-based description, Ness’s writing would seem unsupported by the data.
Conclusion

Writing about dancing is a central task of this dissertation. The scholars and debates described in this chapter formed a basis for my exploration of danced knowledge, not by providing a conceptual foundation or body of work to challenge, but by providing exemplars of the actual task of writing and the range of possible written products. In other words, looking at how, in each of the cited exemplars, the author takes on the task of describing, interpreting, and analyzing movement for both real and imagined audiences. In the ensuing chapters, I have used these notions about writing—especially that writing speaks both to the work it describes and of the writer herself—to develop strategies that I believe well-document the practices I observed and participated in, but also serve to recreate these experiences for the reader. The dance critic, historian, or theorist must write for both those who have seen, and those who can only imagine a work. Likewise, my task has been to write in a way that is compelling both for the most internal of readers, the participants themselves; a real audience of scholarly readers; and an imagined audience of future young dancers as they begin to critically engage with their discipline.
Chapter 4

Situating Sensations as a Means to Develop Knowledge

It is with all of one’s senses that one gradually converts to the world of prizefighting and its stakes. To give this proposition its full force, one would need to be able to capture and convey at once the odors (the heady smell of liniment sniffed full force, the sweat hanging in the air, the stink of the situp table, the leathery scent of the gloves); the cadenced “thump” of punches against the bags and the clanking of the chains they hang from, each bag having its own sound, each drill its tonality, each boxer his own manner of accenting the machine gun-like rattle of the speed bag; the light ‘tap-tap’ or frantic galloping of feet on the wooden floor while skipping rope, or the muffled squeak they let out as they move gingerly on the canvas of the ring; the rhythmic puffing, hissing, sniffing, blowing, and groaning characteristic of each athlete; and especially the collective layout and synchronization of the bodies in the space of the gym, whose mere sight suffices to wield lasting pedagogical effects; not to forget the temperature, whose variation and intensity are not the least relevant properties of the room. The combination of all these elements produces a sort of sensuous intoxication that is key to the education of the apprentice boxer.

Loic Wacquant, 2003 *Body and Soul*, p. 70-71 emphasis added

In the above passage sociologist Loic Wacquant introduces the concept of corporeal knowledge as developed in a South Side Chicago boxing gym. By describing the “sensuous intoxication” of the ring, he suggests how the sensate elements of a space and community create a visceral context for learning. For the dancer, the studio environment is equally sticky—and equally alluring. In this chapter, I argue that the learning that takes place in the dance studio occurs when the dancers intertwine sensate memories within overarching narratives of experience. They describe these sensorial physical experiences by situating them within personal trajectories.

The chapter begins with a lengthy description of one rehearsal accompanied by images. This rehearsal serves as an exemplar of a context wherein learning arises
through sensations that are developed through a process of repetition and refinement. The rehearsal introduces the uses of fatigue and fun and the practices of layering complexity. Furthermore, it serves as an instance wherein the body is both a means of learning and the substance of learning. In the second part of the chapter, I explore the ways that students integrate sensate memories and narratives of experience from the technique classroom thereby cultivating a sense of knowledge as at once known and unknown.

**Rehearsal Practices Generate Sensorial Memories**

On a Monday night, walking from the graduate student office to rehearsal, I pass by Studio One where an advanced non-major jazz class dances to Michael Jackson’s “Thriller,” a standard of late October elective classes. Two dance majors, leaving from or heading to rehearsals, stand in the doorway watching. I, too, stop to observe, but suddenly feel sympathetic towards the potentially vulnerable non-major dancers—students who are usually dancing for fun or a workout—and head over to rehearsal. Peering into a class is a normal practice, fueled by general curiosity or interest in specific dancers, and it often “amps up” the performance of dance majors. For the performer, there is a powerfulness of action that can match the gaze of the viewer, but for the casual dancer, being watched can feel like unwelcome assessment. I continue on to Annie’s rehearsal. Studio Two, long, rectangular, and windowless, has a yellowish cast, which might be from the lighting or the aging paint. Tonight, I am here to observe, and I have arrived about five minutes late. Annie usually begins her rehearsals with a choreographed warm-up sequence that takes about 20 minutes. Expecting to arrive a few
minutes into that, I am surprised to see that they have jumped right into learning material (Figures 2.1, 2.2). Margaret, Anabel, and Carrie lean on the piano over by the wall-mounted television, learning material from the video of an improvisation in a prior rehearsal. I wonder where Jenna is, and when Annie goes to check her phone for messages, I realize that she is concerned about Jenna’s absence as well.32

All three dancers wear black cotton jersey pants and washed-out pastel tops. Each also wears another layer, which will soon be adapted to cover her waist and hips: a high school sweatshirt, a long floral shirt, and a long-sleeved shirt. Trying to figure out a series of low partnering lifts from the video footage, the three look quizzically at the television, watching moments of assisted airtime that they once did and now must remake. They learn these moments from prior improvisations that Annie has spliced together on DVD, a choreographic method she frequently uses. As they awkwardly mark through the series of lifts, two say simultaneously:

“No, that’s not going to work. It’s too much force.”

“Can we change this?”

Annie asks, “Do you hate it or just not remember it?”

All three respond teasingly, “We hate it.”

They start laughing and joking about what each had done on the tape and resume work on specific lifts. Groaning at oneself on video is a common practice—“Oh good one!” “I look like that?” “Isn’t it awful to watch yourself!” (fieldnotes, 10/2008).

These quips bring a lightness to the process but while humorous, they also reference the

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32 Rehearsal observation, October 2008. Reconstructed from fieldnotes taken during the rehearsals, Annie’s memory, and Kathryn’s many photographs.
Images of an *Indelible Marks* rehearsal

Figure 2.1 The dancers circle around the television to watch clips from a previous rehearsal. Photo courtesy of Kathryn Enright

Figure 2.2 Annie watches the dancers initiate a lift. Photo courtesy of Kathryn Enright
Figure 2.3 Carrie launches herself upwards on a diagonal to initiate a large weight shift. Photo courtesy of Kathryn Enright

Figure 2.4 Carrie sends her weight to the right as she curves to the left. Photo courtesy of Kathryn Enright
Figure 2.5 Anabel falls backward. Photo courtesy of Kathryn Enright

Figure 2.6 Margaret slices her arm across her body. Photo courtesy of Kathryn Enright
Figure 2.7 The three dancers weave through one another by reaching for and pulling oneself through the other two. Photo courtesy of Kathryn Enright

Figure 2.8 Annie tries out the task she has given the dancers by inserting herself in the process and describing what she feels. Photo courtesy of Kathryn Enright
Figure 2.9 The dancers take a break and catch their breath. Photo courtesy of Kathryn Enright
constant practice of evaluating oneself and the frustration that can breed. They stop talking about the video and begin seriously re-discovering and re-making the material. The repetition the dancers engage in is different from memorization, but is instead a process of embodying, or integrating the movements until they shift slightly, becoming anew. At one moment, Anabel seems to remember a sensation from the sequence and swings her body onto and around Carrie, hooking her armpit onto Carrie’s shoulder. Though startled, Carrie lifts and spins her, gently setting her down to finish. Finding this exact point of connection seems to allow them to recreate and complete the lift. Annie asks to see the lifts and interactions that they know, and they show her the series of supported movements. By this point, it seems that Jenna will not make it to rehearsal; we later find out when she arrives towards the end of the rehearsal, exhausted and embarrassed struggling with illness, that she has slept through most of this session.

**Renegotiating Movements from a Piecemeal Series to a Fluid Whole**

Next, each dancer crafts a sequence of traveling movements and Annie sets up a pathway by pulling out two chairs and describing how the dancers should weave through and around them. As the dancers repeat their phrases of movement, they become fluid, with more swiping, falling, and gliding through space. They develop and repeat the sequence by moving along a figure-eight shaped track demarcated by two folding chairs in the middle of the room. They then try executing the path in reverse.

Carrie’s phrase starts with her elbows bent near her ribs as she twists back and forth like a boxer, while in contrast her legs take wide, deep steps. She charges through space. As seen in Figure 2.3, she is frequently off-center, launching herself up and outwards or,
as in Figure 2.4, arcing over by curving laterally against the direction of movement. As such, her path involves negotiating movement in the frontal/door and sagittal/wheel planes with low shifts of direction, giving her that charging sensibility. Anabel’s phrase reaches then drops through wide low second-positions of the legs, but she also negotiates a sense of falling backwards, which builds momentum for it requires quicker recovery (Figure 2.5). Margaret’s phrase is more horizontal, her weight moving in the transverse/table plane (Figure 2.6). While mechanically different, the phrases all become full-bodied and athletic with the infusion of running and the group begins to call the result “the marathon of the loop-de-loop phrase.”

“Modulate your energy,” Annie directs, “dropping in and out of it and see if you can still be really specific.” The three begin playing with focus, looking up and out while emphasizing different actions. From my vantage point, they do not seem to be modulating their energy in terms of drawing back, but instead they seem to use the fatigue they feel to find more momentum in the phrasing.

**Repetition Enables Further Risk Taking and Layers of Complexity**

Repeating these full-bodied, traveling phrases breeds exhaustion, which in turn makes for more efficient movement as the dancers physically negotiate when to exert energy and when to give in to gravity. Fatigue aids in the learning process, for it becomes easier to mobilize one’s weight to find a phrase’s internal structure. Unfortunately, it also constitutes a range of work wherein injuries are most possible.

While repetition drives the process, only repeating the movements alone would be unsustainable and inefficient, and attention to details through individual work or
discussion is present in this, as in most, rehearsal processes. The dancers pause to work things out either with Annie, or on their own. When Annie modifies one interaction between Carrie and Margaret, Anabel repeats a movement of which she apparently feels unsure. Moving out of the way of the others, and closer to the mirror, she sweeps her arm up, then drops into a deep plié over and over again while watching herself in the mirror and trying different methods of sending her arm up and over. As she repeats the movement it becomes faster and more cascading, like a ball that has been tossed rather than spiked.

To my relief, Anabel asks Annie to put on different music. We have been listening to the DVD menu music—a country song about Jesus and bartenders—on repeat for the last half-hour. With Anabel’s iPod playing, the three move faster, moving more frequently into high space, and with more accents. Rather than being evenly spaced apart on the track-like path, their cycles compress and they run closer together (Figure 2.7). Next, they do their phrases near one another, still moving along the same pathway. It seems riskier overall, yet they seem to have much more control than they did an hour earlier.

Annie remarks, “I like that part; I don’t know if it works though.”

“It was fun,” the dancers agree, non-committal.

They stand and talk for about ten minutes; the dancers explain the sensations to Annie and ask her questions. After a quick break for water and the bathroom, they resume the building process. This time they stay extremely close as they travel. I am unsure of the task until Annie says, “See if you can make it more like a braid—so you are
always crossing in between,” and I realize they are trying to pass one another while weaving in and out.

**The Choreographer Relates and Evaluates**

They stop, and Annie steps in to show them how to dive through the other two as they pass (Figure 2.8). She describes her own sensation to give them an intention: “I feel like I’m always *reaching* for you.” They incorporate this directive, literally reaching for the torsos of those in front and trying to pull through, without pushing the others back. In addition to an inter-personal relationship, the connection between choreographer and dancer is physical, with Annie’s body moving in and out of the process. While this could be read as what dance theorist Foster (1997) calls the “demonstrative body” (p. 237), which she describes in terms of a teacher’s body that the student understands as a mediator between her or his “perceived” and “ideal” body, instead, Annie’s physicality is less a vehicle to show a movement ideal, but instead a means of developing and articulating a movement quality. In other words, Annie demonstrates not to show, but to discover the details of the movement quality through her attuned body.

Annie looks at each of them and I can tell that she is scanning their body postures, looking for signs of fatigue and injury potential. She asks, “Do you want to do it again?”

“Yeah!” They respond with enthusiasm. The three talk among themselves and Anabel seems to be suggesting an idea. Annie walks across the studio to stand by Kathryn Enright, who is photographing. She physically distances herself from the material, which gives her more of an audience perspective but also shifts the responsibility for approaching the final run to the dancers. After a moment, the dancers
charge forward in the last repetition of the evening. This time, the section has a cycling, flying sense—not just as a whole but also in the individual movements. It is like a steeplechase, a race filled with obstacles.

They end, breathing heavily. Annie asks, “How tired are you?” And Margaret exclaims, “Really tired!”

“Good,” Annie concludes, with a sly smile.

This section of movement in fact fatigues the dancers to a point where they are gasping for breath (Figure 2.9). At one point in a later rehearsal, one dancer finished the section so out-of-breath that I snapped, “Quit smoking!” in a moment of motherly concern. While contemporary dance requires a great deal of athleticism, it less often demands sustained aerobic endurance. This section, in its early stages, required cardiovascular exertion comparable to sprinting coupled with large, exertion-filled weight shifts and direction changes. Only an abbreviated section makes it into the final work, but this so-named “marathon” version demonstrates the physical rigor and learning required of the dancers.

**Bodies as Means and Substance of Learning**

In this specific rehearsal, the dancers’ bodies are both the means for learning and the substance of the learning. In this instance, the dancers are not learning about external content. The drive of this rehearsal is not to express an idea or emotion; instead, the content is the physical dimensions of dancing, in this case the mobilization of weight while negotiating other bodies. The dancers repeat and refine their material with the choreographer articulating her ideas as they emerge, empathizing and giving feedback
through her body, while also gauging the physical capacities of the dancers. The learning procedure is repetition, but in each iteration, the dancers explore different choices and approaches to the movement. The objective is curiosity, with the dancers metaphorically asking: “What is this? How can I discover something here? What are the possibilities?” through physical repetition and problem solving.

As the dancers fatigue, they start to use their energy in a more nuanced way, riding through the momentum at times, as if coasting down a hill for a brief moment, then drawing up more energy to approach difficult parts with abandon. They begin to launch their weight rather than laboriously lift, and drop into gravity rather than resisting it.

This rehearsal illuminates the physical training of dancers—discoveries made through repetition, sensing of weight, and the allure of the sweaty, tired, and always potentially injured dancing body. Like Wacquant’s boxers, these dancers immerse themselves in a learning environment wherein the sensorial dimensions—of the space and between the people—create a contrasting context of stability and mobility. It is a bounded but open studio; the dancers touch, push, and pull against each other’s bodies. We all participate in a system of knowing that relies on exploring and questioning a state of the unknown: dancers Carrie, Anabel, Margaret, choreographer Annie, who moves in and out from observer to actor; graduate student Kathryn Enright who photographs the rehearsal, moving along the sidelines, framing the action, and I, as I sit in the corner, writing and watching.
Learning over Time

The learning here is through sensation and repetition but the context is the students’ belief that the work of dance is a matter of engaging in the practices of dancing over time to uncover the opportunities to refine. They understand knowledge as a process. As Mary says,

I’m trying to situate myself in relation to what I’ve learned more than letting it wash over me. I’m trying to constantly reassess [whenever] something happens. Like after Annie’s piece, I’m just trying to look at myself in a bigger picture than I ever was. I think about the function of things, like practical skills, what can I do, what kind of things can I work on in Annie’s piece or in this class that I know I can use in my future.\textsuperscript{33}

One must keep doing (or in some instances, undoing by letting go of patterns of tension or movement habits) in order to situate knowledge. The work of dancing requires an interest in and commitment to the movement that exists in the moment yet those moments are understood in the context of a trajectory.

Throughout the data set, overlapping experiences provide a context for each dancer’s understanding of her learning. They range in period—from a class or a piece of choreography, to one’s life as performer and dancemaker, to one’s trajectory as an artist and individual: Mamie writes “I know dance is going to be a part of my life. I can’t escape it and that’s a good thing.”\textsuperscript{34} Developing knowledge becomes not about acquisition of an endpoint but is about an experience along a continuum. The momentary sensations and realizations are about both discovery and instability as the students work to integrate those experiences into their senses of selves as artists, learners, and

\textsuperscript{33} Mary, May interview
\textsuperscript{34} Mamie, journal response to the prompt “What is it like to know in dance.”
individuals. Josephine situates her experiences and future trajectory by noticing how her relationship to dance is shifting from performer to artist and perhaps producer:

I think I am becoming more interested in watching dance, to a certain extent than actually participating in it. …, I'm not sure if I want to try to be a performer or not, I don't know. I mean I think I want, but in the next two years I might change my mind. I feel like I'm still changing my mind every five minutes about how I feel about dance.  

Repeating and Refining in Technique Class

In the dance studio, breadth precedes depth. At a physical level, large muscle groups must be warmed-up before firing the specific small muscles that produce the level of detail evident in refined dancing. In ballet, grande plié, a deep knee bend, comes before petit battement serré, a fluttering of the ankle. Likewise, the effort to find specificity in dancing is often preceded by learning in broad, exploratory strokes. In the earlier example, the dancers go from roughly emulating video footage and organizing sequences and spatial patterns, to discovering the weight and directionality of the material and tasks that complicate the performance of it, for instance, in the sequence when they begin weaving the material together and pulling themselves through one another. But how are these capacities developed? For most, physical skills applied in rehearsal develop in technique classes. The college dancer in a BFA program “takes class” every day. Depending on the program, these may include classes in ballet, modern, or jazz. In BFA programs accredited by the National Association of Schools of Dance, students take at least one 90-minute technique class per day. At Ohio State, the undergraduates take, at a minimum, three modern classes and two ballet classes per week.

35 Josephine, June Interview
Recognizing Moments of Learning and Developing a Sense of Ownership

The dancers in this study often speak of recognizing moments of learning within technique classes. Sometimes, these are brief realizations smattered throughout each week, and other times, they are epiphanies. Anabel describes her knowledge development in terms of sensate memories and the integration of those with the messages she gleans from her teacher’s directives and demonstrations. She articulates an understanding of the material, the “momentum, and directionality and clarity,” as a system in which she can operate, experiencing herself in relation to the movement, not by adding together a myriad of details, but by integrating those learned details. She allows herself to experience “how the movement is moving me.” As I will discuss further in the next chapter, here too, the organizing principle is neither the individual, nor an external force, but instead a relationship between dancer and system. She describes the class of Abby Yager, a visiting faculty member who danced for acclaimed postmodern choreographer Trisha Brown and who sets Brown’s work internationally. Brown’s choreography exhibits a delicate interplay between weight and exertion. Much of her movement looks easeful and loose, and her dancers, including Yager, are influenced by the somatic traditions of Alexander and Klein techniques which prioritize efficient, released movement. The style of dancing is often referred to as “release technique,” but teachers like Yager are quick to note that “release” does not mean “relax.” The paradox of the technique is that the detailing of shapes and time it produces is exquisite. While the ultimate goal is movement driven by shifts of weight that make the subsequent movements inevitable, learning how to achieve a precise use of weight, shape, time, and
directionality can be an arduous process. Anabel speaks of her discoveries in Yager’s classes after studying with her for much of the past two years. She highlights the sensations of dancing the movement in reference to prior experiences and looks to connect these with her dancing future. When setting one of Brown’s pieces at a college or university, Yager often uses material from that Brown work in her technique classes and in this excerpt Anabel refers to Brown’s 1983 *Set and Reset* and her 1976 *Sololos*.

Abby’s class this quarter was the first time where I felt like I was really utilizing everything I’ve learned from her, and just been able to dance the material—not be totally consumed by detail. … [This quarter] she’s really open-minded about dancing *Set and Reset*. Like [it is] ‘Anabel’s dance.’ Doing it your way, as long as you are being true to momentum, and directionality and clarity. Which has made me dance it a lot better. I notice[d] that I would be getting into a rhythm with it. I was speeding up a lot more than other people [but] was true to the material. I was able to find that in [other classes and rehearsals]: doing bigger material and just letting things sink in, and not inhibit myself. Because as much as you try to release, you are always inhibiting somewhat. So I’ve been really practicing *not doing* that and it’s helped. It has totally changed.³⁶

Curious about how she was understanding ownership of movement within such a defined vocabulary, I asked, “What does it feel like, to dance set material Anabel’s way? Or to find that ownership in it?”

It’s to let go of all expectations, especially in the Trisha Brown repertory, especially with doing *Sololos*, we were [of] one mindset—of getting to each shape exactly how it is, instead of moving through it. I’d find myself pushing the material a lot. [She punches her open palm.] I was driving it rather than it driving me. So, I found that relationship and balance and, actually, in finding a certain rhythm, I was able to play with things by slowing down then catching up. That was really fun. It was like this thread line that I could weave in and out of—slip in and out of, which was really nice.

³⁶ Anabel, June interview
The Metaphor of Slipping into and Out of the Movement

Unlike in improvisation where the movement vocabulary itself is fleeting, here, discussing historical repertory, Anabel positions the fixed material as the knowledge set. She sees herself and her development in relation to movement that, in a sense, already exists and, in another sense, is produced in the moment. Her narrative features her ability to both trust the material (not to push it) and to find her own rhythm within the work. Brown’s work is often described as slippery, and that quality—Anabel’s ability to “slip in and out of it”—speaks to her sensation, in which, by modulating her effort and engagement, she can embody the movement in its purest form.

Anabel continues, talking about how she now conceives of movement at the end of her third year:

I’m definitely looking at movement differently. Instead of looking at it shape-oriented, I’m looking at it more anatomically and seeing, I guess, how the movement is moving me. I’m not moving it. Abby always talks about—[feeling as] if you had open pores and things were just streaming out of you. …Whatever the movement is, I can just place my body on top of that and let it do its world, or purpose. I think that’s how I’m looking at movement now, which has really changed. It becomes a lot clearer and I move a lot simpler than [I have] in the past. Another thing that Abby’s worked [on] a lot with us, is just talking, like having conversations, being really nonchalant about moving and just moving—just approaching movement not getting tense and thinking ‘okay now I’m ready to dance.’ You get there and you just do it—especially in Ming’s class, there’s a lot of balancing warm-up exercises where I literally just have conversations in my head and it will totally let me forget about the movement and I have such better balance and more control of my weight distribution and use of energy. We also did that [dance while having conversations] in partners with Set and Reset and that was really eye-opening, because I was having a conversation with Sydney. The movement wasn’t really embodied yet. We [had] just learned the material, but I just kept on moving with that rhythm—whether or not I was doing the [correct] movement or not. I could just keep on moving having that kind of slosh—not even the foot pattern but how your foot approaches the floor. That kind of touch. [I thought] ‘Oh, that’s what Abby’s been talking about; that’s what she demonstrates all the time.
Anabel’s understanding of the movement is somewhat convoluted in this passage, because what seems to have happened on first read sounds like a cliché (the movement moving me) and then a contradiction to the argument that danced knowledge requires a heightened attention to the moment. But when I read what Anabel says, in light of observing the changes in her dancing, I see it as indicative of a process of absorption into the physicality of dancing. As Sydney’s journal entry articulates, for these dancers not thinking while dancing can be a result of having thought previously: “In performances, overall, I tend to know the phrases because of practice, time, time spent questioning[;] knowing the phrase allows you not to think. But you have thought. So now you can do.”

Like Sydney, Anabel believes she can let go because she has thought. That thinking has become integrated into her embodied experience to a point where she understands the material as a state of being and pattern of doing that she can, at once, allow to consume her and let her personal identity extrude through. Indeed, even in this highly specific and detailed work, Anabel’s focus has shifted to the quality, the “slosh,” enabling her to avoid the over-thinking about a myriad of details—but, given her years of practice and development of attention to those details, she is able to do both. Perhaps because the Brown technique is both release and weight-based, while specific in shape and space, it features prominently in these dancers’ descriptions of figuring something out both through sensation and patience.

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37 Sydney, journal response to the prompt “Describe a phrase or improvisation where you felt like you really knew the material” emphasis added.
When Movement Clicks

Sometimes after months of hearing and seeing movement values a dancer will experience a sudden sensation—a physical breakthrough where ideas are embodied. Margaret frequently references the volume of challenge held within dance but when prompted, describes her learning in technique class in terms of epiphanies. In this first passage, I have asked her to describe a moment of knowing in a dance technique class. She describes an instance during the first quarter of her freshman year of school, when taking a class by Ming-Lung Yang, also a former dancer with the Trisha Brown Company whose background in Chinese Opera informs his current choreographic work.

It took me so long [to understand the movement] and I [still] don’t really have it. But I know I had this epiphany—at the very, almost last day of class. [the movement] starts like [she shows the opening shape, a spiraled lunge with the arms in a cradling form that slowly shifts, sending the dancer off balance and softly falling forward.] Ming looked at me and [said] ‘Margaret, you did it. That’s it, that’s the feeling!’ And I was like, ‘I feel like I was drooling’ and he said ‘Yes! That’s it.’ It took me all quarter to understand what he was saying about tension and holding all this tension in my shoulders and my face. Yeah, it was such a long process. I just couldn’t understand it. A lot of us couldn’t. But through watching him, I could see it. But I couldn’t embody it. I understood it here [she points to her head] I knew what I was supposed to be doing, but—

Her voice trails off, but eager to hear more, I ask: “In that epiphany moment, you felt like you were drooling. What else do you remember about it?”

She pauses, then states with confidence,

The timing of my breath. I realized, ‘Wow, he’s right when he talks about breathing and how it can inform movement.’ I don’t know. I just remember leaving: I felt so accomplished that day. And I kept doing the phrase in my room. I was just really excited. I don’t know how else it felt in my body. It just clicked at that moment.

38 Margaret, September interview
There is a pleasure in connecting sensation and the directives of the class, or an
image. The movement is validated by her own experiences, she realizes “he’s right” now
that she can feel it. When I ask her “How do you know in your body when something is
right?” She responds:

For me, it’s when what I’m doing feels organic. And I’m not thinking about it as
much. I’ll start doing it in my own zone. When I feel my body and my weight
leading me—I don’t realize at the time, but afterwards I think, ‘Okay, I think that
felt good.’ When I’m really tense, or when I’m thinking about other things—or
thinking about performing it—that’s when the movement doesn’t feel right. Too
much cognitive action! [She starts to laugh and then changes the topic.]

Margaret looks back on her epiphany as key to her trajectory as a dancer. That a
sensation as mundane and specific as drooling could be experienced by her entire body,
metaphorically, provided her with a launching point to consider learning how to dance
from a qualitative perspective. Her achievement came in the context, and within the time
span, of a quarter of not really understanding the essence of the teacher’s style but not
only did her breakthrough moment enable that situated understanding but it reinforced the
idea that learning in technique class happens over times marked by both frustration and
integration. As Carrie said, also referencing her freshman year:

My freshman year was rough just because I felt like I was bad at everything,
because everything was new. You know, I’d done the same things with the same
teachers for years—but luckily I guess it was a challenge. [Now,] I enjoy the
beginning of every quarter. I look forward to having a new teacher, to, I guess,
watch myself improve.39

In some ways, what these dancers express is the idea of “trusting the process” (cf.
McNiff, 1998), or the sense that fully investing in the sensory moments of dancing will

39 Carrie, September interview
over time beget a creative product. This notion, in terms of “allowing” in improvisational practice, is further addressed in the next chapter.

**The Conflict of Thinking versus Sensing**

Margaret speaks to the phenomenon noted by many dance students, that something becomes “organic” as the thinking lessens. While the term organic is contested among many, for Margaret, the process of going into her physical sensations involves following her weight, getting into a “zone” and reflecting on it later. Indeed, the tension of pulling away from weight, whether due to a wandering mind or a mind overly analytic of the task at hand, inhibits the movement. Like the boxers Wacquant describes, dancers often talk about getting “out of my head” or “into my body” as requisite for optimal performance. “Thinking too much” is blamed for poor performance, and dancers talk about knowing material so well that “you don’t even have to think about it,” then moments later, suggesting that “you have to be thinking all the time.” This conflict seems to have to do with turning off something akin to Freud’s “superego,” the little voice telling you that your knee isn’t bent enough, or your weight isn’t dropped, or that you are behind the music. This sort of commentary on dancing often impedes dancing. Yet dancing requires a high degree of concentration: visualizing the skeleton, processing the music, seeing the room, reminding yourself of technical details or thematic ideas. Most importantly, dancing requires an awareness of self and others, and the physical prowess to bend at the knee, drop one’s weight, and use one’s arms efficiently. Like Anabel, Margaret’s moment of realization also involved the demonstrative body of the teacher who functions both as an exemplar and mediator of movement in that moment, and
serves as a model of a careered dance artist. As Sydney describes, “I tend to have physical desires, I don’t tend to think, it happens before I know it’s happening…suddenly I’m in the space and I don’t know how I got there or why.”

Josephine, describing the evaluative voice that can pull her out of the moment, states:

Sometimes I find myself very aware of how I look—which is something that everyone struggles with. I mean, when you are dancing improvisationally you are not supposed to care at all what it looks like and I, to a certain extent I feel like [that] most of the time I’m there. But sometimes I'm still like, “Oh, I probably look stupid.”

Achievement is Contingent on Effort, not Mastery

Achievement in the dance studio always has a lively physical dimension that operates in relation to the cognitive action of the mind. Whether “drooling,” “sloshing,” or, as in the next example, “pouring sweat,” developing danced knowledge in dance is by no means a neat and tidy process. Asked to describe a good moment in technique class in her autumn interview, Sydney responds by describing the fast, precise, rhythmic class of Susan Hadley, a full professor in the department.

I have a very clear, good full-bodied [example]. Susan Hadley’s class, Studio 3. Michael [the accompanist and music director] was playing. We had three musicians: Dorian was there; someone else was on piano; lots was going on. And you know Susan Hadley, her personality: she fills the room. We were doing a combination that had thrown arms and thrown limbs. Then a tight turn. It just felt—it felt like I was dancing. It felt like I was moving and… [She pauses then begins to rapidly describe the experience] It was exciting while I was doing it. We did it right, left, right, left. And she had us do it again and I couldn’t wait to do it again. And you could feel the energy in the room. Everyone was great. It was fun. It was a day where it was so hot and sweaty and everyone was pouring sweat, but that really made me feel like I was doing something. It felt really good; it just felt natural, to go back to that word. It felt natural. I mean, I messed up a lot; I guess that’s interesting. I messed up a lot. Hadley was telling me—we were talking about how Reese and I always stare at ourselves in the mirror. I was saying that it’s not that I’m staring at myself, it’s that I’m insecure and I feel like I’m doing the wrong

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40 Sydney, May interview
41 Josephine, June interview
thing. So I always look to make sure that I’m doing the right thing. Even if, I know I know it, I need to check. That’s just me; that’s just in my personality. She was like, ‘Okay, we need to break that!’ So, this was one day where I was consciously trying not to watch other people—I was just doing it, I was going to feel it, I was going to do it. So I messed up a lot; I kicked the wrong leg like, eight times; I kept repeating the same side. But it felt okay, to be doing that.\footnote{Sydney, September interview}

In the moment, the high level of physical exertion creates a learning experience wherein the achievement is the effort; it is the sense of striving, working, and endeavoring, more that an effort to take the “right” steps. It is the sensation that facilitates the learning. This is not to say that dancers do not need to learn exactness in rhythm, shape, space, or weight. The point is that do be able to do these things well, dancers must learn to take risks—and learn to “feel it.” An unstable knowledge facilitates those sensations and risk taking. This engagement, a departure from Sydney’s normal movement patterns and her personality nevertheless becomes remembered as “natural”—a word she had questioned earlier in the interview. This example gives a glimpse of the sensuous intoxication of the dance studio—live music, a hot studio, a strong teacher—but above all, a value placed on the challenge of physical effort.

Like Sydney, others recall moments of “really knowing” that involve a fluid relationship between the material, the sequence, and other elements prescribed in a given context. Reese, who is a powerful mover, describes dropping into the class of a teacher whose Horton-influenced style tends toward big, punctuated movements that fly through space. For Reese, the movement style so suited her aptitudes that despite it being learned material, she recognized her own identity within it. Like Anabel’s sense of herself
radiating through the Trisha Brown material, Reese found that she could enact the phrase, doing, not mimicking.

I took Maria Glimcher’s class one day this quarter & even though I was coming into the second day of a combo and didn’t really know the sequence at all, I felt like I really knew it—I felt like I was being myself to the fullest and in this context it worked. It was okay. Even though it was somebody else’s phrase, I wasn’t mimicking at all. It all felt so perfect. If I could do that forever I’d be happy.43

**To Continue to Know, One Must Stay Curious**

As I heard more and more about significant moments in these dancers’ lives, I became curious about how these moments functioned. Despite spending much of the last few years thinking about knowledge and formulating thoughtful questions, I often found myself as the interviewer struggling to formulate questions for the participants about movement experiences that I could relate to but had difficulty translating myself. My curiosity would, at times, be stymied by an absence of words. Not wanting to ask leading questions, I sometimes stumbled into sloppy language. Nevertheless, the participants often took off with my queries. Rather than taking them at face value and composing direct responses, they often led into various other directions.

In a conversation with Mary, Margaret, and Josephine at the end of Fall Quarter, which revolved around experiences in classes, I asked: “Can you describe a success this quarter, a physical experience that was like, really really real, or something?” Mary responds:

I had [some] really great days in Abby’s class this quarter. We did this whole combination on one leg—this whole swingy, *rond de jambe* combination. I could just keep coming back to the same spot. I was boinging all over the place and I just kept

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43 Reese, journal response to the prompt “Describe a phrase or improvisation where you felt like you really knew the material”
coming back to a spot. Back to it. Of course, we did the combination like twelve times and by the end of it, it was all over the place again! But there have been some times when I’ve really found something and once I’ve really found something, I can—I can investigate, how. And how to get back there.

Mary’s knowledge is not static. Instead, her “really real” moment is the ability to have a tremendous sensation and, despite losing it, know that she can “get back there.”

Beyond such fleeting victories, her overall realization about learning is expressed in terms of question-asking. She quickly continues to explain:

[Another] success this quarter was that I got kind of frustrated that I couldn’t ask myself any questions. We’d be looking at a picture of a pelvis and I’d [think], I don’t have any questions; none of this intrigues me; none of this seems mysterious to me right now….That was really frustrating because I know I have questions. One big success was when I [realized], ‘Oh my gosh; Oh my gosh—I want to know all of this stuff!’ I was sort of overwhelmed by it.”

Caring and working are intertwined. Throughout technique classes and rehearsals, students must invest with full-bodied engagement to reap the rewards. The curiosity Mary alludes to speaks to the vastness of knowledge and its fundamental instability. This requires that dancers push themselves into risky territory. Josephine describes this as her need to make a “conscious decision not to dance in my comfort zone. I'm going to go dance by myself improvisationally … putting myself out there [getting past nervousness, even though] I know I shouldn’t be nervous.” From the messiness in the studio to the measured reflection in interviews, what these dancers articulate is a willingness to discover knowledge through sensation and to construct that knowledge through dialogue, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

The more you know, the more is required of you. That is axiomatic for life and for dance and the students in this study demonstrated that they recognize that. They
understand themselves as dancers and as individuals in terms of how they engage with the material of dancing—with their bodies and with sequences of historic, brand new, or yet-to-be-imagined movements. The desire that permeates the dance classroom—from Mary’s “Oh my gosh—I want to know all of this stuff!” to Anabel’s “practicing not doing”—is mediated by sensorial experiences within the context of a life as a dancer and these fit into the many narratives of experience the students co-construct and within which they situate themselves. As this chapter demonstrates, this knowledge begins with physical sensations. In the ensuing chapters, I will explore how the knowledge is co-created through dialogues, mediated by pain, and enabled through connections among dancers and between the dancers and the discipline.
Interstitial 1

Stepping into the Studio

In the graduate student shared office—where MFA and PhD students change clothes, store things, and occasionally meet with their own students, I see Laurie; her shoulder-length curly hair looks full and reminds me that three weeks ago I’d promised to cut it. We have developed a fantastic pattern where we trade my cutting her hair for her giving me a bodywork session. Thinking more about that arrangement than the effect of my words I say, “You need a haircut.” This is clearly not the right time or place for she sarcastically snaps, “Thanks,” and I realize that I have just criticized her appearance before even saying hello. As she brushes by me, I notice that the clock says 9:25 and realize that she must be leaving for Tai Chi, a 9:30-10:15 class, meaning that I still have a free hour before 10:30 technique class.

For a moment, I linger with the interaction. Laurie and I have been close friends for over 10 years, since our freshman year in college in another dance department—frankly it feels like another lifetime. She and I are both approaching 30, still single, and decidedly upset with school. Mornings like this, we interact like family; I’m quick to pick at her the way I pick at my mom. Thinking back on the interaction, I probably noticed her hair because it was down. Usually I see her in class or rehearsal, with hair pulled back. Maybe she’d styled her hair in an effort to “look normal”—which for us means not looking like a dancer. Maybe I shot down her effort to get up and face the
day. Maybe I’m making too big a deal of an insignificant interaction. When we talk later and I mention this fieldnote, she assures me that she isn’t upset—that she is just not feeling very attractive these days and that comments on her appearance don’t help. She also says, “I’m sure you can relate,” and although that comment stings a bit, it’s only because I can: for weeks now I’ve come to school with my hair yanked back out of my face, ready for class, and wearing no makeup. This is no political statement; I’m pro-makeup. I just can’t garner the energy to make the effort.

I change from jeans and a brown sweater into a blue sports top, a pink long-sleeve shirt, two pairs of dance pants—a short pair over a long pair, for warmth—and, because I have a cold, a pink scarf. Too early for technique class, I stop by the computer lab, which turns out to be a good thing as I realize I’d forgotten to do several GA tasks over a weekend full of rehearsals and paper-writing. I hurriedly update a wiki page and download some examples from the database that I’ve been maintaining for my job, then after swallowing two bright orange DayQuil gel caps I go upstairs to Studio One, the largest of the studios.

I’m trying to grow out my hair and it’s in a stage where it cannot really be pulled back, but I try. Today three barrettes have secured it into a makeshift French-twist. Still suffering from congestion, when Abby, the professor, calls my name in the roll, my froggy “I’b here” makes everyone laugh for a moment. Having stayed home coughing, I missed class last Friday and I hope that either someone told her that, or that she can tell from my current state. I take the class for an independent study and have to miss every Wednesday for a meeting regarding my graduate assistantship. It’s actually a bit of a
sore spot as I hate inconsistency, but anyway, today I’m glad to be in class and hope that being sick won’t curb my dancing.

Before the roll call I see Laurie in the room. She usually takes a different class, so I sit by her to ask why she’s here today. Her foot is still bothering her and I ask if it is still the same pain from last quarter, involving the swelling of two metatarsal bones that led her to wear a large black boot that used air pressure to alleviate the impact of walking. She says that it never really got better and follows with something about “making stupid choices.” I’m not sure what she’s referring to. She’s dancing a lot right now, but not an absurd amount. I wonder if it is the piece that she’s in that includes Chinese opera acrobatics. Then she says, “and teaching,” and I realize that for her assistantship, she’s teaching beginner level ballet and jazz classes in the non-major, elective class program, which means demonstrating over and over again. Beginners must mimic. She doesn’t seem to want to talk, but I’m worried about her and also selfishly worried because I just sent her an email about dancing in a project I’m starting and I fear that she’ll not be able to dance for me. I mention the email and tell her that if she can’t do it, I understand. She assures me that she wants to do it. I’m relieved.

I go over to the windowsill, drink a little more hot water and set my travel mug down, glancing for a moment at the passers-by in the courtyard between the dance building and the Wexner Center. I join the sixteen dancers in the room as we all spread out on the floor, sitting or lying and stretching.

Abby asks us to find partners, and Laurie looks at me saying, “I don’t care if I get sick”; I take this as an olive branch. Abby sets the goal as finding opening in our hearts,
and soon I’m lying on my stomach with my face turned to one side. My scarf is pressing slightly into my throat and my silly faux amber and gold costume jewelry earring is uncomfortable. I always forget to take off heavy earrings. I can feel the weight of my body on the floor and the slight labor it takes to breathe with a cold. Abby instructs the partners to lie atop the supine, and soon Laurie’s stomach is on my back, legs on my legs, arms on my arms and her head is nuzzled into my shoulder. The intensity of the pressure on my ribcage causes me to tense the muscles in my torso but I remind myself to give into rather than resist the compression and the sensation turns from discomfort to heat.

We breathe together and I notice how particular the warm spot is between the bottom tips of my shoulder blades; one spot is just hot—not burning, but hot. I think for a moment about the inevitable role reversal; even though we are the same height, I surely weigh 20 pounds more than Laurie. But that, too, I let go and return to the sensation. Abby is talking about the heart and I’m not sure whether this “exercise” is to target the heartspace of the dancer on the floor, or the dancer above—both, I imagine.

Trading roles, I now lie on top of Laurie. It’s impossible for me not to reflect on the oddity of the situation: I imagine that this is the only spot on campus where bodies are contacting in such a non-sexual and non-medical way. What strikes me in reflection is how much intelligence the body has in weight and breath. The weighted, released body reacts to the inhales and exhales of the subsumed body, knowing how to distribute and react. It’s reassuring to be laid upon and it’s reassuring to rest on someone. The body knows how to negotiate, how to breathe under compression, how to release into someone else, and how to attune to a breath pattern.
After a slow arm and torso stretch on the floor, we assemble in a circle for some Qi Gong. A new norm in contemporary dance, somatic practices like Tai Chi and Yoga have made their way into the technique studio since the influence of Eastern movement and meditation forms on artists in the sixties. This exercise starts with pounding the right arm against the left pectoralis, the large muscle just above the breast. Twenty-one times we strike in a downward diagonal, aiming to hit as hard as we can. Having done this regularly now for a year and a half, I find the thud of my fist against my chest to be one of the most distressingly pleasant sensations. The impact ripples through the body and the sound seems to stay near my skin as it travels to my ears. The pounding continues through various body parts, including the back of the neck, which can feel like it’s shaking my brain. Sometimes in this series I lose my sense of place and being, escaping to a meditative place, sometimes I’m fully present, and other times I telescope out from the situation, wondering what good or harm I’m doing to myself.

The series ends with the legs about shoulder-width apart, the knees and ankles loose, and we shake, moving up and down about six inches, repeatedly and vigorously. I decide to go to the bathroom to cough and sneeze, and so I jog out of the room. When I get back, the shaking is in full force and I see Abby showing a dancer with larger breasts to cross her arms over her chest to ease the strain. As I begin shaking, not wearing a very supportive top, I notice discomfort in my breasts. Clearly not in a meditative state, I begin thinking about how sad it would be if my breasts start to sag from Qi Gong exercises, thinking to myself that I’d much rather they sag from having a baby and nursing. Noticing myself way off track, I snap back into the exercise by imaging the
color white filling my brain. This takes me to a more concentrated state and Abby comes by and lays her hands on my feet. Imagining white in my head and feeling her pressure on my feet, I start to feel like I am fusing to the floor. Grounded.

The class progresses and both my head cold and the fact that I’ve missed the last two classes remain palpable. I feel like a wreck, not knowing what comes next in combinations and moving slower than I should. One exercise is yoga-like, with slow, sustained, but torqued, dancerly movement. I oscillate between feeling in and out of control as I tilt over one leg, sending the other towards the ceiling and wrapping my torso around my standing leg. I teeter, trying to swing up to a balance; the aim is for the arms to counterbalance the body, returning it to plumb. But the aim is not the act. Instead, I struggle to get upright, wiggling my heel as I try to balance—gripping every muscle that might help in a class where the point is to move efficiently by engaging only necessary muscles.

The release-based technique of this class is a slow, thoughtful process of repatterning and relearning movement vocabulary. There’s little modernist class structure: we don’t jump or move across the floor, but rather do slow warm-up movement sequences, then phrase material. Twenty-minutes before the end of the class, Abby begins the combination. She doesn’t even review the steps; we begin dancing immediately. I’m frustrated and angry; I’ve missed two classes, and I don’t know the steps or the phrasing. I stay in back and follow along, feeling sick, and disinterested in dancing badly. The message in my head is: “What’s the point of coming to this class if I
don’t know what’s going on?” After a few go-throughs, Abby talks and demonstrates the
details of the phrasing.

A “J” pathway, falling the weight backwards, a low leap sideways then arrest and
redirect.

I pick up the steps, knowing that I’m missing the details. After a few more
iterations, I start to feel some of the weight and phrasing: I know when I’m falling and
when to sustain. I feel then like I’m dancing. The rest of the class has felt like following,
but when I’m able to figure out the sequencing and begin to fall into the movement, I’m
glad to be there. Glad to be, as dancers say, “in my body.” The visceral moments—the
sensations of balancing effort and release, knocking myself off balance by slicing my arm
or staying in a lunge by letting my bones hold me—provide a subtle reward.
Objectively—no, actually, completely subjectively—the class felt terrible. Even by the
end, I feel like a crappy dancer: my injured hip, still a year prior to the point when I will
decide to have surgery, feels unsteady; the impossibility of graduate school disallows
requisite sleep, stretching, or balanced meals; attending class irregularly, I feel like I’m
not improving; the movement style isn’t one I gravitate towards. Nonetheless, in the
frame of a morning, the single capsule of “really dancing” was worth the many moments
of frustration.
Chapter 5

Dialogical Constructions of Danced Knowledge

In improv, if I am in the moment, [I am] aware of what I’m doing and sticking to my impulse. Believing them with definite decisions. Then I know what I am doing even if I do not know what I will be doing next.

–Sydney

The dancers in this study construct danced knowledge through dialogue. They come to know by noticing and discussing physical and conceptual details. Dance improvisation trains dancers to continuously develop new understandings and to engage in a dialogical process of generating this fluid knowledge. Shapiro (1998) alludes to the liminal space of knowledge that develops via attention to moments but extends beyond such moments:

The appearance of what we see and accept as knowledge is only half the language. To think, feel, or remember goes beyond surface descriptions. Embedded within perceptions and interpretations are personal experiences understood through a hegemonic consciousness that suspends us in the contradictions between a dominant and a resistant consciousness. From this space between domination and resistance is where meaning is found, securing the lived body as the material that holds both. (p. 32-33)

More simply put, Shapiro’s claim is that understandings come via bodily negotiations that occur within social structures. Theories of dialogue provide a framework for understanding the development of danced knowledge. Although the practice is kinesthetic, communication in the studio has a strong verbal dimension (Fournier, 2003) and audience reception is primarily visual (Feck, 2002), likewise
choreographers often describe “stepping back” from the work to assess it as a visual composition. The learning process is multimodal, and conversation is a key means of developing understandings. As a dancer, I know that we talk about what we do. We ask questions. We articulate movement qualities and images. We use words to describe what we have seen and to suggest something different. We use language to process our experiences. We verbalize emotional resonance. We complain.

But dialogue in dance is not limited to speaking and listening. We often do not talk. We understand meaning through kinesthesia. We communicate by sharing weight, eye contact, rhythms, and movements. We do not feel like we “really know” a fellow dancer until we have danced together. We watch each other. We cradle each other’s heads, gently care-giving, providing physical support. Yet physical dialogues are understood conceptually through formal and informal reflection in dancer conversations.

**Developing Awareness through Improvisation**

Sitting on the couches, the day before the winter break begins, Mamie, Claire, Reese, Sydney, Jillian, Mae and I discuss what it means to learn and grow as a dancer. Mamie begins this excerpt by responding to my question about her changes as a dancer.\(^4^4\)

“I think a confidence has come. I’m aware of the choices I’m making. In improv. especially, I realize I can make these choices rather than letting things happen. I’ve noticed that most partnering with people in improvisation. Usually I’m like—see what happens [Mamie begins to slosh her ribs side to side, letting her head bobble atop a wishy-washy torso, and continues] But [now] I can actually be the one moving the

\(^{44}\) December group interview.
person, rather than just sharing weight and seeing where that goes—which is usually to
the floor.”

She starts to laugh, as do the other dancers sitting in the circle. Mamie finishes
describing her recent realization, saying, “But I’m like, ‘Oh I have hands!

She reaches forward, holds and twists an imaginary partner while saying, “I can
turn this person around and push them through the space.”

Demonstrating this recognition of her own agency, Mamie illustrates the
multimodal quality of danced knowledge. She first learned physically to yield her
weight, softening into partnering, but now she realizes that she can also exert force.
Conceptually, she ties these knowings to a personal quality, confidence, and to her
cognitive processing in her awareness and recognition of this shift (See Figure 3.1 for an
example of confident, spontaneous partnering). In this very brief narrative, the question
of agency in dance improvisation emerges. The learning process—physical, personal,
and intellectual integration—and how it coheres within the social is evident: she goes on
to point to the “trap” of unsuccessful improvisations ending up in what these students
describe as “noodling on the floor.” In this chapter, I consider the role that dialogues,
both inter and intra personal play in the development of danced knowledge. As the
dancers notice and discuss their physical experiences, they go beyond the step of
developing knowledge through sensation, as discussed in Chapter 4, and they proceed to
coop-construct definitions by negotiating their dance experiences with one another and
within a structured educational system.
Definitions of Dialogue

Dialogue as a concept merits defining, given the multiple usages in common parlance as well as in academic discourse. In *Rethinking language, mind, and world dialogically*, linguist and communication scholar Per Linell (2009) points to three usages of the term “dialogue.” The first is the most common usage, observable sociodialogue, “a direct interactive encounter” (p. 4). This can be understood by extension to include mediated communication forms, even message boards where conversations are asynchronous, separated by both time and space (c.f. Amhag & Jakobsson 2009). The second definition that Linell presents is an idealized conceptualization, typified by calls for “true dialogue,” conceiving of dialogue not simply as interaction, but interaction with “a high degree of mutual empathy” (p. 5). Thirdly, Linell points to an abstract sense of the term, expanding it to “any kind of human sense-making, semiotic practice, action, interaction, thinking, or communication, as long as these phenomena are ‘dialogically’ (or dialogistically’) understood” (p. 5). Linell defines dialogical as: “meaning-making activities that are mediated in and through language, words, signs, symbols, or concepts; it is not just (semiotically unmediated) behavior or practical action” and he presents semiotic mediation as key, in combination with “other-orientedness, interaction, and context-interdependence” (p. 4).

A Site of Meaning-rich Interactions

Dance improvisation is a complex and varied act itself, one composed of a multitude of acts, and is a context-rich practice. Art is made—so Howard Becker (1982), a prominent sociologist of the Chicago School, argues—not in isolation, but amidst a web
of individuals, institutions, and practices. Becker’s theory of artistic production suggests that art-making includes the actions of the artists as well as the practices and systems that surround that process. While his discussion of conventions in *Art worlds* focuses on audience perception and reception, his ideas about the social conventions of viewership and production extend to learning within the discipline as well. He suggests that conventions “allow people who have little or no formal acquaintance with or training in the art to participate as audience members” (p. 46). For instance, because our culture still expects the enforcement of traditional gender roles, seeing what Sally Banes (1998) calls the “marriage plot” in ballets (and in popular dance shows like *So you think you can dance*), makes the work readable to general audiences. Because dance training in college differs a great deal from the types of training available to high school students and youth, when they are first in the college dance studio, these students approach it much like an untrained audience member does. Most dancers here have danced at private dance studios, some at school, but few students arrive at Ohio State from performing arts high schools where dance is given the same curricular value as other studies. Furthermore, most students—even those from arts high schools—have only minimal exposure to postmodern dance and improvisation. These students, on arrival, are indoctrinated into the conventions of collegiate dance and, as Becker writes of audiences, they “learn unfamiliar conventions by experiencing them, by interacting with the work and, frequently, with other people in relation to the work” (p. 64). These dialogical experiences often involve renegotiating and amending prior conventions, but some
resistance is not unusual. In the following comment, Margaret again refers to Yang’s technique class:

Starting off [college] with Ming was so shocking. My roommate was a dance major; she’s not anymore. We came back from the first day of class like, ‘What is this? We can’t do this. This is dancing? What?’…apparently there’s this thing called releasing. Although maybe in my high school years we would mix elements of that without realizing it, [dance] was about tricks and extensions and turns, multiple turns.45

Margaret’s notion of skill in dance and even her notion of what constituted dance was disrupted on arrival to college. She came to deeply invest in the values she questioned on the first day but it was, as Becker argues, because she came to understand the conventions of the discipline that her engagement with it deepened. I argue that this understanding develops in part, through dialogue.

**Learning in Dialogue with a Discipline**

The practice of dance includes multiple linguistic and symbolic negotiations—thinking, talking, writing, diagramming—but these are phenomena that are most obvious when they surround the act of dancing. As discussed in the previous chapter, they also appear within the act itself, arising in the conflict between thinking about dancing while dancing, versus being fully present and physically invested.

Dils and Crosby (2001) identify dialogue in a way that also provides a useful frame for the discussion of improvisation by drawing on the multiplicities of encounters within each interchange: “The dialogical process is…a socially and culturally based web of negotiation that occurs in person-to-person dialogue. Even if this is a fiction; most dialogues are actually polylogues, influenced by several people and agendas” (p. 65).

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45 Margaret, September interview
What these authors identify are the instantaneous dialogues (words that can be transcribed or movements that could be notated) and the transcendent dialogues (the dialogues of lineage, culture, and philosophy that reside within our experiences and practices). In this conceptualization, dialogues contain not only the polyphony of culture, experience, education, and emotional state, but also the residue of prior action. When we talk after dancing, our dancing reverberates; when we dance after talking our words resonate. In the studio, there is a constant interplay between the physical and the verbal. The next section of this chapter focuses on conversations about improvisation as a way to unpack layers of danced knowledge.

**Improvisation in Dance Training**

Dance improvisation, a foundation of contemporary dance making (Lavender & Predock-Linnell, 2001; Carter, 2000) and therefore a critical competency for young dancers, is both a genre unto itself and an element of the creative process of many choreographers. Varied as they are, improvisational practices train dancers to achieve a state of physical responsiveness that enables both risk-taking and vulnerability—two vital components of performance skill. Ranging from compositional methodologies such as William Forsythe’s systematic Improvisational Technologies (Forsythe, 1999), the inner drive approach of Ohad Naharin’s Gaga dance language (Friedes, 2009), or Bebe Miller’s intuitive, situation-based work (Kloppenberg, in press) to practices wherein the process is the product like Contact Improvisation or Authentic Movement, dance improvisation requires a distinctly destabilizing dance intelligence. The students in the initial course that prompted the creation of the Performance Improvisation Ensemble studied
improvisation as a way to make dances in real time—in other words, to choreograph dances in the moment. However, in the course that I observed as part of this study, the students experimented with various forms of improvisation, including Forsythe’s Improvisational Technologies, Contact Improvisation, and the practices of noted dance improviser, Simone Forti. They developed an improvisatory engagement with the unknown through the known, which I argue is itself a fundamentally dialogical way of knowing in and of the body that requires oscillations between physical, cognitive, and affective awarenesses. As Mary states: “I want to use what I know and find out what I don’t know, in it [improvisation].”

Dance scholar Ann Cooper Albright (2003), positions improvisation as a dance form in which the training it relies upon is not easily observable:

Generally speaking, improvisation is a misunderstood phenomenon, especially within the dance world. Figured as the opposite of choreography, improvisation is often seen as free, spontaneous, nontechnical, wild, or childlike, as if one can simply erase years of physical and aesthetic training to become a blank slate onto which one’s imagination can project anything. Of course, as seasoned improvisers know, improvisation requires training to open the body to new awareness and sensations, and the imagination to new narrative possibilities. Most improvisational training works to release the body from habitual responses, whetting one’s curiosity about ‘what if’s.’ Improvisation often crafts an awareness of aesthetic priorities, compositional strategies, and physical experiences that may, at first, be less visible or less easily discernible. (p. 261)

Discussing improvisation fosters a conceptualization of dance knowledge that is fluid but ultimately generative. To illustrate the discursive practices that support dance learning via opening the body and imagination, I continue the conversation from earlier in the chapter. Here, Mamie, Claire, Mae, Sydney, Jillian, and Reese articulate three elements of improvisation, that one must: 1) allow things to happen, 2) make choices, and

46 Mary, May interview
3) take responsibility. These components, and more importantly the way that the students’ conversation develops, demonstrate how the students dialogically negotiate their physical experiences in relation to a developing conceptualization of dance.

The Relationship between Challenge and Desire

A few minutes later into the conversation, after the passage that opens this chapter, Mamie speaks about recently finding her own “point-of-view” and opinions on dance, noting that she dislikes some improvisations and choreographed works these days whereas she used to “like every single dance I saw…Realizing that I do have an opinion has helped [me] define myself.” I follow this up, by asking her to explain, and she speaks of noticing how, in this course in particular, sometimes she felt like the group’s improvisations, “weren’t true, and I felt like a lot of the time we were doing them because we had to.” She goes on to say that this conflicts with her definition of improvisation.

When asked to elaborate, she responds:

“I knew in myself I shouldn’t have done something, but did it because it was an assignment or maybe—I didn’t have a passion for it or a need for it. I just did it because I had to. So for me that’s completely against improv—I think you need to want to do it and think it’s contributing and think it’s helping you grow and helping everyone else grow. A challenge, but a good challenge.”

This relationship between work and desire Carries through all of the student interviews and journals. They want a “good challenge” and one to which they can give themselves fully. The students, as well as the faculty members and graduate student choreographers in the department frequently talk about the elements of risk and
challenge, which promote an ethos of both seeking out and coping with difficulties.

Mamie begins to articulate that a “good challenge” is not a situation that just exists but is a situation that is created by the authenticity of the participants. As the following quote by Annie, who made *Indelible Marks* through an improvisatory process exemplifies, the challenge lies in the complication of the intensely personal nature of dancing and the requirement that dancers give forth their “whole selves” to the process.

I’m driven by the challenges that [dance] presents me with and I think it’s a really, really complicated thing. … It is intensely personal…As dancers, teachers, researchers, we all have to bring our whole selves to the table every day for rehearsal.47

For the students, there is an excitement in the complex charge that the quote presents. Hard work is fun; challenge begets rewards. The following two quotes reference the challenges students encounter in different technique and choreography classes. They highlight the idea that difficulties, even personal “flaws,” provide the possibility of improvement and achievement.

[My technique class is] really busy and hectic. And you immediately see your flaws. **Immediately**. You need to instantaneously make those corrections…It’s immediate access. Instead of feeling [taking the time to sense and implement], making those corrections. So it’s a totally different way of dancing and taking a class. It’s really fun, and it’s a lot of hard work. It’s going to be a really tough class. You get those rewards faster, because you’re working on things right away.48

I’m excited about my composition class. It’s challenging and I like that. I like [the professor’s] critiques and I like that she really states her mind. It’ll definitely be a challenge.49

47 Autumn in-studio conversation
48 Anabel, June interview
49 Margaret, September interview
You Can’t Force a Moment

Mamie’s assertion that “you need to want to do it and think it’s contributing” (her expressed belief that improvisation runs on necessity, and therefore, gratuitous dancing is contradictory) is key to the discussion that unfolds. Sydney returns to this tenet of improvisation in a later interview while talking about her own movement tendencies and how she approaches scores with movement rules:

I default to walking. Personally, when I don’t know what to do I walk and watch. It’s kind of my default way of being in the space. So I’m technically following the score—but how much am I contributing movement wise?\(^{50}\)

Having observed the students in this class as well as in others, the notion of dancing but not contributing does not surprise me, for while the students were respectful, they did not always seem fully engaged. They would all participate, but some days they seemed to be “just getting through class to get through class.”\(^{51}\) This poses an interesting question about movement invention and learning about creative processes because a passer-by would have deemed the students to be dancing beautifully—sweeping through the space, dropping into the floor, quirkily gesturing—whereas, unable to turn off my choreographic eye and knowing the students well, I sometimes found their dancing superfluous, lacking invention and purpose. They would be moving, sweating, and interacting, but something was missing. This “something” I now understand through their discussions as the quality of total engagement in a challenge. In this case, the structure of the course may have contributed to this issue. Due to scheduling issues in the department, the professor had less than half of the usual number of contact hours with the

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\(^{50}\) Sydney, May interview

\(^{51}\) Sydney, May interview

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students and would sometimes try to push the group beyond an average level of performance, perhaps not feeling that she had enough time to wait for breakthroughs. Sitting in the corner of the room, distanced from the process, I noticed that she would employ multiple strategies to get at what she described as the “rigor” of improvisational problem-solving but the students remained, in my view, tentative. A note from my field observations gives evidence of this reaction: “I’m curious about the hesitancy. Is it the dynamics of this class or something about [the students’] age? [The professor] keeps ‘checking-in’ [asking the students how they are doing, etc]—are they unsure about what to do with that?”

Curious about Mamie’s suggestion that they “had to” participate in improvisations, and knowing from my observations that there were only occasionally specific directives about who must dance, I ask: “Are you talking about being a ‘good girl’ and getting up there and doing a score because you have to? Or do you mean individual choices within an improvisation? Or both?”

Mamie quickly responds: “A little bit of both, because, I mean, scores are good, but having a reason to go further with a score…sometimes we’ll have a score and maybe it’s not completely necessary for everyone to be involved in that score, but then I question why everyone had to be a part of it when it didn’t really need it, and it was just unnecessary.”

She looks over to Mae who adds, “I think we all felt that—that sense of untrue. And we had walked away a lot of times, anxious—really, genuinely upset.”

“After class?” I ask.
“After class,” she confirms and then elaborates, “Because I felt like the whole time—I felt like I had to save something that was totally un-savable. And then we would all keep trying to go in and save it. I don’t even know what that means, but, like, make a true moment happen, and it just never did; it was just forced.”

**Shifting Agency to the Process**

Mae’s sense that “trying,” in this case to foster an authenticity or to “make a true moment happen,” highlights another element of the students’ developing understandings of dancing. Throughout the transcripts, they speak of “allowing” things to happen, whether they be moments in improvisation, or improvements in physical technique, or clarity in the creative process. Allowing is not the same thing as waiting; it is often very active (see Figure 3.2). But it opposes forcing, by placing the agency within the process and the web of interconnections, rather than distinctly within the individual. In another group conversation, Margaret talks about feeling apathetic, saying: “it’s just been kind of an ‘off’ quarter for me. I’ve not been questioning it, just rolling with it. … So I’m just banking on, ‘Oh, something will happen,’” to which another student confidently responded, “It will.” On the one hand, these students believe that given time and space, things will change and develop. Yet, as we will see, unlike Margaret who is at this point “rolling with it,” when discussing improvisational practice, the students do not generally equate watching or waiting with hopeful passivity. Allowing requires active belief and practice. This is a shifting of agency, but not an absolution of responsibility; the students still value the work of it, the “good challenge.” As a student said of the group later in the year, after they continued to work together on a self-directed basis, “We are just learning
how to work” (Mary, spring interview). The students negotiate their development in relation to the material—the fleeting moments of performance—and in relation to the spectrum of growth, of their learning in space and time.

What Improvisation is not

The students begin to explicate this idea of “allowing” by pointing to the professor’s tactic of coaching improvisations. She would, at times, urge dancers to enter the space and she would call out movement directions to an improviser. Sydney, whose sense of herself as a leader and whose subsequent role in speaking for and guiding the group developed over the course of the study, speaks directly to what others are talking around,

“There would be times when [the professor] would come up and say ‘Okay, you go in’ [or] she would say ‘Jillian, take a solo.’”

As she speaks, Sydney mimics the scenario by placing her hand on Mae’s shoulder and pointing to the center of the room, like a parent encouraging a reticent child to enter a busy playground. Now that this specific reference is clear, the six women all grumble and begin to talk at once.

Mamie summarizes, “That’s so wrong!”

Sydney begins, “I think, to put it in those words” but is interrupted by Reese giving the example, “‘Now go really fast and big.’”

Sydney continues: “Then we followed and you could see us,” she begins to do a robot-like gesture, stiffly moving bent arms and looking over her shoulder behind her, demonstrating a forced, mechanistic body that needs to check in with its surroundings—a
state of being that, by this group’s emerging definition, is antithetical to improvisation. Mimicking her own self-talk and behaviors she says:

“‘Okay, I’ll go in next’—and doing that, I knew I had no conviction about what I was doing—”

“But we tried,” jumps in Reese.

“—and I would try to [do that], but no matter what I did I was like” Sydney continues, moving her arms forward in the space and towards one another, looking at them as if her movements bore even her.

“That was not improv, that was a moment that wasn’t truly improvised because it was planned and assigned, so it wasn’t improv to me” Jillian blurts out, the timbre of her voice revealing the irritation she appears to have felt, as one who had been coached through a process that the students believe needs to be self-generated.

A Dialogical Definition of Improvisation

Reese, a student prone to sweeping but often insightful summarizing comments, looks over to me, and then Jillian and says: “I feel like the definition of improv is empty space with individuals with voices, because that’s what makes things happen. So if someone puts their voice into someone else, it completely spoils the entire thing—[the fact] that she decided for you, it loses its entire deal.”

Here, the definition that Reese provides, “empty space with individuals with voices” and the ensuing refinements of that definition by the group when talking about responsibility, creates a teetering concept of allowing individual expression to resound within the context of a whole. Voice, as defined by Carol Gilligan and other difference
feminists in the 1980s (Gilligan 1982), refers to any expression of ethic. Finding one’s voice has since become a popular axiom, akin to finding one’s path in life. Here, Reese uses the term “voice” to refer to an expression of identity through the body: a voluminous physical articulation—a voice from beyond the throat—that influences and engages in an as-yet-undefined space in a unique manner. This explicates the danced knowledge that improvisational dance fosters, for it comes forth from an individual body in response to a given environment. It exceeds the knowledge we employ when navigating a busy street or crossing a bubbling brook or when thinking through a difficult situation, for it is the enactment of both bodily choices and compositional choices. Moreover, it is compounded by the aims of creative learning. But the learning did not only take place in the moments of elation or frustration but in conversations like these wherein by reflecting upon and referencing shared experiences, the students co-construct definitions and understandings of the form (see Figure 3.3 for an instance of individual “voice” in relation to the improvisation).

While the professor was trying to push the dancers beyond the limitations she saw in them, her actions created a situation that the students read as false—not because they do not want to be pushed, but because they believe that the source of that push is requisitely systemic. Rather than be told to do something or simply follow their whims, they want to operate within a dance sphere that requires their maximum commitment. In effect, these students see the teacher’s role as creating a demanding environment while also allowing students to achieve on their own time. In fact, through their journals,
interviews, and conversations, the students express a desire for experiences that will push them into a risky, vulnerable place:

   to know—to understand—to see—to question—to challenge
   to be open—to change—to love—to write—to desire—
   to need—to fail—to risk—to create—to surprise—
   to live—to share—to breathe—to cry—to smile

How does a type of knowledge production that requires such intensity yet relies on allowing and on internal motivation develop into a craft, especially within the time and space constraints of higher education? Along these lines, as the group begins to complain about being forced to do things they feel uninspired to do, including sometimes even going to classes, Reese looks at me—perhaps reading me as I was at the time of the interviews, in that in-betweenness of graduate student, not student, not faculty—and mollifies:

   “We’re not the type to be like, ‘Academia! They’re telling us what to do!’ But it’s tricky with improv, because for every other aspect of technique classes or academic classes, it would make total sense, and you [are] totally up to following direction and listening specifically to every word they say. If they say ‘301 words in a paper’ you do it. But it’s tricky with improv because you need to have your own inspiration underlying the entire thing—because if you don’t, then there’s nothing. So it’s hard to pretend, particularly with the academic aspect of it. It is a class. But then, realizing that your voice has to matter or else the class wouldn’t exist…” She trails off as the others nod in agreement.

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52 Mamie, journal response to the prompt “what is it like to know in dance?
Within this paradigm of an education that requires active engagement and full-bodied authenticity, these students recognize the sense of responsibility for their learning, but they know the frustration that arises when the elements therein are misaligned. They want complete experiences; they want to take risks; they want to be pushed and challenged, but they also believe that each individual must find those opportunities in her own time.

Claire, who was newer to improvisation, jumps in a few minutes later, returning to the notion of responsibility and allowing a process to unfold, and initiates a discussion about choice-making:

“Sometimes you do need to push yourself, because you are not [always] going to have inspiration; but it’s also giving yourself the breathing room to let things fall into place…[If] the whole group is supposed to be doing this improv score, and sometimes I don’t come in until six minutes into the piece and—I get anxious because I’m like, ‘Alright, you waited a really long time to come in last time’—because I didn’t feel it needed me. [And] ‘This doesn’t need me, [so] why am I going to throw myself in there for no reason?’ And then the next time, it’s like: ‘Well, I waited a really long time [both previous times and] I can’t just sit out,’ and I’d feel kind of anxious and be like ‘When do I go in?’ and I still don’t feel like it needs me, but I need to find some outlet. So it’s hard to find that balance.”

“You also need to be more confident that you always will be contributing something, so don’t—” Reese begins to admonish.
“—you could always start it [an idea],” Mamie agrees. “Sometimes it’s hard to go in if you don’t start the idea.”

“Yeah, anything will be contributing something”

Claire retreats with, “I know, it is—”

But Sydney steps in, this time with an authority of experience: “I think it’s just something that you go through. I know in last year’s class, there were days—I remember specifically, the three of us—” she gestures to Mae and Mamie, “We just stood there.”

“Straight up watched!” Mae laughingly interjects.

“But there was so much going on,” Sydney continues. “But that was allowed to happen in that class, and I feel like some of us haven’t been allowed to have that happen in this class, being forced to go in [to enter an improvisation], but it helped me so much those days when I would leave and I’d be like ‘I did not do anything in the last half hour of that class,’ but I felt like that was okay.

Claire initially gets criticized and recoils slightly, for while the others are being encouraging, they seem to be blaming her for not taking a risk. But referencing the prior year’s class, and validating Claire’s experience, Sydney points to the developmental step of stillness—of waiting and trusting as the others bring up the second and third constitutive elements: choice-making and responsibility to the piece. She arrives at these through reflection. The practice in which they engage differs from practices like Authentic Movement, wherein the emphasis is on internal needs. Here the students are learning to attend to their own states and impulses while attuning to the needs of the group as well as to compositional coherence. Waiting and negotiating entry are both
salient, a form of intent participation, in other words, learning through engaged observation (Rogoff et al. 2003). Sometimes what you need is to \textit{not} do, in order to make that step towards doing. Other times the piece just needs your contribution.

\textbf{Responsibility to the Piece}

Claire, humorously, recounts just such a threshold from the previous Friday when the group had performed at the end-of-semester showing:

“It’s a trust and confidence manipulation, because there was a moment on Friday where there needed—something needed to happen—it had settled into this [she glides her hand horizontally in an even, monotone gesture.] Everyone was doing the same level of energy, and something needed to happen, and Mae even made eye contact with me across the room and my body was like ‘Go, go!’ She starts leaning back and forth in her chair, like a child about to enter a double-dutch game: “And my mind was like ‘I don’t want to do this; I don’t want to do this; I’m scared; I don’t want to be the one to go. Someone else go.’ And I kept stepping forward, then rocking back and stepping forward and rocking back and she’s looking at me like, ‘Just go’ and so I just went out and I have no idea what I did. By the way, it could have been hideous—but I did it.”

Mae interjects, jokingly, “I was like, ‘Help us out!’”

Claire quickly continues: “It very easily could have been a two-second process, but it seemed like forever. I was just trying—and it was terrifying. I did not want to take the space and do a solo and I just had to, so I did it.”

Claire describes the risk of taking the space in emotional terms (“terrifying”), cognitive terms (knowing that the piece had become monotone, recognizing that she
didn’t want to enter the space), and physical terms (-leaning back and forth and finally entering the space to perform). Her negotiations of this critical moment are illustrative of the dialogical properties of improvisation, for the compounding of ways of knowing also speaks to a negotiation with the others in the piece—Mae’s eye contact an obvious instance—but also to the sense of the piece as a whole, in terms of composition.

In this conversation, the students point to three constitutive elements of improvisation: allowing, choice-making, and responsibility to the piece. What is interesting here is not that these students come to these three specific understandings—as they align with the foundational values of both the first and second iterations of the PIE repertory course, but that these students come to this understanding by trusting, questioning, and discussing a difficult process. By not wanting to enter an improvisation, trying to assess whether one’s presence is necessary, needing to make that decision oneself (rather than by a teacher’s prompt), “straight up” watching sometimes, and just going in at other times, students negotiate their learning by articulating physical and mental impulses and restraints by attending to the self and attuning to the group. The knowledge that is discursively constructed is not how to dance, or how to dance better, but how to function within a system: what sorts of choices and risks are rewarded, how desire and responsibility collide, and where one fits at each moment.

Considering these issues, it is clear that language can point to a physical experience and, without always describing it, reference the experience as shared knowledge, then build upon that experience by developing and discussing the questions that arise. The reflective process is an opportunity for dancers to remember an
experience, acknowledge it, and process it in conjunction with the experiences of others. This dialogical employment of language is a critical part of the dance learning process, for rather than an immediate necessity to name and commodify an action, it gives the dancer an opportunity to develop a residual understanding of it. The wobbly language of processing experience is perhaps adjacent to a parallel dialogical process of developing danced knowledge, for as dancers use verbal language as a mode of expressing and discussing dancing, new sets of understandings emerge.
Images of a PIE Performance

Figure 3.1 A spontaneous lift. Photo courtesy of Jim Coleman

Figure 3.2 The dancers on the floor assess the current situation while the standing dancers play with different variations on a single movement idea. Photo courtesy of Jim Coleman

53 I include these photos to illustrate the movement capacities discussed in this dissertation. These were taken a year after my study concluded at Mt Holyoke College, when the group presented work on a tour of several colleges and universities.
Figure 3.3 Although the movements are different, the dancers connect by creating a spatial tension between them and anticipating the timing and weight of one another. Photo courtesy of Jim Coleman
Interstitial 2

Dance on a College Campus: Taking it Out-of-Doors

I sit on the OSU campus, on a raised cement edge, a boundary between the internationally acclaimed Wexner Center Center for the Arts and an adjacent courtyard. Directly behind me are the stairs where the students of the Performance Improvisation Ensemble repertory class have decided that their outdoor, “site-specific” improvisation will end. That is as far as their score goes: they will begin down the way and end here. So I sit, leaning against a white, four-inch square post, surrounded by their nine purses and bags that mark an endpoint. The dancers have made their way to the opposite end of the walkway to begin. I try to dig the corner of the post into the space between my scapula and my spine in an effort to massage knotted muscles. The ropey fibers slide over one another, creating a kind of disgusting, clunky sensation. For the third time today, I desire a massage—which means money.

But soon my own concerns dissolve, for I see the class appear along the concrete horizon. They are still at least 100 feet away from me. The white corridor in which they dance marks the divide between the Mershon Auditorium and the Wexner Center. Under the scaffolding lines of architect Peter Eisenman’s post-modern walkway, they wittily jump and describe the space in neat geometric forms, reflecting the building’s lines and angles. I wonder how many of these impulses come from the recent Forysthian work—physical explorations of describing, avoiding, and embodying lines and points in
space—they’ve undertaken in the studio, and how many result from the placement of their bodies within such clear architectural geometry.

They are still so far away, and so familiar to me that my eye is drawn to the people who pass in the foreground. A woman slouches forward, her spine flexed to support an enormous backpack made even more imposing by a bike helmet balanced atop it.

Biking—gasoline—economic meltdown—there is so much to see in a body.

Several people pass and one man, perhaps in his mid-40s, with a teddy-bear portliness, walks by and the sound made by his sporty sandals—a rhythmic wooshing—seems so loud and yet so everyday. Impressive, textured, yet banal. I notice that his sandals are strapped over thick wool socks, and I smile.

I look up and notice that another man, slightly younger, a graduate student maybe, has joined me in viewing the dancers. He leans onto a post, 30 feet from me and probably the same distance from them. I’m watching him watch them. Watching watching. Bebe Miller’s most recent work, *Necessary Beauty* had the watching of watching as a theme. Miller and her dancers would, at times, simply stop or sit and we would choose to watch them watch a moving dancer, or join their attention. Later in the piece we watched as they looked at and repeated movement from a TV monitor placed in the audience, facing a stage. It is compelling to see someone see. The content and questions of Miller’s work provide a lens for my viewing of this improvisation.

This man I am watching leaves, but then returns almost immediately, maybe 30 seconds later. He resumes watching them, and I, him.
Another man approaches, intending to walk the pathway, himself but he stops abruptly and turns away. A woman does the same.

What a thing to do, to go outside and dance.

My newfound friend has walked away. Like the imposed friendships with other cars that one imagines on a long road trip, I’ve come to identify with this guy. I like him for his choice to stop and watch dance.

I’ve looked down to write but now, looking up, I see what can only be described as a big “dude” wearing a Cleveland Browns football t-shirt. He is suddenly (well, to me anyway) walking through the scene. It looks like he just walked right through the dancers as he strolls down the middle of the walkway. How did he get there? Did he just confidently walk right through or did he sneak around? He’s probably 20 feet past when Josephine and Norah go running towards him. If they don’t stop they’ll run past him, one on each side. Near the edge of the passageway they stop, suspended like they’ve come to the edge of a cliff. He must hear them but he does not look back. He’s either not curious or not interested, or, perhaps, not sure what to do, caught in this strange scene.

I see that my viewer friend is back to watch again. But then, he quickly sneaks around the side, behind the dancers, and into the library. It’s silly, but I’m a bit sad. In my construction of the scene, this was someone who stopped to see some art amid his busy day, not someone politely waiting for an opportunity to unobtrusively get to the library door.

The movement is now much closer and I shift my attention to the dancers. I see clear reaches, bent-arm gestures, standing, walking, softening, and creeping. These
clearly individual choices move in and out of relationship—space does that. Space illuminates relationship. Mamie and Reese lie down with their knees bent and their arms to the sky. Dual images. They roll, crawl, and slither around to the appointed stairway. Reese sits on the ledge next to and in the exact same shape as I. No more time to watch and think. I set down my notebook and just watch, aware that they are now watching my watching.
Chapter 6

Pain as a Way of Knowing

_This sounds awful, but I love feeling beat up from dance._
–Jillian, while warming up for a rehearsal

_I hope this is a quiet injury._
–Ballet dancer\(^54\)

In an Environment of Risk, the “Falling” Section

As I walk into Studio Three finishing crispy kale—a dish, currently favored by my health conscious graduate cohort, that requires broiling kale until it is slightly burned—I hear Laurie say “That’s awful!” as she stands and leaves, holding an empty water bottle. I see Annie nodding and ask Mary, “Is everything okay?” She explains that the previous Friday only a few, maybe six, undergraduate dance majors attended professor and acclaimed choreographer Bebe Miller’s talk about her upcoming piece, _Necessary Beauty_. Addressing Mary’s disappointment, Annie wonders aloud if others were just busy and had forgotten to attend.\(^55\)

Mary, frustration evident, says, “Well, if I can remember, other people could too.”


\(^{55}\) The narrative of the “Falling” section is recreated from fieldnotes taken during and after three rehearsals in Autumn 2008.
“That’s what happens when you care about your education,” Annie, half-jokingly responds.

Laurie, who has returned with a full water bottle, agrees, “It’s because you are actually an engaged student.”

We are all worn-out by multiple responsibilities. I chime in to the venting session with a line about Miller’s work from a student paper: “This piece totally obviously has homosexual content,” and we laugh. The piece did not, but with five women dancing in close proximity to one another and at one point reverberating atop chairs, it is easy to see why someone unfamiliar with modern dance conventions might write such an explanation. We begin to talk about the differences between the process of making work, talking about work, and what the results look like to new audience members, opening a discussion of content, ambiguity, and effect.

Recognizing that the rehearsal could easily stray into a discussion, Annie jumps up, takes out two DVDs and announces: “Today is learning and making.”

Mary worries aloud that she should have remembered a phrase from a piece by Annie she was in last year. But Annie assuages her concerns, reminding her that the assignment she is fretting about is for the next rehearsal on Sunday. The three get up and go to the TV monitor and I stay sitting against the mirror typing notes into my laptop. They watch two segments from the spring, four months ago. One is video footage of a duet composed of falling; the other is footage from a rehearsal in which they discuss with Annie how they are feeling inside the movement.
They begin to work out the choreography. The set-up is a clear structure: they take turns falling. They have to learn the different falls without injuring themselves but the structure is consistent: one person falls and is caught in various ways by the other.

They talk about “finding the weight of it” and they admit to being careful, not really falling.

“I think we are being kind.” Laurie says.

Annie nods replying, “You can be kind, otherwise you’ll be bruised and battered by tomorrow.” They begin to jokingly call this version, “Duet lite.”

In one complicated part, both Laurie and Mary both lie on the floor. Imagine two people lying on their sides, one’s front to the other’s back, spooning, but with about two feet separating them. Mary, who lies behind Laurie, has the task of shifting her weight into her arms and must then shuttle her legs over Laurie’s body, in almost a flying push-up.

They talk as they mark through the material, describing what modifications they find within their movements or when the actions of the other person facilitate or impede the action.

“So, I go this way.”

“That works.”

“That’s a lot of momentum.”

**Knowing One’s Physical Limits**

After the two repeatedly try and fail at one variation of a fall, Laurie says of Mary, “That seems hard for her.” It is not a criticism, but a statement that Laurie’s own
movement creates a difficult task for Mary. This pattern continues over the course of the rehearsal process, with Laurie, the graduate student, being the one to veto a specific movement or to admit fatigue. Here, Laurie’s embodied knowledge is an understanding of what is working and when the risks are too great.

Eventually, Annie will bring me into this section, as a voice from the sidelines giving movement instructions. At first, it will be Mary’s job to cue me to stop the section. But she proves hesitant to indicate the end and after one particularly trying run, Laurie will say to me “You have to call it [the end] sooner because she’s just going to go until she gets hurt.” Throughout the process, Laurie, the graduate student, will often take on the role of protector, tempering undergraduate Mary’s desire to please and impress Annie, the choreographer, and her willingness to push herself to a breaking point.

In a later rehearsal, this section prompted a scare when Mary hurt her ankle by landing on the outside of her foot and rolling over its edge, the day before the faculty concert in which she was to dance. She gasped, frozen on the floor. I ran for ice. Laurie gently moved her ankle to see if it seemed sprained. Already pale, Mary turned white and whispered “Oh no; Oh no.” Within a few minutes, it was clear that it was just a scare. She was up and walking and just a little bit tender, but it was one of those moments where the risk of the action and the fear of debilitation were evident.

Learning an Intention

That moment in the process of creation only foreshadows the intensity into which this section will develop. While making it, Laurie and Mary slowly figure out each fall. At moments when Annie is dissatisfied by their translation from video to live, she steps
in to do one person’s part, then describes how she is moving, or what it feels like to her. This change from video, to Annie’s sense of what it feels like, to doing, is indicative of the values intrinsic to this process. Not only is Annie interested in the look, or the shaping of the movement but she is keenly interested in the sensations of the dancers. As they create the material, they become less “kind,” taking more risks, and finding the intention of the section—to fall.

They continue to work on developing the falls that constitute this section, by watching the next fall on the video. Annie describes how she wants them to do it “without looking pretty.” They cannot figure out how to make the television play in slow motion so they watch several times, brows furrowed, unable to grasp the mechanics of this specific fall. Again Annie demonstrates and describes, “It’s like you are changing direction…right arm high” speaking and showing at once. The dancers attend to the choreographer’s imitation of their dancing on video. She looks nothing like the video does. What matters is not the accuracy, but remaking what it is about the clip that prompted Annie to save it. As Annie explains later, she is interested in “something about the potential” the selected clips hold. While watching the video so intently, and endeavoring to recreate the actions, everyone in the room knows that the point is to get to the idea that has emerged through the movement. They talk as they watch:

“Did you fall into it?”

“I think I went over”

“See, dive back”

“From how you unwound there, you go into the slide thing.”
They begin to piece the section together until they have a repeatable phrase.

These falls are not really falls. They are frequently more like upward dives—as if one person is trying to launch herself up and through the other body. The fallout from the collision resolves in various ways: in one moment, Mary ends up hanging wrapped around Laurie’s torso, legs and arms dangling. Laurie shifts; Mary tumbles to the ground.

As they refine it, rather than repeat from the beginning, they start from various landmarks:

“Just go from Mary getting up off the floor.” Annie instructs.

Mary begins the fall and stops to ask Laurie: “Do I kill your side? I feel like it’s a lot of pressure.”

“It’s fine, it’s not much”

They repeat, stumbling, making mistakes and laughing.

Laurie jokes: “It feels like a ballet.”

“We are dancers, we can borrow from ballet. It won’t mind, it’s really old,”

Annie responds, and we all laugh for a moment and take a break.

Continuing to define the section, Annie grabs items of clothing strewn in the corner and sets them on the floor to mark edges, restricting the space. The dancers now have about a 10’ by 20’ rectangle. They mark through the movement within the area. As they start to find the flow of the movement, their breath becomes clearer in their bodies. I can hear their exhales sometimes, but more clearly, I see expanding and softening in their chests. They get stuck and talk through the phrases. Figuring out space and spacing,
they talk about where they remember being in the previous iteration, just ten minutes ago. Annie clarifies the space and the changes that need to happen in the new configuration. They figure out the steps and the directions. Because it’s a phrase of diving and falling, knowing where they are in space is more challenging as Mary and Laurie both grow somewhat disoriented within the sequence.

As they learn the sequence, it grows faster and more desperate in movement quality. Mary dives up and onto Laurie, who is taller, as if she is trying to get to something just over Laurie’s shoulder. At the height of the reach, her legs fold beneath her and she falls straight down. Her energy is clearly up and out on a high diagonal, then suddenly it redirects straight down.

In a moment of reflexivity that references the earlier discussion of reactions to Miller’s work, Laurie says: “I think people are going to watch this and think they are all the same thing because they are so similar.” Her comment points out the paradox of such work. It looks like falling. Anyone can fall. But the loop between sensation and conceptualization creates a nuanced understanding of the physical sensation of falling—differences in each fall that come to be understood by the dancers.

They laugh and keep working out the details of each, quite different reach, lurch, and fall. Annie rarely stops rehearsal to discuss various interpretations of her work and as such, conversations about performance effect, present in the rehearsals of some choreographers, are not present in hers.

Annie shows one more section that she’d like them to learn this evening. They respond to seeing themselves on video by saying “WHHHAAAT!” loudly in unison. The
next few falls are big and fast and they seem hard-pressed to believe they did them in the first place. In this last section, Mary launches horizontally, diving and tipping forward with Laurie grabbing her around the waist trying to pull her up, but not really succeeding. Laurie seems to be tethering her at most. Laurie releases Mary and she crashes to the ground.

Annie, convinced that there is a way for it to happen without injury calls out ideas and instructions like “Send your weight back. It’ll change as you figure out what works.”

Tired, their energy drops and they rely more on marking and talking about the movement. Their eyes flit up to the clock and a few minutes past nine pm, Annie closes rehearsal saying: “Thank you guys so much; you are awesome.” Laurie, who has two dogs at home a fair distance from school, always bolts from evening rehearsals and she is gone before I’ve closed down my computer. Annie, Mary, and I gather our things, and carpool to our respective homes within a mile of the campus.

**How to Reach a Threshold, but not Cross it**

A few weeks later, the four of us are again in the studio to work on this section. This time we are rehearsing in the Experimental Movement and Media Lab, a technologically equipped small performance space and motion capture studio. Here, Annie is able to try out an idea she has for the section. The room is pitch black; she has limited the performing space so that Laurie and Mary will do their duet in a space about four feet wide by ten feet deep. Downstage, closest to where the audience would be, sits a three foot wide rolling whiteboard such that all that is visible of the duet are the moments when the two move to the edge of their allotted space. Annie has added me into
the section and I begin standing by the whiteboard, looking back at Mary and Laurie. As they move, I draw lines that mirror their pathways: Mary launches and I shoot the marker across the board making a sweeping arc. The lines accumulate atop one another and as I do this, I slowly inch the whiteboard upstage. A video camera is focused on the whiteboard, creating a flashing video feedback. Like pointing a microphone at a speaker so that it pierces the ears of an audience, video feedback is a blinding, flashing visual pollution. As I inch the whiteboard back, the dancers come into full view and are lit by the flashing projector.

Annie has asked me to ask the dancers questions and push them towards moving faster, with more abandon, and more risk. I begin slowly, saying things like, “Could you go faster?” but it progresses to the point where I am screaming at them to: “FALL! THROW YOURSELF! GET UP, COME ON!” The room is dark but for the pulsing blinding projector lamp aimed right at the dancers; the section has gone on for longer than ever before; the dancers are no longer following the choreography but are just throwing themselves at one another, crashing to the floor, and repeating—while being yelled at by me.

So there we were, two dancers falling and picking one another up—layered with me shouting at them to go faster, push harder, to need the floor, to use the other person—layered with the only light in an otherwise black theater being a flashing projector pointing directly at them. As they fall, and Annie watches, I keep pushing them. Finally, hitting the floor particularly hard, Laurie, a calm and reserved dancer screams “STOP! JESUS! MOTHERFUCKER! SHIT!” We all stop, taken aback. I literally
jump back, stepping away from her. I immediately begin apologizing, horrified to have pushed her to such a breaking point. Annie turns off the projector. Laurie insists that she is fine and Annie seems quick to move on. Interested in the quality of the physicality, she initiates a conversation about how to reach that threshold of experience without crossing it. But this moment became pivotal as in the ensuing months Annie reflected on the situation of this section throughout the remaining process, knowing as she did from the beginning that she was asking the dancers to do something painful but wanting to figure out how to bring the section to pain, but not to injury.

**Injury versus Pain**

The medium of dance is the body. Messy, illusive, and sometimes difficult, the dancer negotiates this body both as subject and as object. Injury plagues dancers. In a large study (n=205) of dancers in the UK, dance scholars and sociologists Helen Thomas and Jennifer Tarr (2009) investigated dancers’ experiences with pain and injury. They found that 90% of their sample had experienced injury and they align this with other studies that report on average an 80% prevalence of lifetime injury among dancers. Injury and pain are nebulous phenomena. Some degree of pain is par for the course and in the earlier rehearsal exemplar, Annie had no qualms about asking her dancers to do something painful. She was, however, aware of the potential for injury. Pain that impedes performance, or musculoskeletal damage that renders a joint or muscle ineffective, becomes injury.\(^5\) Thomas and Tarr also note that dancers distinguish

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\(^5\) This is the most commonplace definition of injury among dancers based on my life experiences and fieldwork. Thomas and Tarr empirically note that “Roughly half of participants (101) identified injury as something that stopped them from dancing or from moving normally” (p. 56), noting that the second most
between “good” and “bad,” or similarly, “tolerable” and “intolerable” pain. Indeed, everyday pain—bruises, bloodied feet, light sprains—is nearly a badge of honor in the studio. Like athletes, the “no pain, no gain” mentality can drive a dancer, but beyond that, the dancer’s desire to dance makes small pains a worthy sacrifice. When pain becomes severe or limits motion, when it becomes an injury, it is no longer a badge of honor, but a mark of defeat. The injured dancer operates in a liminal space, for if you cannot dance, are you still a dancer? Jenna, who was diagnosed with mononucleosis midway through the rehearsal period and had to spend several weeks not dancing, prompting her to question the role of dance in her life, articulates the degree to which “dancer,” is an identity:

    I haven’t found anything else that has the same equivalence to dance and that’s kinda’ scary because I’m not always going to have dance. There’s always that “what if” or, “what if I stop liking it one day.” And then what else is there? I feel like I’d just be a “normal person” and that sounds horrible but so many college kids don’t really have a huge interest; they may play some intramural sports, or just hang out, but I like that I have a goal and motivation and drive. And not dancing, I just felt like an average college kid. I mean it was a nice feeling because I didn’t have as much stress, but at the same time I just felt blah.  

Looking at the identity disruption, like the one Jenna experiences, both Wainwright and Turner (2004) and Aalten (2005) consider the sociological function of injury in recent studies. Although both study ballet companies—cultures with similarities but marked fundamental differences from contemporary dance, particularly that of dance in the academy—and their implications differ, several of the conclusions apply.

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common definition dealt with the severity of pain, and a smaller portion of their participants defined it in physiological terms (swelling, bruising) or abstract terms like damaging the body.

57 Jenna, May interview
Aalten (2006) contends that dancers actively silence their bodies, noting that while a “central characteristic of pain or illness is that it calls attention to the body” (p. 58), dancers ignore these signals creating “an active absence, an absence that is forced upon the body” (p. 64). Her suggestion is that the lifetime of training builds on ignoring pain and molding one’s body into an ideal body (after Foster, 1997):

The body’s ability to make itself known, by crying out in pain, is taken away by the dancer in her struggle to achieve the required technique and bodily perfection. When the body ‘speaks up,’ it is habitually silenced into a mode of bodily absence to allow the dancer to continue working. In an occupational culture that on the one hand believes in the malleability of the body, striving for disembodiedness, and on the other hand gives a heroic status to pain, the neglect of the body of the dancer is the result of a conscious act. But this act does not go unpunished. Despite the dancer’s discipline and capacity to silence her body, it still retains some of its abilities to call attention to itself, one of which can be injury. (p. 64)

While her point stands that injury functions as a communicator from body to self and while more so than in contemporary dance, the aesthetic of ethereality in ballet may suggest a possibility for disembodiedness, my own experience of dancing complicates this contention, for the transcendence of pain through dancing is not the shutdown of sensation, it is the overwhelm of kinesthetic actions and the multitude of sensations therein. I am more inclined to follow Cheville’s (2001) assertion that pain “interrupts the relation of mind and body” (p. 37), for it functions like a system error, something one can work around, until the whole program is corrupted.

Of course the relationship is not easy. In the following quote the contrasting metaphors of conversation and battle provide Claire with a way to integrate the two parallel experiences of finding one’s maximum physical potential:

It can be a constant battle with my body. On some days I feel like I’m on a precipice. My body is almost there, wanting to achieve what I’m asking [of] it,
but as I’m pushing it I feel my body find moments where it wants to give up. It can be a constant conversation or battle, depending on the day. It’s a love/hate relationship like no other. There is no better feeling in the world than the certainty of loving what you do and knowing you want to continue doing it for the rest of your life.  

Formulating a theory of epiphanies of embodiment, drawing from Bourdieuan sociology and interviews with Royal Ballet dancers and former dancers, Wainwright and Turner put forth a more nuanced view of the role of injury in dance by proposing that injuries provoke the realization of one’s body in relation to the ballet culture. Using Bourdieu’s metaphor of a fish in water who is unaware of his habitus until he becomes a fish out of water, they suggest that injuries instigate self-examination by dancers: “All dancers can probably expect several major injuries during their careers. Such epiphanies force dancers to confront their embodiment and so their thoughts invariably turn to their body, career, and Self” (p. 317). Fundamental to their contention and evident in this study as well, is that dancing, or being a dancer, is a vocation in the Weberian sense of a calling—distinct from a job. Indeed, dancers talk about needing a “Job job”—a vehicle to pay the bills and permit dancing. Driving this calling, Wainwright and Turner suggest, is the reward of the action: “…the sheer physicality of their working lives—of feeling exhausted, sweaty and out of breath—is something dancers (like all athletes) become ‘addicted to’” (p. 316). But the reward is not measurable in the sort of athletic quantifications (numbers of points or miles) that may keep the athlete engaged, even past her prime. For the dancer, injury can inhibit not only the ability to execute movement,

58 Claire journal response to the prompt “Describe the physical sensations of dancing. What is it like to do what you do?”
but to do it well. Nuance, quality, exquisite control, and complete abandon—these are the dimensions of dancing most at risk.

In evidencing that injury disrupts habitus—places the fish out of water, prompting a reexamination of one’s identity, Wainwright and Turner also build on philosopher Rom Harré’s notions of identity as composed of physical, personal, social, and spiritual beings, stating:

We can, we suggest, connect these four modes of being through the fact of embodiment. For dancers, physical being is the foundation of their vocation. Professional dancing careers require institutions and communities of dancers and here the personal being and the social being help to forge a dancer’s embodied identity. Furthermore, the artistry demanded of the balletic body can be viewed as the embodiment of one aspect of spiritual being. (p. 330)

They conclude:

Dancing, and thus being a ballet dancer, are supremely and obviously about the coordination, acquisition and maintenance of a set of cultural practices. Injury, and aging, threaten to disrupt these practical accomplishments that underpin both the dancer’s habitus and identity (and more broadly, our habitus and identity). (p. 320)

There are, of course, massive differences between a professional ballet company and a college dance department and the field of modern dance, into which most of the students in this population wish to enter. Professional ballet dancers begin dancing as children and most enter rigorous pre-professional academies by high school, only rarely pursuing a ballet career after college. Ballet dancers train in a foundational technique that values verticality, Lightness, and complex sequencing of classical vocabulary. As such, the training is of narrower scope in favor of refinement, than that of a contemporary dancer, although many companies do maintain a diverse contemporary repertory. In
Europe, where much ethnographic research on ballet companies occurs, many are state-sponsored institutions.

**For all Dancers, an Injury Means not Dancing**

College dancers frequently negotiate injury. In a technique class, where subject and learner are the same, injured dancers must come to an arrangement with the faculty member. With substantive injuries, a student might be told to withdraw from the course or to take it for a reduced credit load or, as happens frequently, dancers might watch class for a week before returning, or spend a few weeks not jumping or otherwise modifying the class. It can be difficult for teachers and choreographers to negotiate student injuries. From the outside, teachers often cannot tell who is in how much pain, who is scared to try something, who is burnt out, or who is lazy.

Wainwright and Turner’s suggestion that injuries provoke epiphanies of embodiment is evident in this quote from Jillian’s journal:

Recently I found out what it’s like not to be able to do what I do, which made it easier to describe what it is like to do what I do. I’ve been really fortunate because I’ve never been seriously injured before, but I got a taste of it recently and felt at least the threat of not being able to dance. I only pulled a hamstring so it’s not the end of the world, but never having experienced not dancing before sure made it feel like it was! I actually didn’t know I had pulled it so I tried to dance on it a couple of times after I got the injury but when I did, nothing was going right. There was this whole new element that was present that isn’t normally when I’m dancing—fear. The ease that I usually find wasn’t there, and I was afraid of really hurting myself. Anyways, like I said, I didn’t really know how to describe this until recently, and this is a simple description, but the best way I can think to describe how I feel when I’m dancing is fearless and completely invincible.59

59 Jillian, journal response to the prompt, “Describe the physical sensations of dancing. What is it like to do what you do?”
‘Warrior Girls’

The fearlessness that Jillian feels while dancing is a salient concept in US girlhood, produced in part by the post Title IX rise in women’s sports participation and the marketing of athleticism as a woman’s desire by athletic wear brands. The literature on injury in girls’ sports provides a vantage point for looking at the desire for invincibility that Jillian references and the willingness to experience pain that Laurie and Mary demonstrate in rehearsal. Sports writer Michael Sokolove’s (2008) *Warrior girls: Protecting our daughters against the injury epidemic in women’s sports* looks at the phenomenon of ACL tears—ruptures of the anterior cruciate ligament which stabilizes the knee—in women’s soccer. He argues that girls’ joints are fundamentally different and that girls are getting injured and medically “fixed” and reinjured at alarming rates. Researchers do not know exactly why, but he contends:

> Whatever the glitches are that cause ACLs to rupture, women, statistically, are more prone to them. This is another inconvenient truth, like the high rate of stress fractures in military women or, on the male side, heart attacks and prostate cancer, which no one, by the way, equates with weakness; it is only the female differences that are likely to be constructed as deficiencies. (pp. 147-8)

Sokolove examines the culture of women’s sports, in particular NCAA soccer. The following quote typifies the desire for movement and degree to which movement serves as an identity marker in the minds of players and coaches:

> I asked Dorrance [a NCAA coach] why he would congratulate a kid for ignoring medical advice. “She wanted to play,” he explained. “We weren’t going to get in her way. She wanted to take risks. That was the definition of who she was. In contact sports, that’s the dimension that separates the truly extraordinary. The people who make these choices and take these risks are valuable athletes. To be completely honest, it’s one of the things that I like about contact sports. It’s exciting. The willingness to take risk is basically someone living an incredibly passionate life.” (p. 28)
The notion of risk-taking is ever-present in the dance studio. As discussed in terms of improvisation, sometimes risk-taking means making a brave choice. Other times, as in Laurie and Mary’s duet, risk-taking means acquiescing to the possibility of injury. There is certainly a technique to the falling, and both dancers rely on their training as they soften into the floor sequentially, mostly landing on soft tissue rather than bony protrusions. The techniques of falling itself and the ability to distinguish pain from injury—and the knowledge of being on the brink of injury that Laurie has cultivated and Mary has not yet—are learned.

**Socializing Pain**

This learning is cultivated through repetition (doing) and cultural practices in the studio. On the socialization to pain in girls’ softball, Nancy Malcom (2006) writes that coaches, herself included, subtly introduce the players to the notion of pain as “a simple fact of sport” (p. 497) with negative consequences given to players who complain of injuries and rewards to those who “play through.” She writes that coaches ignore complaints, tease and joke about pain, redefine pain as pleasure, and, themselves, demonstrate a tolerance to pain. While in Malcom’s study, injury is defined broadly (i.e. being hit by a ball, or scraping a knee) the acculturation to the fact of pain and the shift from understanding pain as negative to a pleasure is present in the dance studio as well. Like the fatigue present in an earlier chapter, the sense of feeling “beat up by dance” in the quote by Jillian that opens this chapter indicates a sense of passion and pride in the trials the body can endure and the heights one can reach.
But there is a threshold, and for some dancers a joint grows damaged or an illness overtakes and dancing, any dancing, is no longer possible. The following narrative exists in two parts. Treated like a case study, Carrie’s injury gives a sense of the personal and social realms of dance injury. In the first interview, recorded at the very beginning of the 2008-09 school year, Carrie has learned that her recent knee pain does not require surgery. She is hopeful about a year of dancing that does not fully come to pass. While she performed in Indelible Marks in February, the day after the run of the show she stopped dancing and scheduled surgery for spring break. The second part was recorded six months after the surgery, and she reflects on her experiences and ponders her future.

**Carrie’s Knee**

My knee started bothering me [at] the end of Winter Quarter of last year. I [was] pretty sure I landed from a jump wrong, but clearly that’s not the case. That’s just when I noticed it. I was in rehearsal, so I didn’t say a word to anyone. I limped around for a week and then I started to work through it. I mean, in the back of my mind I was worried because I was clearly over-compensating with different parts of my body. And I started to feel really out-of-whack. My ankle started bothering me, and I just had this awful feeling that they were all related.⁶⁰

Carrie’s initial assessment is that she made a technical error, landing “wrong.” As in the rehearsal exemplar when Mary rolls over her ankle, a slight miss on a landing can easily lead to a pulled muscle, or worse, a torn ligament or tendon. Carrie kept her injury quiet, likely not wanting to risk losing performance opportunities within the rehearsal process and she presents this as a logical choice, her tone indicating an obvious connection. This is not the silencing of which Aalten writes. Even though she situates it, “in the back of my mind,” her knee pain and the resulting bodily pains—what I think of

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⁶⁰ Carrie, September interview
as the system error—are a presence. A foreboding one. She goes on to describe the unstable nature of the pain noting that it comes and goes as she lessens her dancing:

Then after Dance Downtown [the annual faculty and guest artist concert], in May, my schedule was less intense and [the pain] came and went and came and went. Some days it would feel perfectly fine and I knew that if I went to the doctor they were going to tell me to rest—and I knew that the year was almost over and I was probably just lazy and I just didn’t go to the doctor.

This summer I wasn’t dancing, but I was biking and walking a lot. Running up the stairs at work and it started really bothering me again. Just an ache. Sometimes I couldn’t straighten my leg all the way. Some days I was literally limping around: after sitting too long, or standing too long. Just, extreme discomfort. [On a family vacation] my mom saw me limping one day and I finally told her about it. I told her, assuming that the next time I was home she could get me an appointment [with a knee specialist and family friend]. … In my appointment with him we had my MRI up, and he was saying that he couldn’t really see much but there were some things that [wouldn’t show up] on the MRI that could have serious damage. They wouldn’t know until they went in arthroscopically what they’d have to repair and what they would have to do, and it would probably take 6-8 months to recover.

She repeatedly limits the pain, as “just an ache” and “just extreme discomfort” suggesting that these alone are not severe. This follows the dancers’ paradigm in which the crossover from pain to injury happens when the dancer’s ability to execute movement is limited. In Carrie’s case, this is manifest through a limp. As with most suspected joint injuries, Carrie’s option is surgery. She enters the complicated network of sports medicine, first through family connections and later through the university. Speaking from my own experience, I know that this shift of control, from one’s own choicemaking in relation to dancing, to the voice of an expert, a physical outsider who specializes in what is inside of your body, is an emotional one. In this next passage, Carrie describes only one instance of crying. Then, with her father’s encouragement, she takes on
something of the ‘warrior girl’ athletic mantra: get fixed and get back into the game, but have a backup plan.

Strangely enough, I didn’t—well, I had one breakdown. It was right after my doctor’s appointment I just cried in the car [with my mom]. I got home and had dinner with my parents and my dad just said, ‘You are an athlete: if you get injured in the season you are just going to get your surgery, get better, and get back out there. It’s not the end of the world. It’s just a short period of time and you’ll be fine.’ And we had all these conversations about what classes I was going to take if I had to have surgery and where I was going to live and how it was going to work out. You know, maybe I’d graduate with two majors, that kind of thing. …It got to be kind of optimistic, but I obviously wanted a second opinion. We found a specialist [here at the university] in the injury that my first doctor thought it was. I went to him and it was the most thorough exam I’ve ever had. The assistant asked me all these questions, touching [every] muscle. Then [the doctor] came in and the good news: ‘You don’t have what the other doctor said you have.’ There’s some scar tissue on the meniscus that they think is from my first surgery but they aren’t sure because the records [are from 2002 and were lost]. So, [then] the bad news is I have a cyst on my ACL but it’s smaller than cysts they’ve seen before, but it explains all the pain. To me that was a huge relief because I was like, nothing’s torn: I haven’t done any damage to myself. You know, this dancing hasn’t worn my body down to a point of muscles destroying themselves to get back at me. I may potentially have to have surgery if it grows. But I’ll be doing physical therapy and after that, if the pain isn’t any better, I can get injections to try and get it to go away and there’s a slight chance that it will just go away. All those options sounded great to me because that means that I can dance this whole year.

In a sense, Carrie’s experience here is akin to the conversation and battle Claire writes of in her earlier journal entry. Carrie negotiates the sense of dancing as a battle— with her muscles “getting back at her.” But she also alludes to a sense of conversation with her body, noting the things that she can do that will enable her to dance. In terms of the sense of physical threshold discussed earlier in the chapter, she is determined to dance carefully. She’s been in this place before, having had surgery in high school, and the diagnosis of the cyst relieves her of the concern that her choice to dance had caused her
injury. The feeling of fault in injury is—temporarily—alleviated. With that relief, she points to an important pervasive fear among dancers, the feeling of being replaceable:

Since this is what I’m going to school for—to not be able to [dance] for a year seems like a big waste. And being a junior now I guess I [thought] maybe I’ll have more opportunities to work with better people, it just seems like seniority is how they run around here. ... And, I was fearful to have to tell the department about it. [All this] got me thinking about—like—how easily replaceable I am, you know, no one’s going to be like, ‘Oh this piece isn’t going to work without Carrie.’ You just need another body. So, that was kind of eerie, just thinking in terms of the rest of my dancing career, how I could easily...

She lifts her hand, snaps twice, and reflects:

My body is so important. Our bodies are so important that it made me also really want to have a backup plan. I guess. So that’s something I’m working on right now.

In a sense this last comment, which indeed was the last comment of the interview, foreshadows her forthcoming experience. Although she danced beautifully and fully in the *Indelible Marks* rehearsals, her knee continued to hurt. By January, she had decided to have surgery. She finished the concert, but as we planned to tour the piece to New York and Boston in March, she scheduled surgery.

**Carrie’s Recovery**

In September 2009, Carrie and I meet again at the Starbucks across the street from the dance building. I brace myself for what might be a challenging interview, knowing only that she has had a hard summer after running into her a week ago and being three weeks post-surgery myself. We sit with tea, and before turning on the recorder, I remind her that she can talk freely and will have an opportunity to review the transcript before I submit it to anyone. I remind her that the last time I interviewed her, she thought she
would not have to have surgery and asked her to tell the story from that point. She begins matter-of-factly and with few questions from me, divulges her story in a way that I believe highlights the interdependence of identity, connections, and physicality.

So they thought I had a cyst in my ACL [but] it didn’t show up on my MRI or anything, so they kind of ruled it out. Then, after 3 or 4 months of physical therapy twice a week, and continuing to dance on it, the pain wasn’t getting any less. No improvements. They decided to go in arthroscopically and see what was going on—pretty positive that they would find a cyst. So I stopped dancing in the middle of February—well, I was still half taking classes. Then my surgery was March 18th. They went in and found a large cyst on my ACL. It was a rather invasive surgery, just because of the muscles they had to move around to get to the cyst. And they were able to just cut it out, or whatever they do. They were looking for any meniscal damage but they think the only thing there is scar tissue from my previous surgery. They did find cracks in my cartilage that they can’t fix. They don’t have a super glue for things like that.

She laughs a soft, but dark, laugh.

Those probably weren’t causing me any pain, but they want me to be hyper-aware in the future because I could easily make those tears and wear down my cartilage and not have any in the future. I was in physical therapy three times a week until June. I was only on crutches for maybe a week and a half but [with] extreme limping, I probably should have been on crutches for longer than that. I have not tried dancing at all—besides doing plies in my bedroom. It’s been awful. I think—I was so optimistic about just getting back to where I was that I avoided the whole thought process. But in doing that, I avoided dance completely.

Carrie goes on to describe a process of distancing herself from her classmates and from the discipline itself. As her sense of self as a dancer is disrupted, so too are her friendships. As she looks back, she realizes the emotional toll of the injury, reading her loss of dancing in relation to her peers’ development as dancers.

I just took a bunch of other classes that I needed and art education classes that I was interested in and the department was completely okay with that. But I could have been more present in the department. I chose not to because it was really hard for me emotionally. Even with my good friends sometimes. It was a jealousy thing, I guess. Talking to them about dance, I got really upset and I’d shut down and feel
like, “I don’t want to go there right now.” But I’ve gotten much better about that and I feel like I’m ready to support what everyone does. Because that was really selfish of me—but totally okay too. So, I was kind of, just depressed for a while. Carrie’s sense of responsibility for her body—with dance absent—begins to wane. The notion of pushing herself is the same sort of threshold experiences that Annie’s “Falling” section explores artistically, that Wainwright and Turner theorize as a moment of epiphany, and that Malcom sees as a socializing process in young athletes. In this case, she’s lost the drive to find her physical edge, and yet is excited to work in that space again, “excited to retrain.”

I started riding my bike a lot during the summer, but only in the last month I’ve been riding besides just to get around. I’ve been riding about 10 miles a day, which is really fun. But, I wasn’t doing that earlier; I wasn’t really motivated to. I was doing yoga in my apartment every once in a while but not, I wasn’t pushing my body as far as I could have. And I definitely feel strength in other parts of my body has completely fallen away. Which is interesting—I’m kind of excited to retrain it. I felt the same way like right after my surgery: I’m excited to retrain my knee. But now my whole body needs retraining. Even though things will come back easily.

I moved a couple of weeks ago and lifting boxes—I realized I used to be really strong. My dad came out and said, ‘Oh, Mom can’t lift this, come help me.’ [But] I’m not as physical as I used to be. I never thought of it [dancing] as exercising but it certainly is.

Not only does Carrie’s sense of self as a dancer waver, but her sense of physical competence—her sense that she can get things done with her body (Harter, 1982) falters. Something is amiss. She is the proverbial fish out of water, realizing just how strong a swimmer she had been. She goes on to describe the sensations she currently has in her knee.

I don’t really feel pain all that often in my knee, but it’s the sensation of not being straight. So I feel like it could pop into hyperextension and stay there. The first time it happened, I was sitting on the couch and my feet were on an exercise ball. The ball just started rolling away from me, which is totally normal. So my leg
straightened, to pull it back in. And my knee just snapped. There was a shooting pain down the back of my leg and then I pulled it back in and it was okay—except that when I went to straighten it, it wasn’t fully straight. Then when something like that happens, my calf will tighten up and my IT band will start freezing and the whole right side of my body is a tension ball. I even started getting charlie horses in my right calf. Which I haven’t had since I was little. *Ugh, what’s happening to me!…*

I was bracing myself, I was like, ‘Okay, I’ll still have my senior year’ [to] perform and do everything with my friends. Our class has really rallied together to make everyone’s senior project all a part of each other’s. Everyone is going to do really great things and everyone is so supportive of each other—and by removing myself from that, by choice, last spring, I feel like I removed myself from that support system a little bit. And sometimes I feel—since I don’t talk to anyone about it—I think people just think I left and that I don’t care. And that I don’t care about dance, and that I’m like, false, or something. When it’s just really personal and there’s just a few people I want to talk to about it.

You know, Anabel was just in Europe dancing and I’m so excited to talk to her about it. And that doesn’t hurt me. You know? So it’s more just my own personal questioning, like, “What would I be doing right now if I wasn’t injured? What would this upcoming year be like? What if I can’t dance after this year and I’ve completely missed out on it?” Just the fact that I only have one year left, so I am graduating with a degree in dance and it’s not like I have all this time to reshape my education. But, I don’t know, I’ve gotten a lot better. I feel like I can reflect on where I was a couple of months ago. Then, I didn’t want to know anything that was going on with anyone in terms of dancing because I was just jealous. Personal jealousy, not like ‘I hate you because you are good’ but just watching everyone get better, watching everyone improvise. Since I was improvising with them all along, to drop out and realize how beautiful everyone was—I was so proud of them but I was supposed to be there with them, not sitting here watching. Or playing the music. Or giving feedback. It didn’t feel like enough. I didn’t quite feel included. Because I’m not there for that growth. And then it started being like, ‘Well, if I can come back, am I even going to be good enough anymore?’ So that was really hard. But I’ve realized that, as competitive as the field is, they’re all really wonderful people and most of them will be happy to dance with me again—if I can—and respect what I can and can’t do. And if I can’t perform, I can’t perform. And I’m also really thankful that I got to perform so much my first two years. Not everyone had that opportunity and I’m so glad I did.

Carrie’s narrative provides a sense of the complication of an intensely personal and interdependent form. I certainly do not suggest that dance has a corner on jealousy; it
festers across fields and disciplines. What I find interesting is that Carrie is so self-aware of this emotion and the impact it has on her learning. It is a testament to her character, but it also comes from being in a field where students are expected to share their feelings, verbally and through journaling, and also through performance. Carrie is able to acknowledge and work through this emotion in the preceding passage, and in the next section she also seems aware of the desire she’ll feel to dance and her need to set boundaries so that she doesn’t again cross the injury threshold.

I’m trying to take Abby’s class in the fall. I’m going to take Abby’s class in the fall. It shouldn’t be a problem at all. I’m not sure about ballet yet. I need to talk to the department because I’d love to take barre. I would love to take Ballet 2 barre and just do barre and I don’t know if they’ll allow me to get credit for it. I’d even take it without getting credit for it—but I don’t trust myself. I don’t trust my body enough to jump or turn or anything like that yet. So I don’t know what that means in terms of—I’m not going to be able to audition for pieces. So do I say, ‘I’ll be ready by January?’ And what if I’m not? I kind of haven’t figured this out yet. … I tried to ignore physicality for a while—just forget how much knowledge I have about my body and forget all the wonderful things I can do with it. Even just biking gives me this sensation of wanting to move bigger. Sometimes I have nightmares about dancing and falling, or breaking my knee. I just had one and Annie came and saved my life.

Again, she laughs, morosely.

And so those—obviously I haven’t really worked through how this is all going to work out. I can easily find ways to use my creativity, the creative side of me. Not that I have really found those yet—my summer has been doing nothing—but I think the physical side is going to be a lot harder to tap into. [To] feel fulfilled. But I also think that I’ll be able to dance again, even if it’s not as my career. I mean, I can’t imagine just never doing it again. And, I think I’m okay with that. It might really suck if in five years, I’m taking Ballet 1 at some rinky-dink studio and my friends are in companies, but it’s becoming more about me and less about trying to please other people.

I ask her, “Do you think that’s from how you are dealing with the injury? Or just growing?”
Probably both, and realizing that, like with being replaceable, just being a body—how important it is to take care of my own and be sure I’m happy. I mean I could have not gotten injured and graduated with a dance degree and moved somewhere, and not been dancing. So I need to find ways to be happy with dance and without dance—physical dance. I think now, as much as this has sucked, it’s been a really great learning experience.

It’s easy to sound really positive about it. And it’s really funny because a lot of the things I’m saying right now—it’s how I actually feel, but I’ve been saying them for a while, just to please people. And not be like, “Oh, this is awful! I’m so depressed. I haven’t left my bedroom in three days.” You know, but it’s wonderful to finally feel really positive about everything.

Carrie is eager to situate her danced knowledge—even as it feels like it is dissipating, into a trajectory that spans her college career and her sense of post-college life. The system that fosters this danced knowledge is relational and temporal. Her sense that this has ultimately been a positive experience illuminates her realization of how much she values dance, but more importantly her valuation of her self. Her sense that she needs to “find [her own] ways to be happy with dance and without dance” points to the tenuousness of this field but also the sense that danced knowledge, once cultivated, is residual. It is not the same thing as skill. Instead it is because she learned how to feel and articulate those feelings, how to train her body, how to think creatively, how to learn from others, that she is able to conceptualize a future that may be different from her earlier dreams. In the final section of this interview, she describes how the experience of injury bled into her choice-making in her personal life, both in the sense of not being regulated by a dancer’s schedule, and, I think, the experience of instability that injury prompts.

I was living with [my boyfriend] and it was really awful towards the end. Our apartment was really messy. It was just not my lifestyle at all. I’ve always been—I think because of dance—I’ve always been super organized because, you know, you are always doing something. A million classes; a million rehearsals. I always had to be on the ball. And not having dance, I didn’t need to be organized. And at first,
I was like, “This is nice! I can clean tomorrow; I can do whatever.” Then I was like, “This is gross. This isn’t how I function.” So now I’m living by myself and I feel like everything is falling into place—where I need it to be. I don’t think it was the actual physical move, just that’s the time frame. Living a lifestyle that I knew I didn’t want made me realize all the things I want. Or enjoyed about how I was before. But just with being depressed—my apartment didn’t have to be dirty—I just wasn’t doing anything about it. And eating well, overall care of myself kind of fell to the wayside. And now I’m back to the place where I’m like, “This is all I have, so I have to respect it.” I even went vegan again and I’m reaping all the benefits again. Wanting to read about it again; wanting to explore different things; wanting to cook. It all just fell back into place.

Completeness

Carrie’s story gives a sense of the totality of the experience of injury. Her sense of herself as a dancer is disrupted, as would be expected, but so too are her “normal person” activities. She falls into a less than healthy relationship, she stops exercising, and she withdraws from her friends, her commitment to vegetarianism—previously an important aspect of her sense of self—wanes. While she comes to realize that “This is all I have, so I have to respect it,” throughout the interview I could see, and relate to, her struggle to be positive and to be honest. At the point of the interview, I was in my third week of recovery after hip surgery. I could relate with my inner voice repeating “Please let me be able to dance again,” and with the sense of a “dancer.”

The completeness of experience that dance offers, and the allure thereof is artfully rendered in a journal entry by Reese. In response to the prompt, “Describe the physical sensations of dancing. What is it like to do what you do?” she writes:

Feels like you’re using every last bit of you at a time
To use all that you know and all that you don’t and give yourself fully to the space
After your decision to begin movement—none of it matters.
It feels like a period, a question mark, and an exclamation point all at once.
(Certainty + conviction) + (uncertainty + excitement)
Muscle, bone, soul
You are shapes, words, colors, feelings, lines, textures

Later in her journal she writes: “I take this body everywhere.” It appears without context, just written in a margin, but I understand it to refer to one’s body as a constant change—it shifts, breaks, and grows but in life and art it is always the way of knowing. The body, itself volatile, traverses an ever changing environment.

Knowing through pain means knowing through disruption. Like sociologist Erving Goffman’s (1959) assertion that we recognize the performativity of normalcy in the moments when that veil is disrupted—he gives the example of practical jokes—pain disrupts the sense of infallibility that movement can intoxicatingly provoke.61

Aalten’s assertion that dancers silence their bodies seems to neglect the attention dancers pay to their bodies. Deciding not to stop dancing because of pain happens, but I think it is more of a selective mindfulness than a dissociation. Mae writes of mindfulness in terms of choosing how to approach movement, in other words, intention:

What is being mindful? A general or detailed awareness of the impact of your body in space. To others—to the audience—to yourself—your foot—the world. What are you discovering through your plié? Is it the attitude of aristocracy? Is it your rotators? What are you holding mentally and physically? What are you letting go? What is occupying your thoughts throughout a phrase? Sequence? Time? Weight? Your lunch? —Whatever it is you’re not just mimicking other movers—you’re bringing some thought, some sense of history to the table as well.

Injury literally disrupts our foundations. You take a step and your buckling leg is not there for you, you reach to pick something up and your hand cannot clasp. You can jump up, but as you land, you flinch, knowing that a shock of pain will shoot through your knee. Pain and injury makes present the instability of danced knowledge. The

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61 Goffman’s theory is discussed in the next chapter.
disruption that occurs, that realized fallibility, provokes the sorts of epiphanies
Wainwright and Turner discuss, but, for this population it also provides an opportunity
for examination and, as Carrie says, “retraining.” Indeed, Carrie has an epiphany of
embodiment, she realizes the value of her body and her capacities and she begins to
rethink her career aspirations, but she also recognizes the opportunity to grow from this
disruption of self. Rather than scramble for a new secure footing, she is alert to her
present situation and the possibilities it affords her. In improvisatory terms, she
operates—though not happily—decidedly within the unknown.

Danced knowledge involves cultivating a sense of one’s physical limits and
working at that ever changing threshold. The intention, the how of the movement, is
found through these edges and they are controlled in large part by the social dimensions
of the rehearsal context. The desires to achieve, please, experience, and create coalesce
in a way that, as Claire writes, involves both “conversation” and “battle.” The notions of
invincibility, the “warrior girl” is promoted by pain but destabilized by injury. Injury
thus creates opportunities for dancers to see and experience the interdependence of
dancer identity, social connections, and physical competencies. Knowing, in turn, is both
relational and corporeal. Pain and injury, though difficult, mediate danced knowledge.
Onto a dark stage, colored only by a diffuse pool of dense blue light, a dancer dives. Shooting out from the wing, she falls, and now she lies, on her side, her arms over her head, pointing across the stage. The action is sharp and attention-grabbing and as Laurie lies there, her whole body charged and attentive, you expect her to move—to get back up, to roll along the floor, to gesture elsewhere with her arms—but she just stays, alert, but frozen.\(^6^2\)

I am across the stage, off-stage, making sure that the costume I’ve just quickly changed into after an earlier piece is fully zippered and buttoned, and that my hair is smooth. I bounce through softened knees, gently trying to stay warm and loose.

Laurie resumes, progressing through a series of low-to-the-ground, and mid-level movements that begin with a tossing impulse. More buoyant than her entrance, she maintains the sense of getting caught in moments, arresting herself mid-thought. Her pathway takes her directly across the stage, and as she approaches and exits through the upstage wing, a projection of a white surface across which paint streams in yellows, reds, oranges, and eventually blues and blacks illuminates the back screen. The music is rough, a complex static, and onto stage walk Laurie and Anabel. Followed by the other cast members—Carrie, Jenna, Margaret, and Mary—they interact (Figure 4.1)

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\(^6^2\) I wrote this interstitial using a combination of memory and video viewing. I wrote from memory my experiences in the piece, then viewed the video many times to develop the dual, inside/outside perspective.
Images of Indelible Marks

Figure 4.1 Opening Interactions. Photo courtesy of TJ Hellmuth

Figure 4.2 Duet. Photo courtesy of TJ Hellmuth
Figure 4.3 Catch Phrase. Photo courtesy of TJ Hellmuth

Figure 4.4 Falling. Photo courtesy of TJ Hellmuth
Figure 4.5 Whirlpool. Photo courtesy of TJ Hellmuth

Figure 4.6 Trio. Photo courtesy of TJ Hellmuth
and look at the projection, the audience, and the details of the stage space. I enter too, and we all walk and pause, careful to pause abruptly with asymmetrical weight. After months of rehearsing this section, Annie has ruled that if you stop and settle your weight, as you do while standing in line at the grocery store, your energy dies. But if you stop mid-step, with your weight unsettled and caught, as you might do to avoid stepping on your cat when he darts across your pathway, your attention is alert.

This qualitative difference is key to the performance quality of the work; the effort is not a stylized stopping, nor a pedestrian one, but a constructed reality. As I walk, I try to surprise even myself in my choices of stopped moments. Annie’s rulings are not decrees, but rule-setting devices that enable the dancers in the piece to use a score to intensify the sensibilities of the piece.

The relationships in the piece begin to develop as the stilted walking is interrupted by tender, physical encounters between individuals: resting a hand on a sternum, rolling a forehead across an arm, falling together into a lunge, reaching up and over someone’s shoulder. The gestures are slow and soft—making them seem individually important, like a poem comprised of a list of slowly spoken nouns. Action seems inevitable, but absent.

The sonic tone changes, with two clear piano notes. With these, my only music cues in the work, I turn my head sharply looking across the stage then again at the two dancers just downstage of me. They, Anabel and Carrie, are on the floor, leaning against one another. At one moment, Carrie leans over Anabel’s back as she sits on the floor and then slides over her shoulder, extending her leg upwards. The two begin to roll together;
Carrie comes to standing; Anabel kneels, hugging Carrie’s waist, head to solar plexus. Abruptly, as if the ground collapses, she drops a few inches and a split second later, Carrie thrusts her belly forward, knocking Anabel back. As that happens, across the stage we all snap back, taking several steps. This simultaneous repulsion creates the connected dynamic that Annie desires. All actions have consequences.

As Carrie falls, sweeps, and juts across the stage, the piece shifts from the tentative and subtle physical language of the opening section to a dance vocabulary born of nearly a year of improvising together in the studio. This type of creative generation is by no means typical, nor is it unusual, but it is a particular way of working that prioritizes the development of unique physical states and sequences.

The paint has continued to stream across the screen, now layered, dense and dark. Anabel and Mary come together for a faster duet that introduces an awkwardness, but remains tender. Sitting on the floor, Anabel places Mary’s foot onto her back. As Anabel stands, facing a wing, Mary sneaks up behind her, wedging her abducted leg between Anabel’s two. Anabel softly looks down. This seeming imposition is not unwelcome. Others, who have exited the stage, return, and more interaction develops with a heightened interplay between tenderness and oddity.

Soon, Anabel kneels on the floor as if about to crawl and I dive under her and try to stand, knocking her up to her knees. We both turn and come together bumping and tracing lines along the other’s body until we freeze, mid-movement. Like Laurie in the opening, we are caught, but energetic. But unlike the soloist onstage, the interdependence of dancers makes for more complexity as the space between the two or
more bodies presents a readymade context of relationship. Facing upstage, I stare at
Anabel, as if ready to move at any moment, but also alert to my peripheral vision as I
wait for our cue to continue. Moments later this moment is exaggerated, as Anabel and I
stand upright, our toes touching and our noses inches apart.

For me, that is one of the most stunning moments of performance, for I am wholly
wrapped up in Anabel’s presence. We stare into one another’s eyes. Two dancers, ten
years apart in age, who have built the sort of adoring bond that dance can facilitate. I see
her perfect skin, her youth. Sometimes I see in her eyes that she’s anticipating her
upcoming solo—she looks at me with the eyes of a thoroughbred ready to charge out of
the gates and it provokes a funny, banal adoration facilitated by the closeness. This is a
physical experience that average Americans don’t normally undertake, to be so close but
not touching. In some ways our position is a place holder, an interesting interaction
should someone look away from the main event, which is an energetic quartet, but the
tension it provides me as a performer makes the forthcoming action intense in a glorious
way.

Standing there, staring at Anabel, I just have to trust that I will be able to sense
when Carrie rushes by us. When she does, I thrust my chest forward, knocking Anabel
backwards and propelling her into her next phrase of movement. I have to modulate my
energy with enough force to send her across the stage, but not too much, which would
knock her down. She moves away and returns to me, tumbling towards me. I grab her
by the arms, severely, with urgency, and again send her flying.
As the stage empties, with only Laurie sitting centerstage, Anabel begins a solo that tumbles through the space. Her body sweeping, skating, and falling while she reaches, pitches forward, and unwinds as if she is able to slip from the buoyancy of oceanic submersion into the acceleration of gravity through her intention. She seems to reside in her own world, one that exists only on the stage, just once acknowledging the audience as she backs herself upstage, looking out and shaking her head before returning to the swoop of her solo. As she reaches and falls, and Laurie sits, the screen changes to a projection of a long streetside corridor, the kind created by scaffolding during construction. Anabel approaches Laurie and the music shifts, bringing in forceful rhythmic undercurrent. The music states, “wind swept the beach clean, twice a day, wiping the shallow grains of sand textured like an old man’s skin…” The two begin a needy duet that is at once clunky and smooth (Figure 4.2). With sweeping soft gestures, they knock into one another, but the resilience of each body barely registers the force. Laurie seems to be reaching, grabbing for something that is past Anabel; or at other times, she moves Anabel, knocking her arms or lifting her up as if trying not to mold her, but to provoke her. As I watch for my cue from offstage, I marvel at the speed of this gentle dysfunction.

Laurie has learned this duet after Jenna’s illness forced a casting change, and with her 31-year-old, attuned body, she has come to embody the eager, awkward partnering of a college freshman that initially interested Annie. The duet was built upon the bumbling nature of the initial interactions but after Anabel and Jenna had embodied the sequence, the interactions became smoother and seamless. In this case, their
knowledge of the actions accumulated and changed the duet, making it more predictable and, in a sense, rote. In one rehearsal, Annie’s advisor, the renowned choreographer and OSU faculty member Bebe Miller asked Anabel and Jenna to describe how it used to feel, as compared with the current state. They responded that the interactions of the other person used to surprise them more. As they began to know the sequence, they lost their knowledge of the quality. While it is perhaps unusual for a choreographer to desire clunkiness, preserving the sense of newness, or freshness, that comes early in the process is not an uncommon concern in a field that requires both repetition and continual innovation, and Annie worked with the dancers to remake that initial sense of surprise.

In this sense, the infinite complexity of movements, interactions, and intentions that a creative epistemology addresses is particularly germane. As Laurie and Anabel took over the duet and developed it further, they refined the initial quality of an awkward encounter through slight modulations in the ways that each metered her time and quality of touch. The duet grew faster and with the speed came an urgency that begot jarrings and bumbling.

The speed and drive of this duet foreshadows the next section, though much of its movement vocabulary is akin to the earlier parts of the piece. As the duet comes to a close and the rear scrim projection fades, we four of the remaining five dancers charge onto the stage, executing variations on large sweeping and jumping dance phrases. Here, unlike Anabel’s earlier solo where she seemed to move in varied relation to gravity, the phrases are in direct relation to gravity. The movement travels, but the emphasis is in the vertical plane with dropping, rebounding, and an athletic, up-and-over quality.
predominating. This is punctuated by stillnesses on the floor or sweeping horizontal pauses. Although not in complete unison, the material remains the same with sets of dancers in unison. The shift comes when the movement stops traveling and, in place, we move into material that is approximately similar. Called the “Catch Phrase,” (Figure 4.3) we learned this material from a compilation DVD made from quick cuts of each of us improvising. The process was frustrating until we realized that the section would always remain about approximation of content and embodiment of style. At that point, we became less concerned about the placement of an arm, or the rhythm of a step and more attuned to the quality of the person who originated the movement. I know that during the tidbit in which we channel Laurie’s improvisations, I will come to kneeling and shift to sitting, first on one side, then the other, but the direction, order, and timing change each night. What remains is to keep my timing in a tensile relationship to that of the others and to find the softness and sinuosity in the very simple shift that Laurie embodied on the tape.

The stage dims and a box created by lighting appears on the floor, into which walk Laurie and Mary. I stand in the shadows. Laurie tips forward, leaning onto Mary, who embraces her and sets her back upright. Thus begins the section we call “Falling” (Figure 4.4) that is described in Chapter 6. Mary turns and leans backwards, Laurie catches her under her armpits as she falls, and rights her. A pulsing, heartbeat-like sound score rises. They fall into each other again, this time softening onto the floor, pausing, standing, and falling again. Unlike the repetitive falling of German choreographer Pina Bausch’s masterful Café Müller (1978), one does not drop the other; instead, they
simply seem to be resting on an unsupportive surface. I watch for the variations in their falls, trying carefully to recognize my cue. As they fall and fall and fall, they get exhausted and if I jump in too late, they grow angry and, overburdened, near injury. But, if I begin to speak too soon, the section is foreshortened and loses its choreographic value.

Exiting the stage, we all congregate in the upstage right wing through which Laurie shot out to open the piece. Laurie and Mary take a few deep breaths, Mary removes her kneepads, and we all gaze up at the screen and listen carefully. Across the stage, a stagehand is releasing a piece of rope from the hardware that secures two long pieces of paper. They drop next to each other, each about four feet wide and reaching from the fly space above to the floor. We cannot see them from this wing, but we hear the crinkle of the paper as it wafts downward. A black and white projection of a tree covers the rear screen and as the paper drops, the image of the tree shifts forward, projected onto the paper. Laurie dives on stage, repeating the movements that opened the piece. But rather than cross the space alone, she is followed by each of us, in turn, with movement sequences of our own. We each sequenced these movements in a rehearsal, drawing from similar vocabulary and putting them into an individual order, so that they share specific movements and general intentions, but remain distinct. The movements all travel across space in the horizontal plane, with slicing and throwing predominant. After an early rehearsal Bebe remarked, “I love all the little tiny horizontal lines.” After hearing that, I began focusing on all the horizontal pathways, noting beyond initiations or residual movements all the incidental and compulsory horizontal pathways.
Choreographically, the section is like a game of croquet, with each dancer moving along a prescribed line, but others moving farther in a given spurt, and some approaching others and knocking them forward. Like the opening, there are long arrests for each dancer, and surprising initiations. In one moment, Margaret stands frozen, facing the audience as Anabel dives into and rolls upon the floor just beside and behind her. The instant Anabel stands, Margaret turns and continues. In another, I place my ear on Carrie’s outstretched hand, resting there for a moment, and then she flicks her wrist, rolling my head back and making my body tumble around until I reach out to Laurie and steady myself by placing a hand on her shoulder only for her to walk away, leaving my hand in the air. Eventually we are all on the floor, arrested. Then, with a cue from Carrie, we move furiously, low to the ground, ending again still, but crouching. As the rear images saturate into full color, we laboriously rise and fall, running backwards to the right hand of the stage. Several faster duets and solo movements ensue, simultaneously, with partnerships that shifted over the rehearsal process prompted by absence, injury, and the overall artistic benefits of asymmetry—until Margaret stops, breaking out a big phrase of movement, and begins to look at the tree projected on the papers. She walks close to it, then stands, facing the audience, aligning herself with the tree trunk and backing through the crevice that divides the hanging papers. The space grows sparse with a trio, then two duets with slow reaching gestures, and brief, but forceful, shifts of weight.

As the music shifts to a near techno, pulsing beat, the movement becomes more rhythmic. Anabel, Margaret, and Carrie convene and begin cycling through the space with large, athletic movements, bounding diagonally from one side of the stage to the
other with low *chassés*, driving chugs, and lurching weight shifts. This is the remaining snippet of the “Marathon Loop-de-Loop” described in Chapter 4. On their last pass, they approach the hanging paper and jump high, grabbing the paper and tearing it down. Now they begin aggressively rolling on the floor, crumpling the paper and rolling it offstage.

Melancholic music begins and we begin slowly walking diagonally across stage, leaving behind clay footprints. Each dancer makes it about halfway then drops to the ground, repeating a floor phrase that has appeared throughout the piece wherein each movement in some way wipes the clay as the dancer dives and rolls atop the floor. The movement now serves to smear the clay footprints. As the rolling dancers retreat, more dancers walk, stepping over the low-lying. The stage is barely lit, and the tone is somber. Again the lines between image, act, and intention are distinct.

The action feels tenuous. My feet begin the walk coated in a water-based clay slip, so the first few steps are unstable and frightening. As the slip slightly dries, each step, while still slippery, portends less likelihood of my feet shooting out from under. The slow pace of the walk, the separation of bodies walking into darkness, the footsteps and swiped pathways marking the floor, feel tragic. At another level of my consciousness, I have to take care not to walk with the drone of the music, or pause at a predictable moment.

As we exit the stage, we step onto four large wet towels. We bend over, wipe our feet, trying to quickly clean off the remaining dried slip so that we have some traction for the next section. I have few moments off stage and sometimes I can see Jenna and Carrie begin the next section, my favorite section to dance. We call it “Whirlpool” (Figure 4.5).
In the next chapter I describe how we created it by tracing pathways along each others bodies then improvising, physically remembering those pathways. Annie has choreographed it as a rotating series of interactions. Small, short duets and trios, with the rest of us walking around, cycling around the action. Each encounter involves a tracing of sorts. With different body parts—an elbow, a head, a shin—we press into and slide across one another as if trying to mold a mass of clay.

Annie frequently talked about imprinting, and I feel a strong sense of being marked in this section. It feels important and exposing, though not to the audience, but to one another. The consistency of circling feels almost animalistic, like circling prey, yet the quality of touch is not aggressive but instead demands a nurturing. It has the quality of a hug you give someone about to leave for a place where they will not be safe. A goodbye hug that says please stay.

The movement, though, is neither slow, nor grasping; it shifts between sustained and quick, darting reactions. Anabel slides her arm along Laurie, tracing down her back then quickly shifts Laurie off balance, though a split second later she recovers. There are little bursts of action, tiny cascades of initiation and response.

The pace picks up with more darting and sweeping. As I approach Mary, we each have one arm raised shoulder height—with a slight adjustment we would simply hug—but instead we knock into one another; she then crouches down and I rest my shin along her back. I weight for the slightest weight shift beneath me, then allow her movement to trigger my leg to swing back and around. I do a little ball change weight shift, and look at her. We always have a slight smile. I return to walking the cycling
pathway. The section builds in intensity as we carefully watch the centered duets and trios, walking faster with more urgency and interacting with less care and more need. Each duet has moved the group farther downstage right. Fueled by the string score that links the simplicity of the walking with the complexity of these many interactions, we are emotionally charged. Present with each other, with a fullness and responsibility to the group that carries an urgency, we quickly move from interaction to circling. Never in the same spot in the circle, when the cue happens for us to leave, Carrie, Laurie, Jenna, and I race off stage.

The moment feels sad, like I have been cast out. But I quickly cease being in a performance state and shift to a position off stage, out of view of the audience and watch the remaining sections. I find the upcoming trio (Figure 4.6) exquisite. Mary describes the making of it in Chapter 7. Mary, Anabel, and Margaret seem to execute three independent, yet intertwined, phrases replete with the sorts of full-bodied gestures that feel meaning-rich yet mystifying. There is no affect; the neediness of the previous section seems gone. It is not gentle nor rough. But the three interact causally at moments, fully interdependent, and at other moments they are close in space, yet seem separated by decades. At one moment, Anabel stands facing the audience, looking outwards with her fists clenched and her shoulders drawn up to her ears. Margaret reaches out to her, touches her head. The tension melts from her body, her head falls back exposing her throat and she lunges sideways, reaching for Mary’s back, prompting her to jump and turn. There is a sense of caretaking and an expectation of care. People rely on people. Simple as that. They repeat the trio, faster. What were full body gestures are now
sweeping, fast weight shifts and falls; gentle touches are quick, responsibilities. It looks like little, delicate gasps of breath.

Margaret exits and only Mary and Anabel remain on stage. The theme of relationship is pared down to its barest form. Two people and the space between them. They repeat a duet from earlier in this piece, this time in the context of all that has come before it. It’s brief, almost a restating of the whole piece. Touching, sweeping generous lunges, leaning on one another, pulling and pushing, holding, melting. As the lights fade, Anabel walks away from Mary. I’m never sure why. All actions have consequences.
Chapter 7

The Process and Practices of Knowing

Use unknown ways to solve unknown problems.

Margaret Mead on teaching, 1950

Each dancer stands in the middle of the circle, and the rest of us surround her, touching her with the pads of two fingers. Our instruction is to trace pathways, applying enough pressure that the center dancer doesn’t get “that creepy light touch feeling,” or feel tickled. As we trace pathways, I notice the feelings of different types of flesh: fibrous muscles, buoyant cartilage, and malleable fat. I grow curious as I navigate, seeing bumps and curves anew as I move my body vertically, except my arm, which traces all over. I’m drawn to make curvy, bumpy lines but notice that others are making long sweeping strokes, while still others make tiny spirals. One by one, in silence, we back away leaving the dancer to remember the pathways that were just drawn upon her. With each dancer, I’m struck by the way that she begins, almost awkwardly, as if renegotiating her body. These “memory recall” dances build and I begin to see each dancer’s movement style emerge, yet with a new sense of responding to outside information—although these dances happen with eyes closed. When it’s my turn in the center, I have a reaction like no one else. When traces come near my neck, I flinch and squeal and yank my hands up, batting theirs away. I’m not surprised; I have a visceral fear of being choked, but I thought I could overcome it. Annie instructs the dancers to press more firmly and I instruct myself not to be afraid, but the same thing happens again. We proceed with everyone avoiding my throat, meaning that they trace from my breastbone, shoulder, or spine, then jump up to my head. It’s disconcerting. Moments later, I improvise with a sense of release and yet following. Rather than feeling in the moment, I feel like I’m racing forward trying to catch something that is going forth without me. These traces that have existed within me continue.

-Fieldnote, Indelible Marks rehearsal, September 2009

Many choreographers walk into the studio with no plan. Working with an open premise, these artists navigate intuitively, creating work by looking at what they see in
each rehearsal and making ensuing decisions accordingly. Other choreographers enter with detailed scores, assignments for dancers, or problems to solve. Still others enter with exact movement phrases to convey. For either the choreographer with an emergent premise or one with a concrete agenda, what she or he emphasizes—in the form of how she or he describes a step, coaches a dancer’s performance, or puts the sensibility of the piece into words—develops through a dynamic interaction between the choreographers, dancers, teachers, and physical spaces. The trust that resides in this process comes from the richly rewarding task of dance-making: the dancer delights in the internal experience of doing challenging, provoking work and the director or choreographer revels in seeing his or her vision embodied in performance. That’s one reality.

Choreographers may also spend rehearsals complaining or worrying. Dancers arrive late, tired, often injured, and unwilling to risk. Some dances are boring. Yet, regardless of creative process, the resulting choreography includes the bodies and minds of all involved. From amazing to mundane to sadistic, the multiple instances that constitute contemporary dance practice are multifaceted and fundamentally tied to the everyday and the extraordinary moments and the structure of a dance education. Danced knowledge as understood in this study is enabled through connectivity, both interpersonally and in each dancer’s relationship to the field.

**The Extraordinary Creative Process**

Looking at dance education as a system involves stepping back for a new perspective. In many, if not most, undergraduate composition classes, students are assigned to watch how people in a public space negotiate the physical and social world.
How do people on the bus shift when someone sits down next to them (not just why, but how)? How often does one see collisions between two people on the street? What subtle shifts of weight and stutters in time produce avoidance? What patterns emerge? Observing the shifts in space and time within a social environment reveals the rules structuring everyday behaviors. Noticing such spatial and temporal organization then becomes creatively generative. But, how does one learn how to move through our everyday lives? And what does that mean for unusual experiences, such as performance events?

Dance as a practice is both everyday and extraordinary. The education of young dancers organizes these distinctly: you go to class and rehearsals five, six, or seven days a week, and a few times a year you get on stage and perform. Performances are special: your friends and family come; your faculty members compliment you; you have receptions and parties afterwards; you exchange gifts with the choreographer. But while performances are special, the extraordinary comes in the moments when a dancer physically discovers and accomplishes a desired sensation, embodying what has been an idea or a visual exemplar in a teacher or choreographer’s body or words. Moments of epiphany (Wainwright & Turner, 2004) transform students’ understandings of the possibilities of sensation, and these understandings become integrated through dialogues. While performance is a structured event, it is also a quality that one strives to cultivate in class. The notion of performance pervades dance education as it describes an event and a quality of movement. To approach each class or audition as a performance means to push oneself qualitatively rather than approach class like a series of rote drills.
**What Defines Performance?**

Erving Goffman, a contemporary of Becker, whose theory of art worlds is discussed in Chapter 4, is best known for his use of theatrical conventions as metaphors for social interactions. In his 1959 *The presentation of self in everyday life*, he argues that in each situation, we present ourselves in a way that “contribute[s] to a single overall definition of the situation which involves not so much a real agreement as to what exists but rather a real agreement as to whose claims concerning what issues will be temporarily honored” (p.122). While we are often unaware of such performances in our social interactions—or, at times detachedly wondering, ‘Why am I acting this way?’ without changing course—Goffman suggests that disruptions to the projected self (practical jokes, stories, or fantasies) are important because they keep people “modest in their claims and reasonable in their projected expectations” (p.123). In other words, we are not wholly unaware, because at moments of disruption the rote is made evident.

According to Goffman, while a projected definition can become an identity, it can also create internal turmoil when one’s persona feels inauthentic. In this study, the term “authentic” (as well as “real” and “natural” and to a lesser extent “organic”) were frequently used by the participants, and while the students also question the veracity of those words, they seem to function as a best-fit for certain dance experiences. Being authentic is a felt state, a schemata in which different experiences “work” in concert. Goffman’s assertion that “when an individual appears before others, he knowingly and unwittingly projects a definition of the situation, of which a conception of himself is an important part” (p. 126), conveys the importance of the individual, the individual’s self-
perceptions, interactions, and situations. The dancers in this study engage in fascinating work when read in relation to Goffman’s theory, for they actively question their conceptions of themselves and seek both to control and to free their self presentations in relation to their physical and interpersonal environments both in dance and out of dance. Beyond Goffman’s notion of the interaction between people being transacted through claims rather than over “what exists,” these dancers dialogically engage with such situations, developing both shared and individuated understandings, trying to strip away layers of codified behavior and entering into an unstable universe. Because of the nature of the rehearsal process, even when improvisational (wherein the discrete steps differ), the task is to make and remake ideas. The “real” is constantly changing, as is the physical matter. Dancers get stronger, faster, and more fluid, in both matter and perception.

What Makes Danced Knowledge Transmutable?

The college dancers in this study understand danced knowledge as fluid—not relative or arguable *per se*, but interpersonal and requisitely adaptable. In the next passage, from an interview towards the beginning of Annie’s choreographic process, I ask Mary what it means to know in dance. She connects herself with the material, conceptualizing “being with” the material as a way to develop knowledge within it.

Mary: [Knowing] is when I want to find something else—or find something about me in it. I’m *right there* with the material. When I’ve got it, then I can start looking for where I can—not where I can just look better—but where I can do something that is more mine with it. In it.

Ashley: And are you consciously thinking, ‘Oh that reach, I could do that more,’ Or do things happen and you think, ‘Whoa, that was fun. Why?’
Mary: A little bit of both. It might depend on how much freedom I’m given. I’ve found myself [having] to stop myself and think, ‘I don’t really like that;’ then sometimes it’s easy for me to replace it [or] modify it. But other times, the more I can sit with a phrase—like Annie’s phrase, I’ve been really with the mass of it.63

Like Mary, these dancers see that danced knowledge requires allowing growth to happen over time. “Being with” enables the collaborative creative processes that generate much contemporary work. It is also an enactment of engaged learning. Mary references a presence, being “right there with;” a dialogical understanding, looking for opportunities (others describe questioning the material); evaluation; allowing for time, and conceiving of the knowledge and the content as relational, engaging with “the mass of it,” in other words, the gestalt of the work: the whole phrase rather than a series of steps. Likewise, Jenna describes developing comfort with the instability of the work, noting:

Not everything you make has to be so precious; everything is entitled to change and you have to be open for that. We changed things until a week before [the concert] and that kind of not knowing but needing to be aware, was a challenge but it’s something that was really important to have, because things are constantly changing and you need to have that, [to] be stable regardless, and you need to be ready to change.64

Mamie too, speaks of the fluidity of knowledge in the quote below, noting how understanding dance improvisation as vast and changing has allowed her to approach academic writing as a generative, less precious, task.

I’ve started to write papers [using a] stream of consciousness, I’ll write everything I can think of, then look at it and edit it and add more. … I used to never be able to generate enough material, or information, or ideas but now I feel like I could write as long an essay as I want. Usually I have too much to write about. Yesterday [in an exam] we had an hour and I was writing and writing and didn’t even get everything down. In high school I [wouldn’t have known what to write]

63 Mary, September interview
64 Jenna, May interview
so it [improvisation] has definitely helped me generate ideas—I allow myself to think more and evaluate.  

Enactive Knowledge is Both an Internal Process and a Social Negotiation

Studies of knowledge-in-action highlight a sector of knowledge that has been excised from the college curriculum. As Cheville (2001) writes in her work on college athletes, *Minding the body: What student athletes know about learning*:

In the university classroom, faculty who believe intellectual labor necessitates a mythic transcendence of mind over matter may fail to recognize, or even reject, the bodily dilemmas that situate students’ conceptual orientations. Faculty who view the phrase “student athlete” as paradoxical are guided by what bell hooks (2004) cites as ‘the romantic notion of the professor...as a mind that...is always at odds with the body’ (137). (p. 3)

Dance can become romanticized as the antithesis of “intellectual labor” as the ultimate non-verbal expression: physical labor. In fact, the learning constructed within dance studios, classrooms, and theaters is generated through a complicated interplay of verbal, tactile, visual, kinesthetic, and social modalities. Dancers often complain that when they state their major the responses are either “I didn’t think you could major in dance” or “that must be fun.” Collegiate study of dance is many things, including fun, but on a daily basis, it is just as likely to be discouraging or inspiring, depleting or invigorating. Most importantly, it is constantly negotiated, both discursively and physically. The dancers in this study work out their understandings of dance through multi-modal processes, combining affective (emotional), physical, and cognitive means. They position themselves in relation to one another and in relation to the material.

In the following quote from an interview immediately following a rehearsal, we see this interplay of modalities. Anabel references emotional reactions, social influences,

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65 Mamie, September interview
the performance state of full, attentive presence, kinesthetic recall, evaluation, reward/praise, authenticity, other sites of learning, comparison, and cognitive/visceral dissonance all in response to the question, “How does it feel to know something in dance?”

Today didn’t feel good. Things weren’t working and I don’t know why. I don’t think my mind was there all the way. I can tell when things are feeling really good, because my mind is there. [After] our last rehearsal I left that and felt so great. This whole thing…[She begins tracing herself, showing the initiation of the earlier improvisation that is highlighted in the fieldnote that opens this chapter] Tracing the body—I don’t know what that did to me. Actually, during the audition [for faculty repertory], before we did the improv part, I closed my eyes and tried to remember what the tracing felt [like]. Because the improv I did right afterwards just felt so great. Things were just coming out of my body and I was like, ‘Oh, this is fun.’ And Mary came up to me [and said], ‘You just looked so genuine when you did that.’ It was really nice to hear that and it reminded me of authentic movement which I learned about at ADF… I [thought], ‘Now that felt really authentic.’ I just wasn’t thinking about what I was doing, and today, you know, I just kept thinking about what to do when I was improv-ing rather than letting it go and just doing it.66, 67

Earlier in the same interview, when talking about technique class, she said, “I think that’s why I love dance so much, it’s so active. You are constantly thinking. You have to be really, really smart to be doing what we are doing.” As discussed in Chapter 4, the problem of thinking, or the definition thereof, creates a rich contradiction. In this case, danced knowledge is a contextualized kinesthetic intelligence that relies on attunement to others and attention to the self. It is the sort of knowledge, like Wacquant’s corporeal capital, that is produced through training. Studio-work provides an opportunity to conceptualize dance understandings, the underpinnings of learning, as both

66 Anabel, September interview
67 ADF is the American Dance Festival in Durham North Carolina. This six-week festival, the antecedent of which is discussed in the history appendix, has long been the summer training ground of pre-professional dancers. Authentic movement is an improvisatory dance practice that prioritizes attuning to internal sensations and movement desires.
an internal process and a social negotiation, for, as in this example, the student’s learning is regulated both by internal desires and by her position within a vast web of connections. Wacquant (2006) provides a conceptualization of bodily attunement when negotiating explanations by boxers that boxing is both “a ‘thinking man’s game” and “‘no place for thinkin’” (p. 97). He writes: “It is the trained body that is the spontaneous strategist; it knows, understands, judges, and reacts all at once” (p. 97). While dancing, the body and mind are in a similar functional loop. Dancers prioritize heightened awareness of inner experience and develop bodily intuition and efficient and dynamic movement. Like the boxer in the ring, the dancer operates in relation to the others in the space and the values upon which the system relies (colloquially speaking, the rules of the game).

**Knowing in the Body**

Margaret Wilson’s (2007) dissertation, *Knowing in the body: A dancer’s emergent epistemology* is a grounded theory of bodily knowledge developed in a dance context. Her work address the question “What does it mean to know in the body?” (p. 55) through a multi-site case study of somatic education courses and biomechanical research projects, and produces a model for danced knowledge that relies on a process of experimentation, integration, and reflection. Of this, Wilson writes:

Dancers are Bodies-in-the-World who enter into a particular environment or dance milieu; dancers enter into a dynamic interaction when dancing. And yet, dance is more than movement. It is bodily knowledge with aesthetic agency. Through experimentation, integration and embodied reflection, dancers learn to balance conflicting information, direct attention into knowing, embody concepts in their dancing, and apply information in intersections. Therefore, a dancer’s ability to develop knowledge or knowing develops from her interaction, her acting in a specific environment, and her enaction—her dynamic affordance with the environment. (p. 228)
This model is generated via theories of affordance (a set of psychological theories that see the world as a multitude of sensori-motor opportunities), embodied cognition (scientific and philosophical work on the relationship between material experience and encoded concepts), and phenomenology (the philosophy of being-in-the-world). Wilson posits,

Knowing in the body requires each individual dancer to discover 1) how information from outside her body makes sense in her body, 2) how information about her body, or from her body, interfaces with her movements, and 3) how this information functions in harmony with the particular demands of the milieu. This knowing occurs when a dancer is in a dynamic relationship with her body. This dynamic relationship is a physical engagement that occurs when the dancer comes to understand both the possibilities and limits of movement, when she understands the intersections of her dancing body and the world in which she is dancing. (p. 235)

Wilson’s work points to something integral to this study: the degree to which the dancers’ dynamic engagement in the LMA element of Body fosters connections. She connects this to the first element of her cycle, experimentation: “Through experiential work, a dancer comes into contact with her body and her self. Experiential work provides a place of epistemic connection that lays the groundwork for dancers to develop knowledge in their bodies” (p. 196). But who isn’t embodied? And how does one come into contact with one’s self? Certainly, while alive, we are physical creatures. Even when not in prime form, who are we if not ourselves? Being “in my body” and “being myself” are metaphoric constructs. As Wilson uses them, these two states are tangible for dancers. In my personal experience, as someone who has for years taught yoga and pilates to a non-dancer population, I believe they are states that most sedentary, highly stressed Americans rarely experience. While one might never literally not be in his or
her body, the feeling of full presence is another matter. Presence and authenticity, or “really doing something,” come up frequently in these stories. This kind of awareness is experienced by heightening attention to the moment. In the following passage, Mary describes a trio that closes *Indelible Marks*. She presents a state of knowing that defies simple explanation, yet articulates a danced presence.

I didn’t even have to look at them to know what they were doing. I didn’t even have to look in order to know what I was doing. I didn’t have to look in. It was just knowing exactly what was happening, but at the same time not being on auto-pilot. It wasn’t, ‘Oh, I know what’s going to happen,’ it was knowing in the moment. Not predicting, because it was always different. It was one of those things: it was always different but always the same. It was great. It felt very spontaneous. But I think Annie thought it was the most consistent [part of the piece], but it never felt preconceived, ever. It felt consistent. It was a really nice balance between all the kinds of awareneses, all the kinds of things we were working on all came together really easily there, for some reason. When Annie was making it, it was like [she snaps quickly 5 times] “You go here.” And we were like “Yeah, yeah, that makes sense.” Actually, it was hard when we were learning it; it wasn’t easy to learn. It was easy to create, but it wasn’t easy to [retain]. The way we came to know it came slower than the way it made sense choreographically.68

For Mary, her understanding of this section comes from her engagement and comfort in understanding it as known, yet “always different.”

**Understanding the Social Dimensions of Dance Knowledge**

Mary, Margaret, and Anabel cultivate an awareness by integrating the experiences of doing and the history of how the section was made. Wilson’s conclusions illustrate a distinction between her dissertation research and mine. Using grounded theory (Corbin & Strauss, 1998), she prioritizes developing a model from the data and supported by theory. As such, she ends up arguing for a generalizable model of dance knowledge replete with processes and constructs. Yet, mostly absent from her work are the socio-

68 Mary, May interview
cultural dimensions of dancing. While she writes of intersections and ecologies, of dancer and environment, it is as if each “body-in-the-world” is a universe unto itself—a self and a body that interacts among a set of discrete stimuli. For instance, when writing of the students in her course, she writes that they needed to make “the distinction between ‘the body’ and ‘my body’” (p. 136) in order to develop knowledge. I acknowledge the need to personalize experience but what I’ve found in this study is that the students tend to speak and dance in relation to one another and to the form. I see that they locate danced knowledge within a system that functions because of their engagement with an unstable form.

**Improvising in Dance and in Life**

These dancers co-construct meaningful ties from the dance studio to their lives as college students. The following conversation took place in the studio after a group improvisation in the PIE repertory class. After an evaluation of their composition, they quickly transitioned into a discussion of the relationship of this studio work to their outside lives.69

“I feel taken care of in this group,” Sydney begins, “[But,] on a life level, how do you surround yourself with people where you feel like you can take responsibility for the people around you and they can be responsible for you? You have that relationship [here], but how can you take that into life so you are comfortable with who you are with? Because in college, you meet all sorts of people and you are in so many situations on the life level. How do you try to keep that same comfort of sharing responsibility and

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69 PIE class, Autumn, transcribed from videotape
helping and community, outside of an ensemble? If I take risk, whatever that may be, in life, and things start to implode— [It’s like] when someone stumbles or falls here, it’s okay because someone is going to come in and help fix the scene.”

“Or come fall with you” Reese interjects and they laugh.

Sydney laughingly agrees, “Right, and then it makes it part of it. But how does that transition to life?…”

“I think we are so attuned to that [group responsibility in the studio]” Claire states, “that we feel like when someone is not, does not, give us that, does not have that give and take with us—[that sense] of if you have a problem you can take responsibility for each other. I’m very aware of that.”

Claire, Reese, and Sydney suggest that the qualities of their relationships while improvising relate to their relationships in life and the need to trust when giving and receiving care.

The Role of Social Connectedness

In a different look at the same question of the dancer’s knowledge, dance education theorist Risner (2000) approaches the question of dancers’ knowledge in the rehearsal process through an examination of students involved in a piece he choreographed. His article, rich in dancer description, points to several dimension forefronts “knowing from a particular body, place, time and context” (p. 157) and proposes the following dimensions of knowing: knowing as an interpersonal construction,” “knowing by doing,” “knowing as memory,” and “knowing as certainty.” While the dancer experience might not be important for many professional choreographers, Risner argues, it is of utmost
importance to the dance educator, for whom “exploring the world in which our dance
students reside is critical” (p. 156).

Although Risner does not articulate the social practices that may have fostered the
interpersonal knowing that his dancers describe, he does demonstrate the importance of
connection as a dimension of knowledge. He writes that “each of the dancers sees an
important connection between knowing the dance and engaging in meaningful
relationship with others in the group,” (p. 161) noting that several speak of “trusting and
depending on others in the process” (p. 162). Connection, a key psychosocial variable in
college student development (Lee & Robbins, 2000) seems, in both Risner’s study and
this one, to be particularly evident in the rehearsal process, where students are involved in
systems in which they literally rely on the strength and accuracy of one another, for
instance when partnering or taking a cue from another dancer. As in team sports, the
responsibility for learning and achievement gets distributed across a system of relational
knowing that is produced by bodily activity (Cheville, 2001).

Several dimensions influence this connectedness. One is that the intensity of the
dancer’s schedule is markedly different from that of the average college student and it is
not uncommon for these students to be in the dance building engaged in interpersonal
learning (classes and rehearsals) for full days, seven days of the week. While they have
both traditional academic courses for their general education requirements, double
majors, and dance academic courses that require independent work, their creative classes
generally require group study in the form of rehearsals, group video projects, or when
working on solo compositions or notation projects, another dancer to whom to show the
work. Beyond that, many dancers choose to live with other dancers and most develop strong friendships with at least a few classmates. Sydney and Reese describe the quality of their dance friendships:

Sydney: We’ve been hanging out more in the studio [and] outside of the studio. Sometimes when we are hanging out we talk about dance, and sometimes we don’t. It used to always have to be about dance when we were together and I had other friends that I went and hung out with on the weekends, but now it’s like, these are the people that I’m comfortable with and these are the situations that I’m comfortable with as a person and not just a dancer.

Reese: I think it’s weirdly related to the fact that we are so comfortable with sharing our bodies, like in improv and stuff that it’s like, these are our body friends, as opposed to our, mind friends which are like our, (she smiles, perhaps catching herself dichotomizing mind and body, and backtracks): Whatever! We just realized that it’s all trust and [all] related.\(^{70}\)

Despite the importance of out-of-studio friendships and social networks, fostering connections in the studio means more than just building friendships among dancers. The relationships must connect to the values of the piece or process to translate into danced knowledge. Mary, reflecting on Annie’s process and her own first piece of choreography, describes how she plans to develop a group sense in her next piece after having neglecting that aspect of the process previously:

I know it’s going to be a collaborative process, like Annie’s was. … That’s a goal of mine. [So] it’ll be something more than just a group dance. I’ll be able to develop a sense of a group more because that was one thing that I skipped over [in my last piece], that we had a lot of in Annie’s piece: the sense of a group, which is really important. I knew that from Annie’s but I guess I just took it for granted. …I lucked out that my cast was really close to begin with because they are mostly in the same class and they know each other as friends like we all do. But they didn’t seem to—even though they were friends—they didn’t seem to translate that into dancing as a group. Even though they are a group of friends, so then when it came time to hone everything for performance, I [thought] “They don’t really know

\(^{70}\) December group interview
that they are a group” so that was a big problem because when it came time to see it on stage, it didn’t work, in a way. ⁷¹

The sense of group connection in performance can also feed into a sense of achievement. As the one PIE participant wrote on the course blog:

Our performance on Friday seemed to be a success. I was quite nervous and found myself having to hold back various impulses. Thanks to our warm up and discussion prior to the performance, we were able to connect with each other and define the space. The feedback was encouraging and supportive and I am excited to perform again! I felt like part of an ensemble for the first time. Our score was simple: duet, diagonal. From my experiences this quarter, the more simple the scores the better the results. Scores with many demands can sometimes cause us to move too quickly through each instruction. The freedom that comes with a score like ours on Friday can be intimidating. But, with a strong connection to each other and focused attention to the space, the results can be complex and intricate. ⁷²

She ties interpersonal connection with connection to the space as keys to a successful improvisation.

How “Ruling Relations” Affect the Position of Danced Knowledge

I began this work believing that sociocultural and historical discourses, what sociologist Smith calls the “ruling relations,” also influence dancers. My data confirms, or perhaps reflects, that belief. This is evident, for instance, in Chapter 6 with injured Carrie’s concern that the department will see her as “easily replaceable” if she has to have surgery. This concern—the number of eager, talented dancers and the few opportunities—is realized to a degree in the academy, but it more accurately represents the field of contemporary dance, where competition is fierce, even for unpaid work. In the economy of dance, dancers function as muses, as workers, and products; “replacability” is a pressing concern both to choreographers and to dancers. In addition

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⁷¹ Mary, May interview  
⁷² http://performimprov.wordpress.com
to Carrie’s injury, when Jenna was diagnosed with mononucleosis and the doctor instructed her to restrict her dancing, Annie was told by a faculty member that many dancers could do that part and to ‘just replace her.’ This statement was not malicious; surely the faculty member was trying to prevent further injury and avoid impeding the work, but a dancer knows that she can give herself fully to a work, and then by injury or choreographic decision, she can lose it. This is another facet of the instability of knowledge: it is fluid, to the point of dissipating. The vehicle of knowledge is the body—and the body is a fragile container. Unlike the activities that constitute most disciplines in the academy, in dance, as in contact sports, the act of dancing is often itself injurious. While it would be irrational for a computer scientist to worry frequently about having a brain injury, joint or muscle injury is a rational and pervasive fear among dancers. This context, even when it is not immediately lived by the dancers, is present in the system creating a sense of not dancing as a ruling relation of dancing.

Returning to Wilson’s theory of dance knowledge, her emphasis on the individual nature of these processes, i.e., “Dancers make meaning and develop knowing through interactions with their bodies,” (p. 217) partially conflicts with the narratives in this study. While highly attentive to their physical states, these dancers view their learning as interpersonally connected. As Wilson would argue, they negotiate the physical boundaries of one another when dancing together, but I note they also live together, eat together, talk about ideas, feel left out, and form collective as well as individual identities, and these relationships bleed into and out of the studio. While there are distinct friendships among the participants, beyond those, there is a distinct collegiality
and competition that seems vital to their understanding of dance. The dancers develop through physical, affective, and verbal dialogues. Resting a hand on another, offering emotional support, or arguing about an issue—they make meaning through interaction.

**Tying Beauty and Challenge**

The social nature of developing danced knowledge is also present in conversations where dancers challenge one another, providing a sort of “checking” system. In the following conversation in an *Indelible Marks* rehearsal, the graduate students, Laurie and Annie challenge and complicate the developing understandings of the undergraduates. This excerpt begins when Laurie responds to an inspirational essay written by the chair of the department. Laurie argues here for the everyday: the gritty, hard parts of dance that make the beautiful resonate. She argues for the action of dance—the doing, the dancing.

“I think we all need to be careful about jumping on the bandwagon of ‘Yes, this is such a beautiful thing we do and we are all so beautiful.’” Laurie laughs and I jump in with,

“—the romanticized version”

Refining her point, she uses the metaphor of “grounding” experience in both the beautiful and the challenging moments, “The romanticized version. That is part of what we do, but if it’s not grounded in anything—if it’s not grounded in the days that you feel euphoric and the days that feel really hard—if it’s not grounded in that, then we lose the richness of what this is.”

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Anabel situates what Laurie is saying within her own narrative of experience, her position on a path to becoming a professional dancer:

“I understand what she was saying. It is beautiful. But I think if we are trying to make it, to be a professional, there is a lot of work to be done. Being in Susan’s [Hadley’s very fast and challenging] class, I was like, ‘Wow, that really grounded me. I have a another mountain [to cross].’ And that’s what’s exciting about it: there’s never going to be perfect. So you have this motor. This is the next step, then the next, then the next. And it’s not about, ‘Oh, what a lovely dancer.’”

Warning of complacency, Jenna agrees, “I feel like you can only be so beautiful; when it gets too beautiful, it’s boring.”

Speaking with confidence suggesting that she’s thought a lot about this issue, Annie states: “It’s like recasting our notion of beauty as something that contains contrast. And that we need the lows to understand that the highs are highs, and vice versa.”

After Anabel refers to her morning technique class as a “reality check,” Carrie agrees: “I mean, I felt like shit in class this morning. [Feeling like] I can’t do one thing that she just asked us to do. And I probably could have two years ago.”

Again, Annie helps refine the problem by pointing out that technique class is “about how to work, and what to work on.” She references the notion that these dancers need to work on quality and risk, not simply learning the steps—the sense of undoing, repeating, and refining in order to develop as performers.
“It’s nice to know there are tons of things” Carrie begins, shifting the tone of the conversation to a sort of resolve, and Anabel agrees, “That’s the thing, it never gets boring.”

Having listened quietly, Margaret speaks up, addressing the “hardness” Laurie first brought up: “At the same time, there’s a feeling, like, once you feel comfortable with something and you get to one place, then you see something and you think—I will never be good enough. It’s that constant feeling that you are never going to match up, then once you finally think you are somewhere you see something else and you are like, ‘Ugh!’ And I guess that’s what keeps me going.”

The importance of this conversation is the work that the dancers do to understand their discipline in terms of the effort it requires and the challenges it holds. They negotiate it by bringing forward their individual experiences and vantage points, but also by trying to come to a group consensus.

**Between Physical Sensation and Linguistic Understandings**

The language of a dancer remembering and hearing the remembrances of fellow dancers also results in a shared construction of knowledge and a shared lexicon, as does the physical reality of dancing together. Writing of the somatic reeducation practice, Alexander Technique, Tarr (2008) suggests that the knowledge developed therein is functional and reciprocal:

From an ethnographic perspective, Alexander Technique is interesting because of its status as a bodily practice whose tenets are not easily translatable into words. While words may be used in Alexander lessons, what they point to is corporeal; the Technique is a kind of embodied knowledge. (p. 479)
As in Alexander Technique, the words that a choreographer uses to describe movement provide yet another theoretical framework from whence to move and they are an attempt to create complex understandings. In that struggle, the difficulty of translation creates opportunities for dialogue, exploration, and risk-taking. One example in this study was that Annie repeatedly asked us to find “thickness” in our movements in a particular section. We likely each interpreted this differently, and the results never suited her. At one point Laurie said, “She just needs to pick another word.” But while the slipperiness of words pointing to movement makes the task daunting, it is also my justification for having kept intact so many of the narratives in this document. Rather than view the stories and discussions as data to parse, I have looked at them as an opportunity to make available the shadowed, textured learning processes of dancing. I see the contradictions, confusions, and remappings as illuminating the myriad ways that dancers experience sensation, dialogue, risk, and connectivity. But beyond the presentation of the narratives, the idea that we can do knowledge is particularly useful for the dance scholar. I am concerned that the disembodiment of knowledge in dance (for example conceptualizing the body as a site or an instrument rather than as a being) strips the action from the dancing. Conceiving of the body as a symbol rather than an actor negates the dancing in dance. I am not arguing for an approach to knowing dance that devalues the cognitive aspect of analysis. Instead, I suggest that if we consider sensation, dialogue, pain, and connectivity as organizing concepts in dance, we can understand the multiple dimensions that enable dance as a creative process.
An act of cultural production and resistance, dance is a practice, a way of being, and a way of knowing. In the Western Cartesian paradigm, descriptive knowledge (knowing that can be stated in a declarative sentence, i.e. being able to explain that a *plié* is a bending of the knees and that ballet originated in the French courts) is often privileged over procedural knowledge (knowing how to perform something, i.e. the ability to do a plié). Someone who can declare is considered smart, whereas someone who can do is, at best, competent. Following Risner’s (2000) suggestion that dancers’ epistemologies are “rooted in the whole body and frequently conjoin knowing that and knowing how... transcend[ing] traditional epistemology all together” (p. 157), I suggest that studio-based dance practices further destabilize the knowledge hierarchy. In dance, knowing that, knowing how, and knowing of are not only co-dependent but are developed through a process that oscillates in the moment between cognitive, emotional, and physical understandings and tacks, over time, between movement acts and reflective practices.
Chapter 8

Conclusion

Limitations of the Study

This study was inarguably limited in scope and is not generalizable. Instead, its validity relies in its ability to provoke discourse (Lather, 2001). My interest was in investigating the knowledge practices cultivated in the dance studio by looking at how twelve dancers constructed their learning and how the system of dance learning in higher education operated. In large part, I wanted to know what questions to ask. Even though I had been rehearsing in the studio consistently and thought frequently about learning outcomes, I was not sure where to start with knowing. In dance we talk a lot about how much the body knows, but there has been limited inquiry into the dancer’s understanding of knowledge, and the cultural practices that foster those understandings. This dissertation contributes to that line of inquiry. The primary limitation is that this study size is by no means representative of dancers in higher education. In fact, when looking at demographic characteristics, it was not representative of the department in which it took place with all the study participants white and the majority coming from out of state.
That the study did not look at demographics or personal histories in relation to developing danced knowledge may be a significant oversight.

This study is grounded in a specific aesthetic, type of institution, and geographic location. It is worth noting that the beliefs and constructions that arise in this study are likely deeply tied to the values of postmodern dance and improvisation, and the degree to which I have parsed those influences is limited. Likewise the environmental, social, and academic situation of a large BFA dance program in a huge university is likely different from that in a much smaller program. For instance, one might wonder how dancers in a program that graduates a few dance majors a year, does not distinguish courses for dance majors from those for elective students, and in which cohorts of students are loosely constructed would describe their sense of connection to peers or a dance community.

The size of the dance department at Ohio State also afforded these dancers access to see many performance and the relationship of viewership to developing danced knowledge is not explored here. Lastly, my concern for the rights and privacy of these dancers led to a selectivity in presenting the data that may not give full voice to the challenges, frustrations, and pains that some of the dancers experience. While I touch on these by presenting a few anonymous quotes, I remain concerned that that is an important absence in this text.

**Aims, Objectives, and Outcomes**

My goal in undertaking this project was to better understand the nature of the type of knowledge requisite in dance, as understood by college dancers. I hope this work
opens for discussion the knowledge practices that are cultivated within the college dance studio, through the narratives of this group of college dancers.

The objective of this study was to document the following: 1) how individual dancers develop knowledge within the context of daily studio-based dance practices and 2) how these practices contribute to systemic themes surrounding learning in dance. Better understanding danced knowledge from these vantage points, will advance collegiate dance pedagogy and curriculum design by expanding the ways educators conceive of how students learn.

Through extensive interviews and observations followed by analysis of these data, I developed an understanding of danced knowledge in a subset of college dancers. The outcomes of this study, indeed the content of this document, was particularly influenced by Georgakopoulou’s (2006) notion of “small stories” which helped to identify and clarify the participants’ experiences in relation to my broader aims and questions. I used a narrative style to stay close to the temporal experience of dance and the interconnectedness it fosters. Additionally, I believe that it is through narrative that some of the paradoxes of this knowledge set can be illuminated.

**Explicating Danced Knowledge**

Despite a focus on the context of the dance studio, I used Bourdieu’s concept of a field, to understand the nature of danced knowledge and the relationship of dancers to their chosen discipline. As such, I frequently broke the boundary of the studio, literally, as when watching the students dance outside, and figuratively when the students described their personal relationship and the ways dance has influenced their
development at large. In the following section, I will describe the organizing concepts and pervasive themes that emerged from an analysis of the data. To organize this section of the chapter, I will use the following simple questions to organize the material: 1) What is danced knowledge? 2) How is it developed? 3) What beliefs enable it? and 4) What threatens it?

**What is danced knowledge?** Danced knowledge refers to the ways that dancers mobilize knowledge, both through their competencies and their capacities. That is to say, how do they develop and demonstrate the knowledge and how is that knowledge is cultivated by a belief system. It is something that is done—in that sense it is a knowledge-in-action akin to the knowledge set that Collinson (2008) describes in relation to co-running (the practice of running and pacing oneself with another runner), but it is also the way that the sub-culture of postmodern dance makes learning readily available through practices of question asking. As documented in this dissertation, the knowledge these dancers construct arises from sensation, is constructed through dialogues, is mediated by fallibility, and is enabled through connectivity.

**How is it developed?** Danced knowledge arises from complex physical and linguistic understandings that are interdependent, yet conflicting. Learning in dance is physically negotiated through the dimensions of time, space, and weight in relation to other dancers, choreographic and improvisatory constructs, and physical space. It is constructed linguistically through interpersonal reflection and meaning making. Both modes of learning are dialogical in that the dancer engages in a back-and-forth relationship with the material, the other dancers, and the space.
As evidenced in Chapter 4 and throughout this study, repetition is a means dancers use not just to memorize but to recursively repeat and refine their movements. This iterative process fosters question-asking wherein the students simultaneously try to discover more about the movement as they integrate it into their bodies.

Dialogue, whether in the form of peer conversations outside of the studio, group discussions in the studio, or brief explanations (physical and verbal) by a teacher or choreographer’s demonstrative body, creates a knowledge set that is constitutively interdependent. The dancer’s knowledge is not hers or his alone, but instead it is a way to operate within a system of knowing. There is a sense of seeking out knowledge from a teacher, by understanding movement by seeing it even if one cannot do it yet and by listening to and trying to integrate corrections.

These dancers understand knowledge as developing both through the accumulation of everyday work, punctuated by epiphanies and achievements and sometimes the disruption of injury. But most importantly the dancers have a strong belief in time, in the sense that they are on a trajectory in terms of their dancing and working hard and that seems to drive them to seek out new challenges.

**What beliefs enable it?** Two key beliefs about danced knowledge emerged from the data set. The first is that danced knowledge is vast and unstable. All of the dancers reported a belief that knowledge was not something to acquire and hold, but as a procedural system, one that must be constantly sought and questioned. Achievement, they believe, emerges via the quality of effort, rather than mastery. Indeed, high school beliefs that dance meant the accomplishment of turns or high legs are disrupted in
college. As discussed in the limitations, this may very well be context specific, but even when they talk about codified forms, like ballet, the students are curious about the quality of their actions. It is not that they want to do fewer turns or lose turnout. Looking at the following quote by Sydney we see that what happens is her understanding of the movement shifts from a statement, to a question. She begins after I ask her what has developed most in college:

Awareness. When I'm dancing I'm actually thinking of muscles and body parts, instead of “and then you kick your left leg” which was, you know, [the sensibility of the high school dance] studio, [it was] “Do a pirouette.” Now it's “How am I on balance?”

Or, as Jillian writes: “It’s not being knowledgeable about what steps to do, it’s achieving an amount of certainty in everything I’m doing, including how I move” (emphasis added).

The second foundational belief that enables danced knowledge is the belief that it is procedural, that it is a confluence of work over time.

Psychologist Hofer presents personal epistemology as an evolving set of theories that individuals apply and transform, and also draws from non-developmental work like that which proposed individual dimensions of knowledge rather than stages, for example structure, stability, source, and the speed of acquisition (Schommer-Aikins, 2002). Hofer, looking to cognitive science, highlights context, noting that personal epistemology may be “more situated and less stable or trait-like.” She also considers expertise, expecting that as expertise increases, so might one's perception of the complexity of knowledge. This idea comes through when Anabel talks about the layering of knowledge destabilizing its foundation.
I'll have an idea of what [something] is then there are just so many different layers. [She laughs]...You get a certain ground, or foundation, then you add the layer of getting the steps, and add the layer of the movement, and there's just so much more that I feel like I never know what it is I'm doing because upon each layer that is added on, it changes, so it's constantly shifting. ... It's almost like all these different building blocks are on top of each other, and it's just becoming a lot more interesting. That's what makes me so curious about dance is that it is constantly changing and so on top of itself.

Dance is a vast system that is known and equally unknown; the vast possibilities within the form compels dancers to continue to develop as artists. As Reese writes,

I don’t know in dance. I have no idea. And if I knew I might stop exploring. I know my multiplication tables, I know my capitals, I know how to tie my shoes. I know a sonnet. But dance—I have no idea and that’s probably why I’m intrigued still to this day.

And now to contradict myself completely—there’s a constant dichotomy of “knowing from the inside” and “knowing from the outside” in dance.

Inside—I know what feels right for my body (or at least I think I do)
Outside—my teachers guide me teaching me right from wrong—technique, alignment, weight, etc.

Sometimes they go hand in hand, sometimes one overrides the other. The relationship between the 2 is why “knowing is not so black and white.

Hofer asserts that “individuals appear to have differing epistemological assumptions about disciplines (Donald, 1995; Hofer, 2000), rather than general beliefs about knowledge that override disciplinary context,” (p. 361). This applies to this population. Even within the discipline, the students articulate differing beliefs about the nature of knowledge—for instance, comparing the detailed anatomical knowledge of ballet, knowledge that is fluid but factual, to the group process of improvisation, knowledge that is systemic and volatile. And, while my assertion is that what is telling

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73 Reese, journal response to the prompt “What is it like to know in dance?”
about these narratives is that they are indicative of an expansive, recursive, and fluid view of knowledge production, when looked at over time, I imagine that one would see a development akin to the progressions of the stage models.

What threatens it? For these dancers, pain becomes a way of knowing one’s physical capacities and limits. Whether the pain that arises from calculated risk taking (as Mary and Laurie experience in the “Falling” section of *Indelible Marks*) or injury or illness (as Carrie, Jenna, and Jillian all experience); pain functions as a reminder of one’s physical presence. Dancers must learn how to use movement intention and their embodied technical knowledge to reach a threshold but not cross it. Understanding injury as debilitating pain also makes real for dance students, the possibility and reality of not being capable of dancing. Despite the fearlessness and empowerment prompted by the rise in women’s athletics and practices wherein pain is socialized, part of the knowledge set that college dancers develop is an attunement to physical sensation and a fear of the body’s fallibility.

Suggestions for Future Research

I hope this research prompts further inquiry from many vantage points. I believe this study succeeded in shedding light on several beliefs and practices that foster knowledge production in the dance studio. This topic merits further investigation, both broadly and deeply. While the middle ground of this study was necessary to explore a range of student experiences, it was too large to go in depth with each participant and too small and local to generalize. As such, the topic would benefit from a case-study approach, perhaps following 4-5 carefully selected dancers over their college career. At
the opposite end of the spectrum, it would be useful for the field to see if the themes that emerged here are present in a cross-section of college dancers. Towards this end, a large study using brief interviews or open-ended survey questions could elicit a broader picture of college dancers. Of course, it would be important to look at male dancers, dancers of color, dancers from elite pre-professional training programs who chose college over an immediate professional career, and dancers who begin dancing in college, as well as those who dance recreationally.

Beyond college dance, studies of the epistemologies of professional dancers, choreographers, or retired dancers would further explore questions of life-span development. Likewise, studies of adolescent dancers would further contextualize danced knowledge in relation to epistemic cognition.

**Implications**

Several implications for theory and practice can be made from this study that are relevant for: 1) college dancers, 2) dance educators, 3) educational theorists, 4) policy makers.

**College dancers.** What clearly emerges from this study is the degree to which these dancers oscillate between enactive knowledge and discursive knowledge. The sensuous intoxication of the dance studio and the richly, complex tasks of integrating and developing movement ideas (and the capacity to improvise around such ideas) is strengthened by the conversations, in and out of studio, in which the dancers co-construct notions of what dance is and what it means for their lives as artists and individuals. I hope that the questions raised and concepts proposed in this dissertation would provide
young dancers entering a college program with interesting stories in which they can situate their own emerging epistemologies.

**Dance educators at the college level.** It is important to reiterate that there is very little literature concerning the epistemic development of college dancers. As college dance departments increasingly face the need to articulate the relevance of the discipline to parties as diverse as governing bodies, parents of prospective students, and leaders in the field, being able to tie the broadly applicable dimensions of this knowledge is increasingly important. Indeed, I believe that simply in documenting the multifaceted nature of danced knowledge, this document serves the discipline. Furthermore, these questions of dance epistemology could serve as the foundation for enlivening discussions among dance teachers and practitioners, for experiences vary widely and responses to these students’ experiences, will, too vary. As was seen in this study sensation, dialogue, pain, and connection became the dominant themes both emerging from the data and in my choice making as a writer. Utilizing the framework of working outwards from the studio could challenge dance educators to question how their classroom practices foster similar or different epistemologies. Beyond that, I hope that this will spark the same question that Mary Hunter illuminated for me: Just what *is it* that people think they are doing. Not surprisingly, as was discovered in this study, students need to articulate their understandings through various modalities. By facilitating opportunities for students to reflect upon their learning, faculty may be able to encourage students towards more complicated understandings of the field, enriching their dancing, dance making, and other creative and scholarly work. I certainly do not suggest that faculty ought change their
classroom habits and sit around and talk about dancing in place of actually dancing. I hope that it is evident in this dissertation, through the narrative data descriptions, photographs, and interstitials, is that the sensory experience of dancing—the messy, sweaty, tiring, and exhilarating—is at the core of danced knowledge as understood in this document.

**Education scholars.** Dance, and the learning practices out of which it is woven, has been neglected by scholars seeking to expand the research on educational theory. Therefore understanding the processes through which dance learning is constructed—and what is lost when such learning is excised from educational curricula as a whole—is increasingly important. There is great potential benefit for understanding the diversity of practices and beliefs that constitute knowledge. Arts education scholar Shirley Brice Heath writes that the verbal, “dominates knowledge management and production, especially in schools” (p.12). Interestingly, while in her study of youth involved in arts practices, she found that the students “move as far away as possible from the verbal” (p. 12) in their artmaking, in this study, dance is both physically and discursively negotiated. I imagine that this difference reflects both the age difference and that, for the students in this study, “being a dancer” has become a way of life, not an escape from a life—as well as being a part of a community, as I have discussed throughout.

Examining issues of sensation, or experiences through the body, offers students a real tangible context for knowledge development. As Brown, Collins, and Duguid (1988), argue, “For centuries epistemologists have concentrated primarily on conceptual representation and its problematic relation to objects in the world, assuming that
representation is cognitively prior to all else” (p. 28). Indeed, separating the learner from
the subject, divorces learning from experience. As this dissertation suggest, learning that
is grounded in, but not limited to, experience, provides the foundation for rich
epistemological development that occurs within and among individuals.


Sport, rhetoric, and gender: Historical perspectives and media representations (pp. 19-30). New York: Palgrave Macmillan.


Appendix A

Glossary

Common dance terms used in this study:

Many dance techniques require **lifts** and **partnering**. As illustrated in many of the photos in this document, these actions involve one person taking and shifting the weight of another. In ballet this is often done by a man, holding a woman by her waist and elevating her. In contemporary dance **lifts** can be done between and among any dancers, irrespective of gender, and take varied form. **Partnering** simply refers to contact among two or more dancers.

Dancing **full-out** means using performance energy and dancing to the best of one’s abilities.

A **gesture** is a movement that does not involve the transfer of weight. Gestures often refer to common or quirky, small, staccato movements, but can also refer to larger, more abstract still movements.

**Marking** means to dance using partial effort. It is like rounding in arithmetic, or outlining in writing. The dancer conserves energy, while still developing an understanding of the material. This often happens when learning, or enabling the choreographer to see a specific section or interaction.

A **phrase** is a series of movements. A phrase of movement is similar to a sentence in language.

**Running** means dancing a section, or entirety of a work.

A **score** is a set of movement rules used in improvisation. While a score can also refer to written notation (like a musical score) in this dissertation the students generally use it to refer to the rules of an improvisation.

Dancers **take class**, meaning they go to technique classes. The phrase is often heard when going to class is a choice.

**Weight** in Laban Movement Analysis, refers to the quality of Strong/Light and in particular relates to the vertical dimension of movement. A dancer who exhibits Strength
has a forceful, downward intention, whereas a dancer who exhibits Lightness has a lilting, airy quality.\textsuperscript{74}

\textbf{Weight} can also mean a relationship to gravity. “Using your weight” or “finding the weight of a phrase” can mean allowing one’s mass and structure to work with momentum and the pull of gravity, rather than pulling away from it (as is standard in forms like ballet).

Weight can also refer to a \textbf{weight shift}; this is the opposite of a gesture and involves a transfer from one supporting limb to another.

In addition to the common verb form “to work,” which comes into a dancer’s vocabulary when talking about \textbf{working on} a piece or a project by going to rehearsals and participating in the process, working on can also be used in a broader context as the dancers talk about “working on” specific artistic or technical challenges.

\textbf{Work} is also used as a noun to refer to a piece of choreography or a choreographer’s pieces collectively.

\textsuperscript{74} Weight at Ohio State University is also influenced by professor emerita Vera Blaine’s course in “Weight Studies.” Building from LMA, Blaine teaches students to mobilize their bodies in three relationships to gravity which she calls the “weight qualities”: 1) Resilience, a buoyant ball-like relationship, 2) Strength, a forceful horizontal pathway of the pelvis, and 3) Lightness, as in LMA, a lilting quality that emphasizes high space.
Appendix B

**Title of the Study:** Knowing Dancing: An Exploration of Knowledge Construction in the Making of Dances and Dancers in a University Setting

Principal Investigator: Candace Feck, Ph.D.
Co-Principal Investigators: Ashley Thorndike, M.Ed.
Institution: The Ohio State University

Thank you for your interest in participating in this study that will take place between 30 June 2008 and 30 December 2009. The bulk of your participation will be in Autumn and Winter Quarters of the 2008-09 academic year. This document outlines the purposes and procedures of the study; pay close attention to the description of involvement as well as your rights as a participant. If at any time you have questions about this study, please contact me, Ashley Thorndike, or my advisor Candace Feck.

Your Category:
- Core Participant, Undergraduate Student
- Core Participant, Graduate Student
- Auxiliary Participant, Undergraduate Student
- Auxiliary Participant, Graduate Student
- Auxiliary Participant, Faculty, Staff, Administrator, Professional Dance Artist

**Purpose & Procedures**

In this study, through participant observation, formal interviews, casual conversations, structured activities and mapping techniques, I will investigate the processes of learning and knowing in dancing in two particular instances and web outwards from there to consider the critical issues of dance in higher education. In deciding whether to participate, know that I’m not setting out to study you, but the situations and choices that organize and regulate your work as a dance major. This distinction is nuanced as your individual story and experience will thread through my work. In other words, I want to *show* what happens to you but *analyze* the themes and issues that come up in the course of that story.

**Core Participant, Undergraduate Student:**

*I will participate as an observer and dancer in the regular course of events that lead up to a performance.*

At this level, you will be interacting with me much as you normally would, but with the knowledge that I’m leaving rehearsal to take notes, recording the process.
I will interview you alone and in small groups, asking questions about your experiences dancing.
Beyond the normal rehearsal process for this work, you will meet with me on occasion to talk about your experiences, insights, and analyses of your dancing. These questions won’t be limited to the work itself; I’ll be asking you about technique class, your choreography, your GEC classes, your dance/life balance, etc. I’ll want to be able to paint a picture of the complexity of your work as a dance major.

I will take you as a point-of-entry to look at the choices you make as a dance major and the different cultural, educational, institutional factors that influence how your work is structured.
I must emphasize that I’m not studying you in the way that a case study would: I’m not going to try and dive into your psyche to explain you to the world. Instead, I will look at your experience in this work as an opportunity to further articulate the learning and knowledge of dancers and to investigate how various structures govern those processes. This might mean that you show me the courses that you have taken in your time here and we talk about the institutional requirements, or you may invite me to go with you to physical therapy if you have an injury, or you might see if I want to trail you as you look for apartments to live in. I’ll welcome any opportunity to get a sense of your work as a dance major—but you’ll always be the one to invite me. My interest here is how the lived experience of undergraduate dance majors is constructed, inside and outside of the studio.

Core Participant, Graduate Student:
I will participate as an observer and dancer in the regular course of events that lead up to a performance.
At this level, you will be interacting with me much as you normally would, but with the knowledge that I’m leaving rehearsal to take notes.

I will interview you alone and in small groups, asking questions about your experiences dancing.
Beyond the normal rehearsal process for this work, you will meet with me on occasion to talk about your insights and analyses of your dancing and I’ll be asking you to tie your experiences to your undergraduate or professional training.

I will take you as a point of entry to look at the choices you make in your work as a dance major and the different cultural, educational, institutional factors that influence how your work as a dance major is structured.
I’m directly interested in the status of undergraduate dance education so I won’t look so much at the structure of your lives. However, I’d like to keep open the possibility of incorporating this material when it directly impacts the work.

Auxiliary Participants, Undergraduate or Graduate
I will interview you alone and in small groups, asking questions about your experiences dancing.
You will be interviewed by me either alone or in a small group. These interviews will center on questions about the experience of dancing, learning in the studio, and your educational experiences. Your participation will be on a case-by-case basis, you may agree to one or several interviews.

**Auxiliary Participant, Faculty, Staff, Administrator, Professional Dance Artists**

*I will interview you alone and in small groups, asking questions about your perspectives on the issues that arise in the course of this study.*

This may include asking questions about your perspectives on dance education, particularly artistic and physical training; your perspectives on higher education and dance in the academy; your professional and education history; your assessment of the field and the contemporary dancers; and any other such issues. Please carefully read the statement on confidentiality, for, as I am asking for your professional opinions in the context of your background, you will be asked to explicitly grant me consent to fully identify you.

**Possible Risks or Benefits**

**Student Participants:**

There are no benefits to you as an individual. At the very least your story will become a part of my dissertation which hopefully will become conference papers or articles in journals, and may, someday, become a book. In agreeing to participate you expose yourself on some level—in essence, you are letting me write a story that includes you.

As with all self-reflection, when we talk about our experiences, sensitive information can emerge. Sometimes this information feels comforting or illuminating, sometimes it feels difficult. However, the emphasis of this study is not on sensitive or intra-psychic issues.

**Faculty, Staff, Administrator, Professional Dance Artist Participants:**

Your professional opinions and personal reflections may be included in this work. As you know from your own work, the gap between research phase and publication is lengthy. As such, you may find that by the point of publication your opinions have changed.

**Participant Rights**

You are as free to choose to participate in this study as you are free to refuse. Participation in this research is voluntary. You retain the right to withdraw from the study at any point, for any reason, with no consequence.

**Confidentiality**

**Core Participants**

In some studies, it is relatively easy to keep the identities of participants’ confidential. Certainly in quantitative work when people are categorized, you don’t know which person ends up where. In some qualitative work, when researchers do many single interviews for instance, or interviews people from a wide swath, they can disguise their participants in ways that provide enough contextual information but make identification
impossible. It’s more accurate to describe this project as semi-confidential. In this case, because the essence of this story resides in the specificity, I can’t guarantee that people who know you won’t eventually be able to figure out who you are. During the research process, however, all data collected will be kept confidential and discussed only with my committee. People in the project will certainly know who’s who, and someday people presently in this department may try to piece people together.

But:
1) Even if this project becomes a book, it won’t for quite some time—long past the point that any of you would likely be living day-to-day lives at OSU.

and

2) You’ll retain some ownership over what of you is represented, if we have conflicting interpretations of a situation, I’ll include both our analyses in the final work either through footnoting or including our different readings in the body of the work.

I also know that you may find that in the end, you do want your name included in the project. Because you are not public figures, I will not use your full names, but should the entire group of participants elect to be identified by their first names, at the end of the data collection period you will have the opportunity to sign another form explicitly giving me consent to use your first name.

**Auxiliary Participants, Students:**
At the end of your participation, you will have the option to select a pseudonym or sign a form giving explicit consent for me to identify you by your first name.

**Auxiliary Participant, Faculty, Staff, Administrator, Professional Dance Artist:**
Your voice is important in the context of who you are—your background, aesthetic values, pedagogical lens, connection to the field, and your influence on policy. As such, you will be fully identified. If you rethink something that you’ve said in an interview, you may pull any information from my data immediately after an interview and may qualify any statement that you may make at a later point.

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**
Candace Feck, Principal Investigator, or her authorized representative Ashley Thorndike has explained the purpose of the study, the procedures to be followed, and the expected duration of my participation. Possible benefits of the study have been described, as have alternative procedures, if such procedures are applicable and available.

I acknowledge that I have had the opportunity to obtain additional information regarding the study and that any questions I have raised have been answered to my full satisfaction. Furthermore, I understand that I am (my child is) free to withdraw consent at any time and to discontinue participation in the study without prejudice to me (my child).

**AUTHORIZATIONS:**
I consent to participating in research entitled: *Knowing Dancing: An exploration of knowledge construction in the making of dances and dancers in a university setting* as described in this document. _____ (initial)

I consent to having all interviews video taped for research purposes only and unless I give written permission later in the research process to release specific portions of interviews, I understand that these tapes will be not be presented publicly. _____(initial)

I consent to being videotaped and photographed in the rehearsal process and in performance. I release these images and this footage of myself, allowing for the public dissemination of my image. _____(initial)

Candace Feck, Principal Investigator, or his/her authorized representative Ashley Thorndike, Co-Principal Investigator, has explained the purpose of the study, the procedures to be followed, and the expected duration of my. Possible benefits of the study have been described, as have alternative procedures, if such procedures are applicable and available.

I acknowledge that I have had the opportunity to obtain additional information regarding the study and that any questions I have raised have been answered to my full satisfaction. Furthermore, I understand that I am free to withdraw consent at any time and to discontinue participation in the study without prejudice to me.

Finally, I acknowledge that I have read and fully understand the consent form. I sign it freely and voluntarily. A copy has been given to me.

Date: _________________________ Signed: ________________________________
Signed:____________________________
(Principal Investigator or his/her authorized representative)
Signed:_________________________________
(Person authorized to consent for participant, if required)

Witness: ______________________

Sample Interview Questions

Tell me about your dance background. With whom did you train; what styles were you drawn to; what was your training like?

Why did you decide to major in dance? Why come to OSU?

What classes have you taken here? How do you decide what to take?

What sorts of goals do you have for yourself as a dancer?
What is important for me to know about your family background, culture, or your upbringing?

Do you think there is a “right” way to dance?

How can you tell when you are improving in class or rehearsal?

What do you do when you are trying to learn or understand material?

Describe an experience where you came to understand a movement, phrase, or score on a deeper level. What did you do to achieve that?

Describe a “good” rehearsal.

How do you integrate information from the different senses in class or rehearsal?

Do you notice yourself attending to different communicative means differently? Ex. visual, verbal, rhythmic…

Describe your relationship with choreography, performance, and improvisation.

What are your expectations for your experience in (indelible marks or performance improvisation ensemble)?

In regards to (indelible marks or performance improvisation ensemble) what sorts of ideas or experiences are you engaged in right now?

Talk about how your experiences as a dance major translate to other parts of your life.
Appendix C:
An Overview of Dance in Higher Education

Corseted; draped in neo-Grecian robes; streamlined in black and pink; sarong wrapped; spandex clad; or wearing cutoff sweatpants, thrift store tanktops, and socks, dancers have stretched, sweated, toned, and practiced for over a hundred years of dance in US colleges and universities. In this time, college dance has had a range of overlapping purposes including physical health, aesthetics and moral development, cultural edification, self-expression, professional training and scholarly inquiry.

Dance education approaches in higher education have grown out of a range of philosophies of dance. Dancers trace their training genealogically: I danced with X, who danced with Y, who studied with Z, then I did a workshop with A who studied with B who also studied with Z, but broke with her to develop a unique method. Unfortunately, little scholarship has revealed how these pedagogical lineages have intersected with the academy. While that task is beyond the scope of this dissertation, the aim of this appendix is to provide the reader with an overview of early dance educators.\(^75\) Because dance in the academy began in the context of women’s education, I look at the role of women in early US higher education then survey the genesis of three university dance departments.

Early US Higher Education

\(^{75}\) For a more complete look at dance in higher education see Hagood, 2000; Ross, 2000; McPherson, 2008.
Higher education in the Colonial period bore little resemblance to college and university life and learning today. The earliest institutions—Harvard, William and Mary, Yale—were seminaries that prepared the young men of the ruling elite for futures as clergy or politicians. After the Revolutionary War, more colleges were chartered, and debates on the purpose of higher education began. Several factors precipitated women’s entry into higher education. As the dominant Puritan church began sending emissaries to convert the “heathens,” the wives of the missionaries needed to be taught a measure of literacy and domestic facility. The woman’s role—though firmly tethered to the home—was not devoid of civic responsibility. As the nation’s economy developed and the male workplace diversified, there began to be a role for women as teachers of young children. Both at home and at school, the first reputable woman’s workplace, the education of women was a social responsibility and became a national priority. Literacy was a concern to the burgeoning Christian nation. By the early 1800s in the upper classes, both boys and girls were taught to read and boys were taught to write. Although not until the late 1800s did women attend colleges with comparable standards to those of men, women began attending women’s colleges and seminaries in the early part of the nineteenth century. By the 1830s, concern for the hygiene of these women led to women’s dormitories and regulation of the dietary, study, and exercise habits of female students.\(^7\)

\(^7\) The background information in this paragraph is from Barbara Soloman’s (1987) *In the company of educated women*, J. Smith Maguire’s (2008) *Fit for consumption: Sociology and the business of fitness*, and Heather Munro Prescott’s (2007) *Student bodies: The impact of student health on American society and medicine*
Industrialization and Health

After the Civil War, the industrial society was firmly established. Through the 1800s and particularly after the Civil War, the United States became a nation of cities. The migration from rural to urban life, required by industrialization, led to a rise in health concerns as workers on the new assembly lines toiled through repetitive tasks in cramped factories. With crowded cities, the fledgling medical profession had few to no treatments for disease and a limited understanding of communicative illness. The middle class disease of neurasthenia, an overtaxing of the brain, confounded the medical profession and undermined the developing germ theory (Prescott, 2007). The related nervous disorders of women were attributed by some to the confinement of women in Victorian homes—and in Victorian corsets—and attributed by others to the frail constitution of women.

Despite the widely accepted belief in the fragility of women, by the late 1800s, the idea of a vigorous body began to be connected with ideals for an industrial society. The men’s athletic movement began around 1820. Early women’s reformers like Catherine Beecher were the first to suggest that women could benefit from the emerging physical training systems as well. Prompted by the “Muscular Christianity” movement, YMCA gymnasiums flourished. Physical fitness became a matter of social responsibility. J. Smith Maguire (2008), author of Fit for consumption: Sociology and the business of fitness, suggests that this shift towards fitness resulted from a national “shift in perspective from a [Puritan] predetermined fate to a perfectible self” (p. 26). A
strong body was linked to a strong mind and a strong country and this could only be achieved by a generation of healthy and productive mothers.

A small but significant number of women attended colleges and even universities by the end of the 1800s. Although the nature of women’s education was contested, by the end of the nineteenth century American women were the most literate in the world (Prescott, 2007, p. 12). Several women’s colleges were chartered (i.e. Mount Holyoke in 1837); many normal schools taught women the profession of teaching; and several institutions became coeducational. The University of Michigan admitted women in 1870 as did Cornell University in 1872.

Women’s bodies were soon at the center of the debate over women’s education. A prevalent cognitive theory of the period, an interpretation of Darwin’s principle of conservation of energy, suggested that the brain drew energy from the fluids of the body. Given the biology of menstruation and the general perceived weakness of women’s bodies, the implication was that women’s education was too dangerous for women. With few treatment options, health required disease prevention. Prominent Boston physician, Dr. Edward Hammond Clarke furthered these theories in the 1870s. He argued explicitly against the education of women by rationalizing that the female brain, less evolved than the male brain, would need to draw even more energy from the female body, a weaker body. Thus, the risk of illness to women in education due to the taxation of thinking made education a dangerous prospect. Because much of Clarke’s theory relied on the loss of bodily fluids during menstruation, the first woman to become a member of the Academy of Medicine, Dr. Mary Putnam Jacobi’s 1877 study of women, which found
that rest during menstruation was an unnecessary requirement, bolstered counter-
arguments for the education of women (Prescott, 2007).

Although Clarke’s stance can be read as “yet another call for suppression of
women” (Ross, 2000, p. 48), regulating physicality did not affect only females. Male
bodies were also impacted by the theory of conservation, as the future of the country
putatively rested on their intellectual development which relied on the fitness of their
bodies. With men, the future of the country rested on their intellectual development,
which relied on their bodies. This theory led to admonitions against masturbation (the
voluntary expulsion of the fuel of the intellect) and for calls mandatory exercise. Thus
began the physical fitness movement in higher education.

Dance Enters the Academy

As US society moved into the Progressive Era, dress reform and physical activity
were the two most dramatic changes for women’s bodies. Women’s fashion, which had
consisted of corsets and layers of clothing, which not only restricted movement, but could
damage a woman’s organs, were redefined into lighter, less-restrictive designs. This
freedom of the body was exemplified by the sensation of Isadora Duncan, who draped
herself in both the fabrics and rhetoric of classicism, thereby providing women with a
new idea of a natural, moving body (Daly, 2002).

The popularity of fresh air, as coveted then as air-conditioning is today, resulted
in the development of public parks and outdoor recreation. The women’s suffrage
movement held outdoor meetings and women marched in outdoor protests. The woman’s
body became an active statement: Like the many protesting bodies of the 1960s and
1970s, suffragettes realized that their physical presence itself made a provoking social statement.

**Perfect Womanhood**

The woman’s body, now more than a potential carrier of disease, was the lynchpin of the future of the nation. The health of women suddenly concerned both the women of the women’s movement and the ruling men, the “deciders” of social policy. Between 1890 and 1920, the notion of a perfect woman changed. She was “socially witty and sophisticated as well as physically adept at golf, tennis, cycling, swimming, and equitation” (Mawson, 2006, p. 21). Indeed, Ellen le Garde’s 1890 Ladies Home Journal article tells readers:

> Not alone is bone and muscle made; you are learning, girls, how to handle and carry your bodies…. Every game in which you take part requires skill, dexterity, coolness, and courage with presence of mind. Cultivate and play all the sports you can in the open air, and they will make you a fitter type of perfect womanhood. (in Rosoff, 2006, p. 56)

“Perfect womanhood,” then was not about the competition of the game, but the comportment and grace of the refined player. While Le Garde did not foresee the “warrior girls” of today (Sokolove, 2008), other sportswomen of the turn of the century, particularly in basketball, actively protested having to play by the modified women’s rules. Perfect womanhood did come to justify the place of dancing in a women’s education. Dance performance, however, was still not regarded as an appropriate occupation for middle and upper class women. Founder of the first dance major Margaret H’Doubler’s quest for a dancing “worthy of a college woman’s time” contained the same virtues to which Le Garde alludes. This women’s sports movement had to
contend with genderizing the sports of upper-class White males. H’Doubler would have to remake dance as White, non-erotic, upper-class, aesthetic, and scientific, for the perfect mothers and members of society.

University of Wisconsin

That dance found its first home at the University of Wisconsin was not happenstance. Long a pioneering progressive institution, the University’s “Wisconsin Idea” of education conceived of the university as extending from the campus to the boundaries of the state. Margaret H’Doubler was a young physical education instructor and basketball coach at the University of Wisconsin Women’s Physical Education department when she was set onto a path towards developing dance in higher education. Charged by her boss, Blanche Trilling to find a dance “worthy of a college woman’s time,” H’Doubler spent an initially frustrating, but ultimately fruitful year as a student at Columbia University Teacher’s College searching out dance classes. Trilling’s oft repeated quote conveys quite a bit about the education of the time. Beyond what the statement implies is what it does not say. Trilling did not ask H’Doubler for the newest dance form, or a dance that college women would like, or a dance that would be good for college women. She implies that these college women should be engaged in meaningful pursuits, suggesting the sense of seriousness about their education. Trilling’s statement suggests that she envisions a new dance with which a smart college woman (gearing for a place in high society) could engage. The statement also cautions H’Doubler of unworthy dance. While by this time dance forms like the Chalif method of ballet, as well as folk dance and gymnastic-based dance forms were implemented in many physical education
programs, including Wisconsin’s, dance had a significant, surly cousin in the professional dance world. Trilling set up a clear divide between the professional dance artist and the dance form for the college woman.

Inspired by her readings of John Dewey, H’Doubler eventually discovered a practical application of her charge when she was inspired by a children’s music class taught by Alys Bentley, yet it seems that what most inspired her was the absence of gravity one feels lying on the floor and Bentley’s reliance on improvisation rather than mimicry. H’Doubler recounts the experience in an interview:

‘I said of course! Get on the floor where we are relieved from the pull of gravity, no balance—I had anatomy and all these things before I went to her. Where you could work out and see what the structure response was to [a] change of position in movement. Why it was like a quick flash. I got so excited.’ (qtd in Ross, 2000, p. 42)

When H’Doubler returned to Wisconsin then, she did not arrive with a new dance to teach but with a spark of an idea of how to teach and from where to begin. In fact, and perhaps because of her scientific background, the most salient realization was of empirical fact: gravity. By moving her students through explorations that began, and stayed, on the ground H’Doubler moved away from the subtle fight against collapse that is standing, and instead allowed her students to submit their bodies to this most basic of the natural laws.77

H’Doubler developed her convictions about dancing into successful classes and festivals. By 1926, her program developed into the first dance major. Graduates went on to teach in budding programs in women’s physical education centers around the country.

The foundations of H’Doubler’s program were rooted in the women’s physical culture movement, valuing health and physical exploration as an element of a virtuous life. H’Doubler, like Isadora Duncan, revered the ancient Greeks and was repulsed by the Jazz Age and the associated Black dance forms. Her classes were designed for and to further the ideals of a White, upper-class woman. Although she pushed the boundaries of femininity, for instance by cutting her hair while in New York and skinny-dipping with her students on weekend breaks, she espoused the dominant mores of the time.

While complicit in the dominant social mores of the virtuous idealized body, H’Doubler’s classes broke with the conventions of female physicality. She would verbally guide her students through improvisatory exercises exploring anatomical concepts, rhythmic variations, and movement patterns. These dancers focused on both the sensation and the science of their bodies. H’Doubler taught with a skeleton and emphasized the scientific facts of movement. In theory, H’Doubler believed that the kinesiological ways that a body could move indicated that the body should move through all its capacity. In practice, other dancers like Martha Hill criticized H’Doubler’s dances for taking place from the waist up. Perhaps because H’Doubler did not train as a dancer prior to teaching, she viewed the lower body suspiciously. She saw the leg movements of ballet and the pelvic contractions of Graham technique as vulgar. H’Doubler-trained dancers used their legs for locomotion but their arms and heads for expression.

Even though the emphasis was on developing self-awareness, the dancers did perform “demonstrations” at area colleges and universities. After some successful performances, H’Doubler was admonished by Wisconsin’s president who “asked her to
stop because he did not want his institution to become known as a ‘dancing school’” (Ross, 2002, p. 120). She curtailed those performances, but in upcoming years, the Wisconsin women would present lecture/demonstrations of their new aesthetic dance. This new dance was explicitly intellectual:

dance that could have the prestige of intellectual achievement, dance with the capacity to represent the nuances of real life. Yet dance in the university has persistently had a utilitarian thrust that dance in the Western theatrical world has not. Even into the present day, dance in the university is usually framed as supporting, paralleling, and enhancing some other curricular objectives, such as morality, physical fitness, community-building, or self-esteem—ancillary, not central, benefits of experience in the arts. (Ross, 2002, pp. 117-118)

While the Wisconsin dance program was explicitly designed not to develop professional dancers, several dancers did go on to professional careers—generally brief careers before lives as teachers and/or wives and mothers. Later students like Anna Halprin and Joan Woodbury would go on to notable professional lives as dance artists.

**Bennington College and the Bennington School of the Dance**

Bennington had been conceived in the early 1920s as a progressive women’s college aligned with the philosophy of John Dewey. Planners scrapped ideas for grand gothic architecture due to the fiscal constraints imposed by the Depression-era economy and Bennington opened in 1932 in simple, American farmhouse-style buildings. The focus on the arts as a way of learning and the selection of Martha Hill as director of dance led to an idea of dance in education that would compete with Margaret H’Doubler’s Wisconsin program.\(^7\)

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\(^7\) Information on Bennington College and Martha Hill can be found in Kreigsman, 1981 and McPherson, 2008.
Martha Hill studied dance in the 1920s while earning her degree in physical education from the Battle Creek Normal School of Physical Education; there Hill found dances to be “this beautiful thing…Instead of the body being a carnal thing, it was a beautiful instrument” (qtd. In McPherson, 2008). Later, she studied both ballet and “free expression” dancing with Isadora Duncan disciple, Anna Duncan (McPherson, 2008) while earning her bachelor’s degree from Columbia University’s Teachers College. Hill eventually found her footing in the percussive, forceful technique and expressivity of the Martha Graham Dance Company. There she performed as Martha Todd to protect her identity, worried that a reputation as a professional dancer would stain her reputation as a teacher. Hill taught at the University of Oregon and at Teacher’s College before taking a position at the New York University. While there, she was invited to develop the dance program at the new Bennington College.

Hill created a program at Bennington, which connected dance education to dance performance. Unlike the dancers in H’Doubler’s program (a program for which Hill had little admiration), Bennington dancers learned to be educated women and proficient, professional caliber dancers. At Bennington, the women were not freeing their bodies; they disciplined their bodies for performance. They contracted and released, fell to the floor and balanced, working for the opportunity to engage in the new American expression: modern dance. Young dancers wanted to go to Bennington to improve their craft and to become educated women. Unfortunately, this opportunity was not open to everyone. When Ann Halprin, a bright young woman educated in progressive schools
and a well-trained modern dancer, applied in 1938, she was rejected, likely a result of quotas designed to limit the number of Jewish students on campus (Ross, 2007).

Summer study, now a standard in dance education, was developed in large part at Bennington. It was and still is, in part, a bridge from the collegiate to the professional worlds. In 1934, Hill and her partner Mary Josephine Shelly developed the Bennington School of the Dance, inviting as faculty the big names in modern dance: Martha Graham, Doris Humphrey, Charles Weidman, and Hanya Holm. Bennington became a site where technique, choreography, and theory prospered. Historian Sali Ann Kriegsman (1982) suggests:

Although the school was initially conceived as a training ground for dancers and teachers of dance—the first center devoted wholly to the study of modern dance—it quickly became as well a haven for the leading artists of the day; a laboratory for experienced and neophyte choreographers; a major production center that drew informed audiences and critics to programs of new works; a tryout site that made revisions possible before New York premieres; and an arena for experiment in which the sister arts of music, drama, design, and poetry were assembled in the service of the dance. (p. 1)

The Bennington summer program thus provided students with a chance to experience the varied pedagogies of the leaders in the field. Not all dance education was of the supportive, exploratory nature developed by H'Doubler. The pedagogy of Hill, strict but supportive, was intended to prepare the student at Bennington to perform in classes taught in summer session by Graham or other choreographers. Rather than a self-development aim, training came to be about perfecting physical craft. Whereas performance was not an aim at Wisconsin, at Bennington students prepared to perform on stage and in the classes of choreographers.
Howard University

In Modern dance/Negro dance, historian Susan Manning (2004) positions modern dance and Black dance as not only parallel movements, but as interrelated histories. Howard University provides one of many possible vantage points to consider dance at Historically Black Colleges or Universities (HBCU). Like the nearby Hampton Institute, where a successful performing group, the Hampton Institute Creative Dance Group, began in 1933, Howard had a developing dance program between the wars. Information on dance at Howard is limited, but Tamara Brown’s (2004) dissertation, Negro renaissance to the black arts movement, African-American concert-theatrical dance in Washington, D.C., includes a significant section addressing dance at Howard.

Maryrose Reeves Allen, a native of Indianapolis, graduated from the Sargent School of Physical Education in Boston in 1923. She returned to complete a master’s degree at Boston University and later began doctoral studies there as well. Allen began teaching at Howard in 1925 but she also taught at the Hampton summer program from 1922-1942 where most likely she interacted with Charles Williams who founded the dance program at Hampton. With her lifelong interest in Greek ideals, Allen connected these values to concerns about women’s health and beauty and racial pride. Allen believed that the fine art of dance supported the goals of women’s physical education. In line with this belief, she developed a program at Howard that emphasized artistry, scholarship, and women’s health. Guest artists at Howard in the mid-century included Pearl Primus, Paul Taylor, Donald McKayle, and Katherine Dunham.
Like H’Doubler, Allen’s social sensibilities were conservative in regards to women. In her later years, the burgeoning Black power movement would bring students to question her foundations. But Allen’s accomplishments are significant not only because she developed a dance program, but also because she envisioned a dance education that cultivated women’s health, intellect, and cultural awareness.

**Dance as a Discipline**

As Murray Sperber (2005) points out in his essay on the dilution of undergraduate education in *Declining by degrees*, after the Second World War universities tried to offer *every* degree during the Cold War period of post-Sputnik expansion—from land-grant agricultural schools offering arts degrees to small liberal arts colleges adding science and technology programs. Students began to be able to select both *where* they wanted to go to school and *what* they wanted to study. Sperber argues that this expansion has now led to a glut of departments and academics enabled by the GI Bill, the baby boom, and solidified by the institution of tenure.

No longer either entertainment performed by a scrappy, entrepreneurial working-class or the private activity of upper-class women, dance became professionalized and yet another narrative of the American Dream. The expansion of colleges and universities led to another aim for the arts in colleges and universities: educating audiences (Banes, 2000). Social restrictions on dancing abated as dance became accepted as a popular and wholesome social activity. Upper-class families began to let their daughters study dance. Teaching dance became a respectable profession. Dance educators began to see their discipline as more related to the art of dance and the profession of dance and therefore
considered their field as miscategorized in physical education. Summarizing the period, Hagood (2000) writes:

Dance educators had placed their alliances with professional artists at the symbolic center of their conflicted experience in higher education. Among physical educators, the notion that ‘anything good in the dance is good in art and education’ [quoting Martha Hill] was viewed with great skepticism. The idealization of the professional dance artist by the college dance educator was an attempt to separate dance from physical education and align more closely with the other arts. (p. 165)

Moving dance departments out of physical education and into liberal arts or arts colleges was the major curricular issue of the 1950s and 1960s. By 1965, the Dance as a Discipline conference, organized by the American Association for Health, Physical Education and Recreation concluded with nine recommendations for dance as an individual field of study. These included requirements for breadth and inclusion of various aspects of dance and a charge for “continued growth” (p. 196). According to Hagood, this was to assert both the rights of dance as a valid discipline and the responsibilities of the field to develop the curriculum and expand the purview of dance.

**Sixties and Seventies: Post-modern Dance on Campus**

According to Wendy Oliver (1992), in the 1960s, dance entered the public consciousness through the art philosophy of Susanne Langer. Public art movements like Halprin’s street dance/protests in Berkeley also brought a new perspective on dance to the foreground. For instance, Halprin’s piece was given its title, *The Bust* because it ended with the arrests of several participants. The artists of the Judson Church remade dance as a revolutionary, democratic art. While the “early moderns” had espoused democratic values and ideals, the daily practices at any major modern dance company
were strict and hierarchical. Inspired by the classes of John Cage at the New School for Social Research, an institution that since a restructuring in 1922 had supported the modern dance movement, Robert Dunn began offering composition classes at Merce Cunningham’s studio. The students in his courses and in Halprin’s West Coast workshops began to reconceive not only what dance could be, but also who could do it (Banes, 1995). What dance historian and critic Deborah Jowitt (1989) deemed the “everyday bodies” at Judson, paralleled the idea of every body accessing dance and movement education in the early college programs. The number of dance programs at colleges and universities expanded in the seventies and included the development of more BFA programs.

**Dance Boom**

While postmodern dance contemplated the boundaries of dance, life, and gender, on the other end of the concert dance spectrum, the defections of Rudolf Nureyev in 1961, Natalia Makarova in 1970, and Mikhail Baryshnikov in 1974, and the stardom of Suzanne Farrell, sparked an obsession with ballet. The PBS’s American Masters and Great Performances/Dance in America series brought both ballet and modern dance into family rooms, sparking a dance boom. Dance classes became a popular extracurricular for young girls. The fit body was privileged as a sign of all-around well-roundedness (Maguire, 2007). In 1963, the Ford Foundation grant to the New York City Ballet, School of American Ballet, and several Balanchine-lineage regional ballets, also allowed Balanchine to bring dance teachers from across the country to learn his pedagogy. Thus, in the heart of the dance boom, a devoted young dancer from a supportive and well-
heeled family might study at local ballet schools, regularly go to see a regional ballet company, attend a summer programs in a major city, and watch the New York City Ballet, American Ballet Theater, or even the Royal Ballet on television.\textsuperscript{79}

Modern dance has never benefited by the type of institutionalized structures that have benefited ballet, but during the dance boom, with funding from philanthropic institutions like the Ford Foundation and the government’s National Endowment for the Arts, modern companies toured the country performing in city theaters as the ballet companies did, but also performing frequently at colleges and universities. Centers for the arts like the Krannert Center (1969) and the Wexner Center (1989) fed university arts departments by developing programs that brought world-renowned artists to campus not only for the edification of the students, but for the campus and community at-large. By the end of the eighties, dance was out of physical education, mostly housed within a theater department or as an independent department (Van Dyke, 1992).

The Educated Consumer

Through the 1980s and 1990s, state legislatures cut funding for higher education, forcing public colleges and universities to seek funding through external sources (Bok, 2003). Universities increasingly turned to academic scientists for commercial gain. Congress enabled such a turn through the 1980 Bayh-Dole Act, “which made it much easier for universities to own and license patents on discoveries made through research paid for with public funds” (Bok, 2003, p. 11). Increasing commercialism and the impact of college-rankings (i.e. US News and World Report), led to further competition between

\textsuperscript{79} For a comprehensive look at the role of the School of the American Ballet and US dance training, see Dunning’s (1985), “But first a school”: The first fifty years of the School of American Ballet.
institutions, both for research funds and for students. Today, materials sent to high
school juniors and seniors feature glossy images of new university fitness and aquatic
centers, students relaxing on lush green lawns, and an action shot featuring the school’s
best athletic team. Michael Klassen (2000) titles his study of visual elements of the
college viewbook, “Lots of fun, not much work, and no hassles: Marketing images of
higher education.” This lifestyle marketing overshadows the presumed goal of higher
education (that is, learning) and emphasizes the extra-curricular elements. Faculty
bemoan a new generation of students of whom. In an essay titled, “On the uses of a
liberal education as lite entertainment for bored college students” Mark Edmunson (1997)
writes:

How did my students reach this peculiar state in which all passion seems to be
spent? I think that many of them have imbibed their sense of self from consumer
culture in general and from the tube in particular. They’re the progeny of 100
cable channels and omnipresent Blockbuster outlets. TV, Marshall McLuhan
famously said, is a cool medium. Those who play best on it are low-key and
nonassertive; they blend in. (p. 40)

Dance departments are not immune to such commercialization and
commodification of education, but they face a slightly different “sell.” In light of a field
in which a job that involves a 401k, or even health care, is hard to come by, dance
departments cannot present the education they offer as particularly practical. And, most
certainly, a major that involves blistered feet and 14-hour days, is not an easy route to a
college degree. The situation somewhat particular to elite college dance programs, is that
entering students come with training—of some sort—and college dance becomes an
avenue to continue dancing. Increasingly though, as Dance Studies has developed into a
significant element of dance in higher education, students in university dance programs who come to dance, also have the opportunity to learn about dance.

Physical Practice

The actual physical practice in university departments shifted after postmodern dance changed the dance field. Dance departments from the late 1980s and into the 1990s began to contend with two forces: eclectic training approaches and burgeoning research agendas. Although many programs included courses that embodied the self and movement exercises pioneered by H’Doubler, many also implemented a core of codified ballet and modern technique classes. Hagood (2000) writes:

While retaining essential elements of H’Doubler’s philosophy in the rationale for dance in the academy, almost surreptitiously, within the day to day experience in the classroom and in the studio, college dance began to assume the cultural characteristics of the professional field. (p. 287)

But the influence of post-modernism complicated things:

The non-traditional nature of the post-modern aesthetic caused repercussions in college dance. Academic dance was confronted with a new, largely indeterminate message from the artistic, professional world. Indeterminate in the sense that while the rules for making dances were changing, they were not changing toward a new set of ‘rules.’ The evolution of dance in the professional world presented collegiate dance with a charge: to contextualize what could, conceivably, degenerate into a post-modern indeterminate, and sectarian relativism, into a new approach that would be cohesive and purposeful in educationally viable terms. (Hagood, 2000, p. 289)

In a chapter on alignment in The body eclectic: Evolving practices in dance training, Glenna Batson (2008) defines the somatics model in dance as “[emphasizing] the embodied, processual nature of the soma, where self-guiding and transformational capabilities are realized through a sensed bodily experience” (p. 146). By this definition,
somatic study has been an element of dance in the academy since Margaret H’Doubler at the University of Wisconsin brought a skeleton into the studio and asked her students to lie on the floor and sense their movements. As the first home of dance departments, physical education programs sought to teach women dancing, in order to teach them to care for their bodies. This extended beyond the sensation of the body: in the 1930s, Maryrose Reeves Allen explicitly connected dance and hygiene in her program at Howard University. Today somatics, again a part of dance education, draws dancers to the internal sensation of dancing—an effort to privilege the sensate body over the ideal body. With an increasingly unfit, stressed, and injured student body, somatics carries the allure of a healthier way of being. To proponents, this move has returned the value of dance to exploration and healthy bodily functioning. To opponents, it makes for dance that is more rewarding to do than to watch.
Appendix D

Personal Epistemology

Learning is both a process and an outcome. Contemporary educators prioritize the construction of knowledge by the learner and foundational to such a view of education are the students “way[s] of constructing meaningful interpretations of [student] experiences,” which are formed by “the underlying assumptions that appear to guide the process of knowing” (King, 1996, p. 231). Beliefs about knowledge impact the construction of knowledge. Most epistemological theory is developmental (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule, 1986; Magolda, 1992; Perry, 1970; King and Kitchener, 1994; Magolda, 1992); however, some theories challenge this by looking at knowing in dimensions rather than stages (Schommer-Aikins, 2002), and recently educational researchers have looked more towards domain-specific epistemological development (Hofer, 2004; Schoenfeld, 1992) rather than expecting a pervasive belief about knowledge. Personal epistemology is the term psychologist Barbara Hofer (2002) presents as a catch-all term for several angles of inquiry into the impact of student beliefs about knowledge on learning. What follows is a brief overview of influential inquires into personal epistemology in college student development.

Perry scheme. Over a 15-year period in the 1950s and 1960s, William Perry (1970) conducted a study with Harvard undergraduates—then a privileged, white, male cohort—asking them about their learning over the prior year. While he had expected to
discover that personality traits would account for variance in student learning (for instance, hypothesizing that certain students would be drawn to certain teaching styles), he found an overall trend in the student’s conceptualizations of knowledge. The resulting Perry scheme showed a distinct directionality through seven steps in the four stages from dualism, to multiplism, to relativism, to a commitment within relativism. In the dualistic stage, students perceive knowledge as concrete and obtainable. They believe in single truths and they believe that the teacher can pass on such truth. By the commitment within relativism, as Pugh (2005) summarizes, “knowledge is a creative resolution between uncertainty and the need to act, which makes it a dynamic means of transaction between the self [and] the environment, requiring both stability and flexibility” (p. 3-4). Perry didn’t claim to have created a definitive developmental model of epistemological development, however. Although others have followed, Perry’s scheme still represents an ideal grand narrative of American higher education. One comes to college a naive concrete thinker, then facing and conquering challenges, he emerges able to lead the masses, poised for action and able to debate difficult issues: the Harvard man.

**Women’s ways of knowing.** Several models have followed Perry’s scheme, refining and challenging it. Perhaps most well known beyond college student development literature is Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule’s (1986) *Women’s ways of knowing.* Responding to Perry’s model by querying the epistemological conceptualizations of a diverse population of women, their model includes five “perspectives”: silence, received knowing, subjective knowledge, procedural knowledge, and constructed knowledge. Important for this study, Belenky et al, introduced the
concepts of connected and separate knowing. Highlighting connectivity, they write of the
women’s usage of metaphors of speaking and listening in contrast to traditional visual
metaphors for knowledge:

Visual metaphors, such as "the mind’s eye," suggest a camera passively recording
a static reality and promote the illusion that disengagement and objectification are
central to the construction of knowledge. Visual metaphors encourage standing at
a distance to get a proper view, removing—it is believed—subject and object
from a sphere of possible intercourse. Unlike the eye, the ear operates by
registering nearby subtle change. Unlike the eye, the ear requires closeness
between subject and object. Unlike seeing, speaking and listening suggest
dialogue and interaction.

We also note that philosophers and scientists who use visual metaphors to connote
“mind” value the impairment of that sense. Thus moral philosophers argue for
"blind justice" and donning the “veil of ignorance” so that “she” (justice) may
choose impartially without either considering the intimate and the particular or
anticipating the consequences. Similarly, the scientist tries to approach his
studies “blind” or “double blind” so that he, too, may be removed from the
influence of the particular. Attempts to blind the seeing knower have made it
difficult for the scientist and the philosopher to acknowledge the role the knower
plays in the construction of knowledge. Indeed, it is only now that there is
widespread recognition among scientists and philosophers of the importance of
“putting the knower back into the known” as they come to understand how
intentional blindness limits what one can “see” with the mind’s eye. (pp. 18-19)

Arguing for a dialogical, interactive women’s knowledge, the authors prioritize
the context of the knower through metaphors of “voice” (Gilligan, 1982).

**Reflective judgment.** The notion of engaging in problem-solving is central to King and
Kirchner’s reflective judgment model. This developmental model is explained through
the ways “people use evidence in making decisions about problems that cannot be
defined and resolved with completeness and certainty” (King, 1996, p. 232). The highest
level of reflective judgment is the “outcome of a process of reasonable inquiry.” Their
premises, “1) individuals’ understanding of the nature, limits, and certainty of knowing
(they epistemic assumptions) affects how they defend their judgments; and 2) their
epistemic assumptions change over time in a developmentally related fashion” concern, in particular, knowledge beliefs by looking at how students engage with ill-structured problems. In brief, ill-structured problems (like abortion or health care reform or art imitating life versus life imitating art) provide an opportunity for the most developed students to delve into murky waters and emerge on a particular side.

**Developing a Sense of Knowledge**

These developmental theories—along with Marcia Baxter Magolda’s (1992) model of epistemological reflection—share, “an interactionist, constructivist, cognitive developmental view of the individual’s evolving understanding of the world” (Hofer, 2001, p. 356). Psychologist Barbara Hofer presents personal epistemology as an evolving set of theories that individuals apply and transform and also draws from non-developmental work like that of Marlene Schommer-Aikins (2002) which proposed individual dimensions of knowledge rather than stages (structure, stability, source, and the speed of acquisition). Hofer, looking to cognitive science, highlights context, noting that personal epistemology may be "more situated and less stable or trait-like." She also considers expertise, expecting that as expertise increases, so might one’s perception of the complexity of knowledge.

Hofer’s assertion that “individuals appear to have differing epistemological assumptions about disciplines (Donald, 1995; Hofer, 2000), rather than general beliefs about knowledge that override disciplinary context,” (p. 361) applies to this population. Even within the discipline, the students articulate differing beliefs about the nature of knowledge—for instance, comparing the detailed anatomical knowledge of ballet,
knowledge that is fluid but factual, to the group process of improvisation, knowledge that is systemic and volatile.
Appendix E:

Journals
yes, i am giving you homework for the break. i promise that it will be fun. in fact you don’t have to do it all. just do the parts that seem like fun. in january you will give it to me and i will copy it and give it back to you. thank you thank you thank you thank you thank you--ashley ✴✴
articulating the physical, winter data collection

maps

TASK #1: diagram your dance training. be as creative or as pedantic as you like. make sure you include important experiences, whether they were one time classes or performances or years of studying with a teacher. i made the questions two ways, so you can approach it either or both ways.

TASK #2: think about where you are as a dancer and where you’d like to go. make a map of your life now and your desires for the future. feel free to include personal or other career desires or you can stick to dance.

TASK #3: trace backwards. make a family tree of your dance training and creative influences. you may want to visit or call former dance teachers to learn about their backgrounds. for osu faculty or guest artists, look online and read their bios.
articulating the physical, winter data collection
tell me about your dance background. when did you start dancing? why? where? why did you keep dancing? what do you remember it feeling like? describe the look and smell of the place. did you have a critical moment when you had to decide to keep dancing or to quit? what did you do? did you dance in high school? in school or afterschool? describe ...
make a map of your dance life. how are you organizing your dance life? what are you doing? where are you going? what matters to you? what do you desire?
make a family tree of your dance training. List important teachers, performances, experiences and try to trace backwards, learning about their influences, experiences, and teachers.
images

TASK #1: take several photographs of movement. This may be movement that you see in your daily life, movement that you seek out, or photographs of you dancing. Select three images and explain them in terms of movement: what you see; what you felt while taking the picture; what you were doing while the photo was being taken.

TASK #2: take several photographs of the spaces that organize your college life. Where do you go? What buildings, landscapes, trees, streets, etc, do you see on a daily basis. Select two and describe how you feel in these spaces/places and/or how you interact with them.
collage

TASK #1: make a visual display of your aesthetic. what sorts of things appeal to you? what colors, textures, shapes, draw you in? use any sorts of materials: magazine clippings, photographs, drawings, textiles...

TASK #2: describe the process of making your collage. what does it say about you? did anything emerge from the making of it? write one sentence that could accompany your collage.
essays

several questions follow. freewrite, write poetry, list words, draw, paste pictures--whatever you'd like in response.
what is it like to know in dance?
describe a phrase or improvisation where you felt like you really knew the material.
is there a right way to dance? how do you know? make an argument.
what are you working on in your dancing? what do you want to improve upon? how did you decide that this is a worthy goal? how will you know when you’ve achieved that?
describe the physical sensations of dancing. what is it like to do what you do?
how does dance interface with your life?