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Finding Voice, The Body Speaks:  
Original Work and Counter-Hegemonic Performance and Practice

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of  
Fine Arts at the Virginia Commonwealth University

by

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May 2017

## Acknowledgements

I would not have been able to navigate graduate school without the excellent guidance and teaching of my advisor Dr. Noreen C. Barnes who has re-inspired the life of study, along with the professors I studied under in the graduate theatre program: Dr. Tawnya Pettiford-Wates and her Ritual Poetic Drama process, soliciting story from individual and collective experience, Dr. Aaron D. Anderson for offering the ability to read language, and David S. Leong for requiring the reduction of things towards their essence. I would like to thank my spouse and life partner Alicia Diaz for her constant support in this process, and towards our joint effort in raising our two daughters, Laila and Gabriela. I thank my parents Pauline Thornton and James Thornton for exposing me to Literature and Theatre, and opening the way, as well as my twin sister Leah in our parallel paths. Finally, I have been fortunate to study under numerous talented instructors, masters, teachers and artists that have shared their expertise in diverse movement practices, and collectively guide me as I take my own spiral journey through the study of movement.

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## Abstract

### FINDING VOICE, THE BODY SPEAKS: ORIGINAL WORK AND COUNTER-HEGEMONIC PERFORMANCE AND PRACTICE

By Matthew Paul Thornton, M.F.A.

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts at the Virginia Commonwealth University

Virginia Commonwealth University, 2017.

Major Director: Dr. Noreen C. Barnes,  
Director of Graduate Studies, Theatre Department

Graduate study in theatre has allowed me to understand my work as an artist and educator from a critical academic perspective. I have researched Butoh as a model for original work that employs multiculturalism against hegemonic control of personal identity. From my own training experience, I am recognizing Capoeira, Contact Improvisation, and Devising processes (co-creation or collaborative creative process in dance) as counter-hegemonic forms and techniques that share a physical/philosophical emphasis on communal engagement, improvisation, circularity and repetition. Looking at them together provides points of intersection for me to examine them as an artist, while posing questions for cross-cultural investigations. In this process, it has been crucial to consider my personal relationship with these forms along with the aesthetics and values associated

with them, their potential use in academic contexts, and their support as practices to match theoretical discourse towards a pluralistic and multicultural society.

## **Introduction**

In this thesis I will address the values and aesthetics of forms from the margins, crossing the borders between dance and theatrical realms and practiced as experimental, alternative and counter-cultural expression. I will also look at the development and understanding of my own creative work in relationship to them. I am reflecting on my previous experiences as an artist and teacher and in relationship to the education I have received from the Graduate Theatre Program at VCU, allowing me to frame the narrative of my own work within an academic lens. I have considered my recent artistic work in conversation with my training and my graduate study involving Theatre History, Theatre Historiography, Modern Theatre: Theory and Practice, Pedagogy courses in Movement, Acting and Directing, and Applied Theatre and Solo Performance.

Coursework and research led me directly to unknown lineages of my own training and a deeper understanding of post-modern dance and avant-garde theater practice in the U.S. and Europe, as well as their claimed relationship to Eastern movement and philosophy and their sublimated relationship with Africanist forms. It has allowed me to clarify the history, aesthetics, values and purposes of my work within a larger context, and in support of techniques and approaches to performance that seem strangely absent or unnoted in many academic programs in Theatre and Dance, but which have clear histories and impacts on our understanding of performed art today.



My professional experience and teaching in a wide variety of contexts had given me access to academia as a movement artist pursuing creative research, but without a clear academic narrative of my works' value. This does not mean I had not considered philosophical approaches to movement, but I was a practice/performance based artist with an oblique understanding of critical theory as it directly related to my work. My idiosyncratic training and approach allowed access into some spheres while also limited my employment opportunities. I understood capoeira as an art form of liberation and resistance from the African Diaspora, and contact improvisation and collaborative choreographic processes as counter to mainstream culture, but I would not have labeled them as counter-hegemonic. I now claim my diverse training as challenging dance and theatre norms for performance, requiring their own set of standards of evaluation inside academia. Looking at employment opportunities right now, an increasing number of academic positions are opening for Afro-Diasporic forms, improvisational practices, collaborative creative/choreographic processes (particularly in relationship to technology), and applied theatre. In a global worldview that values pluralism and multiple perspectives, these approaches in academia should be accompanied by an appropriate set of standards for the evaluation of their success, different from a western hegemonic rubric.

## **Counter Hegemonic Forms and Cross-Cultural Values**

My work comes about 40-50 years after the avant-garde theater and post-modern dance movements in the United States. In the 1970s, capoeira also arrives through the east and west coasts. These disparate forms share some of the same aesthetics and values: communal collaboration / use of improvisation / repetition / juxtaposition / polyrhythms and multiple levels of meaning / inverting the process-product hierarchy / embodied and somatic (mind-body-spirit) / ritual or ritualistic / unfinished and experimental / non-linear and non-narrative flow, emphasizing circularity and being part of a continuum / being vs. performing. These are at once modern and ancient, reflecting the circularity of non-western perspectives alongside influences of western avant-garde practices.

Deidre Heddon and Jane Milling discuss the history of devising in America, Europe and Australia, where a ritual encounter of the actor with themselves as well as the audience is informed by an "encounter with the performer's body as unguarded and transcendently revealing" (50). They go on to describe the work of Anna Halprin, Richard Schechner, Joseph Chaikin, Jerzy Grotowski and ultimately Antonin Artaud, where "the inspiration for much of the idea of the 'encounter' in the theatre was drawn from the gnostic imagination that haunts Antonin Artaud's *Theatre and its Double*" (50), which was first published in 1938. Interestingly, Artaud's inspiration is largely informed by experiences with Balinese ritual/dance/music/theatre/community event, not claimed to

a single artist but rather a cultural form, and as such, the Euro-American lineage stops with Artaud. This seeding of European avant-garde theater/dance practice with non-western philosophical traditions reveals that counter hegemonic impulses in modern and postmodern performance practice announce a 'new' way of performing with aesthetics that have ancient roots, while also underscoring a dangerous hegemonic relationship involving potential appropriation and ownership. Ownership is often understood in a western perspective as pertaining to an individual, and further complicates the ability to recognize influences that occur from communal cultural production in non-western forms. As devising is also a collaborative form, creating work collectively can propose a series of philosophical challenges to the individual as they integrate with a group: what is shared? What is mine? What is our individual and group purpose? What do we want to say/do? A contemporary approach to devising should also include an intimate look at the relationship with non-western forms, and their deep influence on avant-garde theater and dance practice/performance, as I will discuss later.

I desire to understand the relationship between the fields of theatre and dance beyond their prescribed roles in American academic study, as my early training and current study in theatre are considered alongside my professional performing and teaching experience in dance. Anna Halprin, who was among the initiators of post-modern dance, discusses her relationship between the two fields, as well as the understanding of working within a continuum, versus a linear and forward progression:

When an artist begins to work outside the officially recognized context of her discipline, the established artistic community will often ignore her. If this doesn't work (because the artist is either persistent of good or both) she may be called 'avant-garde', meaning that she is ahead of the times or so far behind that she seems to be ahead (which is what happens when things move in circles). The dance community in the 60's was too

conservative to have an official avant-garde; the theatre world, however, was not. So my work began to be thought of as theatre. (54)

My early training was in Ensemble performance, original theatre pieces created collaboratively primarily-though not exclusively-through movement improvisation. This experience prepared me for working with the world renowned dance company Pilobolus, which develops all of its work from improvisation and in collaboration with two or more artistic directors, guest artists, and in direct collaboration with the performers. Pilobolus at its inception was a group of six dancer/choreographers, who performed and created work as a collective. By the time I performed with them, the reality of this collective of dancers controlling the artistic space had shifted to the artistic directors, but it was still at the core of what distinguished it from the hierarchical model of most professional American dance companies, where a sole choreographer composes their vision on the bodies of the young highly trained technical dancers. This movement-based, ensemble driven, devised performance is a direct outgrowth of the post-modern dance and theatre movements from the 1960s and 1970s.

Aside from the emphasis on generating work collaboratively, another major contribution of the artists from this time was the use of improvisation as a performance tool, and some in academia have gone on to define improvisational practices and performance as instant composition or spontaneous choreography. There are numerous parallels in the performance and composition of music, perhaps the most accessible would be to consider a jazz ensemble, defined by unique talents that form a group, but whose individual voices are expressed improvisationally through clearly structured composition. I see this link between Afro-diasporic arts and the avant-garde

predominately white post-modern dance world: a clear emphasis on community, with improvisation as the tool to express individual identity within the group, and as the highest form of creativity: the space of innovation. Self realized voices create a stronger collective.

For parallels in athletic competition and martial arts, set movement patterns are trained for the sole purpose of applying them improvisationally, which involves reading movement information from another body, and using 'feel' to respond appropriately to the context. In Internal martial arts, set movement patterns are practiced often in much larger and slower patterns than would be used in an improvised response in application. Martial arts master Wilson Pitts discussed the relationship of improvisation for combat and its relationship to dance through our e-mail correspondence:

While dance improvisation is the process of spontaneously creating movement, combat sports and actual combat is 80 to 90 percent improvisation of rehearsed sequences and techniques. While fighters have to express themselves with techniques they have mastered, no prearranged choreography will work in the live improvisational moment of a fight. This makes martial arts a natural place to seek out undiscovered dance idioms related to dance improvisation *particularly where contact or the potential for contact occurs* [my emphasis].

Steve Paxton was strongly influenced by the partnering responses and body use in the martial art form Aikido, along with the proposal that a dance could be almost entirely about improvised touch and feeling, and he realized this interest in the creation of the art-form Contact Improvisation.

While western dance choreographic practices rest heavily on a single choreographer setting their work to a group of technicians (dancers), The *dancer as improvising choreographer* is a pattern found in much older non-western dance practices

as well, particularly those from the African Diaspora like the battle-dance Capoeira, which is trained with known movement patterns, but can only be expressed authentically as an improvisation by the dancer. Contact Improvisation can be trained with set patterns, but can only be danced as an improvisation unique to the dancers involved. The work done for improvisational performance is on going, and this ability to engage improvisationally as I have been trained demonstrates the rigors of regular practice.

Capoeira also employs call and response song structure and movement conversation which defines alternating leader / group relationships as well as challenges the performer and audience relationship. The use of polyrhythms allows for multiple levels of meaning, with multiple musical voices co-existing at the same time. The polyrhythms are also defined in movement, as the body isolations and articulations in hips/feet/shoulders define complex and multilayered expression, particularly for use in an improvised manner. In the post-modern dance and avant-garde theatre of the 60s, the audience - performer relationship is either challenged or invigorated to eliminate separation. The audience is not there to be entertained by but to participate in or witness the event, while the functioning of multiple voices and/or multiple levels of meaning is intently examined.

### **Disrupting Hegemonic Values and Hierarchies**

Language shapes culture and rhetoric naturalizes society. Inside the evaluation of performance arts this can be observed, the tension between acquiescence and rebellion to this control. Counter-hegemonic practices challenge western canonized standards for evaluation, finding value in what has been dismissed.

In validating my own work and defining my own narrative, I have encountered challenges to collaborative work, improvisation, repetition and the process/product relationship. In my most recent University position, my work was dismissed as unfinished, repetitive, collaborative and lacking sole ownership, improvisational, with an inability to distinguish high quality finished work from site-specific or street performance. Ironically, these are the same qualities in which I find value. Collaboration is co-creation within a community where the individual contribution is subsumed into a collective. I identify with the devising forms arriving in performance from the 1960s, as well as the traditional role of extended family/tribe emphasized in traditional non-western forms, forms that often combine music, dance, theatrical play, and ritual as one experience. My approach has been dismissed as improvised, assuming that improvisation is ad-hoc and never completed, versus adaptable individualistic expression of unique identity within a community and inside a continuum, where innovation and creativity define an individual's contribution through the improvisational voice. The criticism of repetition is both the inability to read difference in the face of otherness, as well as an innate value inside counter-hegemonic forms for non-linear, non-narrative circularity, where 'being' in a process is prioritized over 'arriving' at a product. Finally, it only makes sense that taking performance out of the theatre and into streets or alternative venues changes the value, use and purpose of the art, as well as the demographics of the 'audience.' Polished concert dance, opera, or western theatre inside an established venue where a ticket must be purchased, is a different context than a street roda (the circle where capoeira is played) or site specific performance, which engages and challenges in a populist forum and where the rules and purpose of performance, as well as the preparation for it, are fundamentally

different. They do not function in the same way and need to be looked at relative to their purpose, the artists' intentions, and their contexts. How can you criticize an apple for not tasting like an orange?

Working collaboratively and improvisationally are both ancient and modern practices that are pertinent to the past, present and future of dance practice and performance. They are also the skills that allow for effective site-specific performance, and presentation of work that differs from traditional western notions of performance and correspondingly appropriate venues.

### **Identity, Form, Theory and Practice**

My work as an artist and educator has primarily been through the body, investigating movement practices for personal growth and expression that may also lead to original artistic expression. Graduate school has prompted me to question and reframe my personal relationship with art and its potential for transformation on an individual, communal and societal level. Many classes focused on the contemporary social/political climate while understanding how we as individuals function within it. Given this understanding, what ways can we approach an educational theatre process, either for entertainment, social change, or an embodied change in individual students. I am conscious daily of disparities around race, class and gender as well as culture, ethnicity, and political representation, but it has been a long time since I have been in an extended forum where recognizing the need for multidimensional perspectives towards building shared communities has been required.



I have had to recognize my own white male privilege culturally, and the choice I was able to make in part because of this privilege, to investigate counter-hegemonic forms as an artist. I have spent more than twenty years working in movement practices, and took for granted the value and importance of the forms, never developing the language or narrative to defend their value against hegemonic cultural standards, standards that prioritize training and production techniques in academia for use in Western concert dance and theatre venues.

An initial study of theatre for social change in *Modern Theatre: Theory and Practice*, taught by Dr. Aaron Anderson, and *Applied Theatre* taught by Dr. Tawnya Pettiford-Wates, introduced me to Augusto Boal and Paulo Freire, allowing me to consider the relationship between practice and theory. Boal's *Theatre of the Oppressed* provided an extensive outline of the history of Western Theatre practices and their use and purpose, from the ancient Greek to the middle of the 20th century. I was impressed that three-quarters of his text dealt with this history, before he finished by outlining his own practice and methodology. An intimate knowledge of the history and use of theatre as a form of oppression allowed him to arrive at his own methods. His lens on the past practice of theatre as a form of oppression also allowed me to understand the hesitancy with which I have approached 'traditional' American theatre and dance. Kathleen S. Berry's *The Dramatic Arts and Cultural Studies: Educating Against the Grain*, addresses hegemonic cultural production, and the use of theory from cultural studies to reframe the practice and potential use of the performing arts. Both these texts have been important references for me as I consider the use and value of performing arts as both an artist and educator.

In both my teaching and creative research, I explore the ability to improvise and respond, and the need to engage with another body in effective and appropriate ways given the context and the form. I do not mean this metaphorically, though addressing how the body moves has clear implications for how to observe and address society at large. I strongly encourage students to listen to how their physical practice impacts their philosophical understanding of the world, their relationship to it and functioning inside of it, while expanding perceptions of the use and purpose of performance. When students connect to their creative voice by understanding their own physical facility and in the relationship between the mind/body/spirit, the potential arises to reclaim the use of the body in conscious ways. This self-realization of the individual inevitably yields a deeper critique of the forces that have co-opted or negated the mind/body/spirit.

Marx insists society is structured to serve the economic mode of production, and all inside of society are co-opted into this venture. Michel Foucault discusses *practices of freedom*, by which individual attempt to address the prison we live in, constrained, consuming and existing for the modes of production. For me, the role of art has always been associated with an alternative vision of the world. Puppeteer Inés Pasic of Teatro Hugo & Ines, insists that her work is political because she chooses how to use her own body for creativity. What I have understood through art, is what butoh practitioner Hijikata Tatsumi referred to as movement that disregards a productive-use; the body is there to serve the dance, not economics (though another pertinent topic would discuss making art economically viable, I don't intend to address that here). His work began in the tumultuous youth rebellion in Japan in the 1960s that challenged Westernization, capitalism, and a repressive Japanese society. In this space, individual hearts, minds and

bodies can be transformed, and the social change enacted is perhaps more personal than political. This may also be a seed for self-realization *toward* activism. Art forms that address personal freedom have the potential for broader use. In a recent Black Lives Matter protest march in Philadelphia the berimbau (the primary instrument for the Afro-Brazilian Art Capoeira) was prominently featured among the protesters. The water protectors against the Dakota Access Pipeline used ritual (sweat lodges), drumming and dance to identify self and community through protest. Practices become at these times a tool with a broader use. Poetic self-expression through the body witnessed by community and displayed in protest is a clear tool for counter-hegemonic resistance.

All of these practices share a common goal of greater personal awareness in relationship to self and others, or the environment, and employ self-study in conjunction with tactile training and experience with others. I cannot say, from my personal experience, that traditional western concert forms share this interest, where the body is trained primarily in order to be a tool for the choreographer to shape a desired aesthetic. Training is looking in the mirror, moving in unison and facing the same direction, often negating internal impulses or the recognition of the living human bodies around you. The mirror provides an invaluable tool to correct form, but embodied movement emanates from inside the body, where the body becomes a reflection of the internal self.

Modern, Post-Modern, Contemporary performance have all arrived from individual artists and collectives fighting against the co-opting of the body and spirit. In the end techniques are established which are ultimately validated by their codification, and the technique's absorption into and service for performance forms functioning inside dominant culture. Feeder dance programs and schools all over the country cater to this

model for the youth. This is the model we see in most Higher Education programs, with a few notable exceptions.

### **Individual, Community, and Education**

Often students are not taught to be creative artists with an individual voice, they are taught to proficiently perform a technique for a prescribed role within a rigid production oriented structure supported by Western European hegemonic standards for performance. I have worked in dance and theatre contexts, as well as with somatic practices that emphasize the relationship between mind/body and spirit. My work has focused on developing authentic and original impulses for practice and performance across a broad spectrum of forms. This places a high value on improvisation as a creative tool of adaptability and individual expression, and co-creation (collaboration) as the shared space of enlightened communal experience. I believe these tools work best when students learn to move effectively on their own while finding their original voice, in various partnerships with others, and while playing a role within a group or community.

In my eight years of work as an Assistant Professor, I have become acutely aware of the potential for cultural bias in Western European hegemonic cultural standards for performance and training. This has taught me to question who is excluded from the performance experience and why. Community-oriented performance should offer alternatives to these standards. By its nature, community-oriented performance should expand the breadth of who is involved and where the performances can take place.

To move beyond access to the institution, and towards inclusion, the scope and value of performance itself must be broadened. Devised, practice based, social, and

community-centered arts should be assessed by their own values, aesthetics, and purpose. These may include: multiple perspectives, identifying under-represented cultural forms, alternate venues, the use of improvisation, the participation of the non-specialist, the dynamic and fluid relationship between audience and performer, balancing the process/product relationship, the encouragement to develop experimental forums that may yield 'unfinished' products. Deidre Heddon and Jane Milling propose that devising original work (as opposed restaging established plays or having a sole choreographer transpose or set work) may be one essential way to matching contemporary theory with a contemporary practice:

It is our argument that collaborative devising processes match contemporary critical concern, making it an ideal means to explore and embody those concerns in practice . . . a layered, fragmented and non linear 'text', one specifically courting various perspectives and viewpoints, perhaps lends itself more readily to the group devising process. Or, to put it the other way around, a group devising process is more likely to engender a performance that has multiple perspectives, that does not promote one, authoritative, 'version' or interpretation, and that may reflect the complexities of contemporary experience and the variety of narratives that constantly intersect with, inform, and in very real ways, construct our lives. (192)

I see little reason why this process should be left to professional artists, except for the structural limitations inside academia, where new curricula or pedagogical approaches may have to be developed. In a liberal arts institution, it could be the fundamental tool through which students 'make-sense' of the diverse fields of study in the humanities: devised performance could be the space where the education could be realized in practice. Not only would this encourage cross-discipline conversations, it would inherently broaden the demographics of the students involved.

Young artists can express their own voice individually and collectively in creative, not interpretative, performance. They may want to utilize a number of different influences to accomplish this. Using devised solo and co-creation (collaborative) authorship of original work stemming from personal experience offers this opportunity. Devising text, sound and movement, using non-narrative and non-linear approaches to performance, offers healthy alternatives to the established processes of producing the well-made play. In my experience as a graduate student, this has been a central theme in the teachings of Dr. Tawnya Pettiford-Wates. In a community oriented performance or practiced based approach in academia, the venture should be centered on nurturing a shared humanity as creative individuals first. Students who learn to access their own voice and creativity as artists will flourish in their understandings of themselves, have a greater understanding of the purpose and use of the performing arts, and also have more to offer in the more traditional spheres of performance. This is particularly true for those who have not been given voice, those who find no roles to be 'type' cast, or who have not learned western concert dance/theatre techniques.

Improvisation and Contact Improvisation emphasize practice as performance, with the body as the site of investigation. Capoeira is an Afro-Brazilian battle-dance expressed through song and movement in highly physical theatrical play. Though arriving from distinctly different cultures, these forms require a communal experience for exercising highly personalized improvisational engagement. Fundamentally, the practices are about self-realization and empowerment through improvised conversations with others. The health of a group rests on the individual's ability to find their own voice and in direct dialogue with the voices of others. I have used these forms to develop

effective partner techniques with students, as resources for creative research, and as the primary forms where I have engaged in community outreach at the university level.

Brenda Dixon Gottschild references contact improvisation as coming from the postmodern tradition, and the employment of call and response, deeply integrated in Africanist forms, as fundamental practices needed towards realizing multiculturalism.

Both provide:

a model for equality-with-difference and living with and negotiating the process of existence. These lessons must be learned if we are to have a multicultural context. Both contact improvisation and call-and-response are forms that reside in the subjunctive world of improvisation. Yes, there is theory to ground them, but it hovers on the periphery and is complete only when realized and vitalized in practice. More than theories, we need practices to emulate multicultural models. (144)

So what is the difficulty in understanding their value inside contemporary curriculum? In all fairness, this depends on Institution and the Department, but having attended numerous American dance conferences over the last eight years I can say they are highly underrepresented. In my first Assistant Professor position in an established dance department, it was clear that I introduced new knowledge to the program, and it was clear to me that I was supported in doing so, first through the support of mentors and colleagues in the Department, in faculty meetings and in public forums where my voice was encouraged and included, through the advising of students to participate in my classes and choreographies, and the space, time, and access to training students in the Department in methodologies foreign to their previous experience. In my second position at an institution with a newly developed major inside a small dance program subordinate to the theatre program, the rhetoric of inclusion was present, particularly on an institutional level, but the reality presented clear structural challenges to having any

real inclusion of alternative forms and methods with students, particularly beyond the classroom and into presentation and performance. There was limited collegial support to truly integrate counter-hegemonic practices in performance and where it counted. As I noted earlier, the fundamental values of counter-hegemonic forms, at least in my artistic work, were disparaged for not being of high-quality, so how can this mindset provide the nourishing space to teach them?

Real structural limitations existed to actual inclusion of forms or the openness to a broad and diverse student base coming from diverse experiences in movement and dance. Student scholarships, access to the only dance company in the Department, the only opportunity to dance on the main stage in a fully produced show, the platform for students to create their own choreographies with the support of Department, student pieces that would travel to college dance conferences, a season that lasted August to February with numerous renowned guest choreographers and master classes, all required proficiency in a ballet and modern audition. To take a real journey in the Department, a ballet passport was required. It was necessary to profit from the program's main interest in student development and success. If you did not enter the university already having acquired the language of power within American concert dance, the rhetoric of inclusion was fundamentally limited to marginal access with no path towards real growth for students that arrived from the margins, from outside of center. Aside from a series of introductory level classes that often truly transform students who have not encountered dance, there was a looming standard that clearly limited their inclusion.

I encountered numerous students with a strong interest in dance that could not perceive from either the visual representation of the Department, the performance



opportunities, or the upper level classes, any space for them in the Department outside of tangential contact. I think it is crucial for Universities to consider the training of ballet in a post-colonial discourse: not everyone needs to speak French to learn how to engage in a new language! Ballet plays an irreplaceable role in our understanding of the development and history of the field in Europe, the United States, and perhaps the world, but in no way should be maintained as the standard for access and privilege to expressing oneself creatively through dance, particularly in a liberal arts institution. An equal focus should be placed on training that matches multicultural theory, as discussed in the previous chapter that addresses the value of call and response, contact improvisation, and devising processes.

There are many forward thinking individuals who project into the future but are mired by the weight of their institutional structures. Access is provided to some using pluralistic and global language and changing the face of the institution, while feudalistic practices inside individual departments are exclusionary, reverting to Western European hegemonic cultural standards for participation. This can be seen in performance opportunities, in curricular structure, in the design of performance and practice spaces, and in the evaluation of non-traditional forms by traditional academic standards.

I have generated a series of questions to better understand the purpose of the field in American academia and my own experience in it.

- What use do marginalized dance/movement forms serve?
- Does this use serve multicultural rhetoric or propose extended programs of study geared toward inclusion?

- Who trains in mainstream dance technique (ballet/modern) before coming to college/university?
- What other forms do youth engage in that are not-represented/validated in academia?
- Who performs these under represented forms?
- Why do they do them?
- How does this define who participates on the college/university level?
- How do higher education programs reinforce 'high' culture, classical western hegemonic standards through technique requirements? How can this be seen across the arts, and across the humanities?
- What use does dance serve in the context of American Theatre?
- What is the function of social dance and movement practice? If it does not directly yield choreography in the Western Concert dance model, where is its value?
- What is the relationship between students that study dance and students that study theatre?

### **Personal Training History**

Looking at my own training as an artist, I have pursued movement forms that are counter to mainstream American performance cultural practice. This began with the training in Ensemble performance with my father James Thornton. He created a movement based theatre training at Shaker Heights High School in Ohio that developed presence and focus through the breath, body, and voice, and utilized group improvisational practice for original, devised movement theatre pieces. The performance was conceived of as an energetic transmission between performers and audience, one that

was imbued with the spirit of the performer. Following my graduate study, it is now clear to me that this training was influenced in part by a Euro-American lineage of physical theatre from Artaud, to Grotowski, to Joseph Chaikin and the Open Theatre, as well as Richard Schechner and crossover artist Anna Halprin creating in a dance idiom but finding performance support in theatre.

I enrolled in my first formal class in choreography at Hamilton College, and studied Contact Improvisation and began my training of Capoeira at the University of Wisconsin, Madison. After college I was introduced to Chi-Gung and Internal Asian martial arts practices, and this diverse training, along with my previous experience in Ensemble devised work, gained me employment with Pilobolus Dance Theatre. I had an early exposure to their work through master classes and workshops while a student of my fathers. While working with the company I helped to codify teaching techniques for a collective choreographic process that did not usually employ traditional western choreography techniques. We were hired in large part because of our individual creative abilities to generate movement ideas as a group.

My research has not been written, but is in body, in the study of forms from disparate fields, and examining the relationship between them through improvisation and set choreography. I have continued training in capoeira, improvisation, contact improvisation, and I am currently studying Gao Style PaKua Chang, Tai Chi, and western boxing fundamentals. My interest has been on perception of self through set form, and then in the remittance of form through improvisation. I also seek to understand each form independently, with greater understanding of both their unique qualities and the points of intersection. This practice-oriented approach to research has inevitably

impacted my choreography, in that the impulses and 'muscle' memory that the body is most familiar with arise in the creative process. At the same time, choreography allows the context to create something new (art) ideally respectful of the training influences yet not restricted by their context. Real discovery in artistic research seeks new information, and asking questions helps depart from known outcomes. By examining seemingly disparate disciplines similar questions appear from different perspectives. This has formed the body of my artistic research over the last six years.

### **Africanist Aesthetics and Post-Modern Dance**

I have examined my root desire to conflate these forms, or at least consider their parallels. I have always had an impulse to draw seemingly disparate elements together. I have done this through physical or spatial relationships across various techniques, across social/cultural barriers towards redefining an artistic lineage, and out of a desire to connect what is intricately related yet socially segregated.

Brenda Dixon Gottschild provides a remarkable account of the relationship between American culture and African aesthetics in her book *Digging the Africanist Presence in American Performance: Dance and Other Contexts*. American Modern dance directly appropriated costuming/style and movement from Eastern and Native American cultures, while post modern was inflected by attitude and approach. Both admitted direct influence from the East, while defining no real relationship to the pervasive African Diasporic influence on the forms, if only for the pervasive influence of African American culture on American identity. Just as the capital accrued through slavery, and indentured servant labor is invisibly dissolved into the economic system, so

to the food, language, customs, attitude, physical carriage and art are subsumed into American culture in "invisible" ways:

The Africanist presence in American culture has shaped a New World legacy that sets American culture apart from that of Western Europe. It is a potent, vital force that plays a significant role in the defining American aesthetic. At the same time, it has suffered from sins of commission and omission; it has been "invisibilized," to coin a new word. (2)

In the predominantly white post-modern dance and avant-garde theater in the States, the discussion of the impact of Africanist aesthetics is negligible. At the same time there are constant references to European avant-garde, and Eastern spiritual, philosophical traditions. It seems easier to reference a culture whose physical presence on the continent it decidedly more distant!

This potentially broadens and deepens our understanding of the postmodern dance movement, and must be considered to have a clearer perception of contemporary dance and theater. Gottschild looks at Richard Schechner's examination of postmodern performance, suggesting:

the following contrastive look at Europeanist and Africanist traditions as paired opposites: linear focus against a multiplicity of signals; narrative form against self-referential clusters of information; upward progression (toward resolution) against circularity (including repetition); cause and effect against continua; and finally, product against process. Experimental theater and postmodern dance constructed their identities around a return to the subjunctive, the experiential-experimental mode, in contrast to the European post-Renaissance, "high" art perspective that privileges product (the dance) over process (the dancing). (18)

The rules were broken, resulting in the new knowledge and idioms in the field, by rejecting classical Western European standards, while using aesthetics, style and tools that are clearly established and identified within Africanist aesthetics. Even where the

look may be different, American culture creolizes European and African influences in very deep ways, and American rebellion through art in particular, utilizes African impulses. It could perhaps be considered white privilege in 1960-70s for the avant-garde theater and dance makers to risk 'breaking all the rules' and get away with it!

As a white male, I find I must re-examine at my own work and the forms and techniques that influence me, the way I speak, the music I listen to, the way I exist, in a different light. The performance history of white performers adopting black art, and making money on it, is the history of minstrelsy, the blues, etc. up to contemporary hip-hop. The performance history is born directly from the historical economic use of the black body in slavery. If I think back to Marx, I do not have guilt for a system wealthy white men created through manifest-destiny that subjugated the rest of society for the means of production: I have strong contemporary concern for my own subliminal blocks, choices and deferred intuitions that are defined by that system, I have concern for the aspects of my own humanity that have been co-opted to participate in that system which is the foundation of the society. I have made money teaching an Afro-Diasporic art form, when the originators of the form practiced it for survival from slavery. While my own purpose is not exploitative, at some level is there not a resonance of sublimated minstrelsy? By claiming the Africanist philosophical influences in my work, because of the history, I must also question my claim's authenticity. There exists at times a neither here nor there space, and that is when practice and community become essential.

The potentially complex relationship with form and identity intrigues me. Who for what reasons at what time acts the way that they do? When given the opportunity to honestly assess our individual roles and responsibilities as artists, are we able to? Art can

provoke this question, and require that we answer in relationship to our own individual truth. Theory suggests we consider this truth within the greater social/cultural/political historiographical perspectives and in direct relationship to the power dynamics involved. Theory perhaps gives us a space to negotiate the questions intellectually, while the practice gives a space to perform.

I understand my desire to place the collective choreographic process (or its parallel in theatre, devised ensemble work), contact improvisation and post-modern dance impulses, in conversation with capoeira and eastern internal martial arts, in a different light. What power, essence of capoeira am I using to tell my own story? In my entrance for my solo work "one head, many hats" what does it mean to begin with capoeira movement and song, and end with a traditional Irish song about death, reveal to me at this point in time? Will I change it with this revelation? Is my own inclination to train Internal Eastern arts, and my desire to discuss butoh as an abstract impact in my vision, merely a lineage of both adopting/appropriating Eastern forms, not a novel and genuine interest driven by a pure inner voice!? To that end, why have I chosen capoeira to train, and not break-dancing? I knew nothing of the history of the dance, the relationship to music and graffiti, the diverse population of peoples that contributed to hip-hop culture in the Bronx, the expansive vision of some of the originators, the numerous parallels to Capoeira. Perhaps too many social barriers to be crossed, and a local protection of the dance after centuries of white theft from the black body? In puberty, I was negotiating race on an emotional level with no intellectual understanding of the social history that had placed me there, watching break-dance in the halls of my high school. I did not connect the communal, improvisatory nature of it to the ensemble theatre classes I was

taking. I didn't see a space in it for me, while recognizing its power and draw on me. When I encountered Capoeira in Cleveland at age nineteen, I saw an opening and heard a call to participate. Capoeira was considered both a African influenced martial art (the only one that has travelled in form to the Midwest) alternative, global, and open to all if you were up to the rigorous training! My teacher Wayne Chandler had been exposed to it in Washington D.C., and I can now see he approached his work as a messenger announcing the presence of a deep art form, while not as a master of the form himself (though his prowess and mastery of African and Eastern knowledge of somatic practice is clear and embodied).

It has taken me years to understand the process of Capoeira's legitimization, 'whitening,' as it rises in class stature, the treatment of it as 'from Brazil' just as jazz music, and even more clearly jazz dance, has been 'from America.' In both instances, African roots are creolized with a syncretic relationship to European culture, and by the diverse spectrum of people who practice it, are then stamped with exportable approval as a national art, where nationhood refutes ethnic origins. The father of modern day Capoeira Regional, Manoel dos Reis Machado, or Mestre Bimba, created many adaptations of the art: it was given a linear training structure, it moved from the street to the academy where a fee was charged, in part to combat the history of its criminalization, in order to make it legitimate to the dominant power structures. This is the form that would first reach the United States in the 1970s, yet he was an African-Brazilian who practiced African centered music, fighting and religious forms. Perhaps this is one of the reasons it was able to travel beyond Brazil, just as hip-hop culture has traveled the world,



adopted in particular by Asian youth both in the Diaspora and on the continent. Similar trajectories can be traced with Tango, Bachata, and Salsa.

My training leans towards the 'traditional' 'Afrocentric' orientation of the form, Capoeira Angola, the modern father of which is Vicente Ferreira Pastinha (Mestre Pastinha) born of a Spanish father and African Brazilian mother. Interestingly, the creation of the academy was also a part of its preservation. In the battle over ethnic origins, it is the Angola form that prioritizes African lineage before Brazilian identity. Along the way, new practitioners enter from their own trajectories. African-Americans desiring to have a practice that defines their relationship to the continent, European-Americans wanting places to intersect with an African art. Mestre Valmir, a Capoeira Angola master from Salvador Bahia, recently visited my Introductory Capoeira Angola course and talked about his teaching tour that took him to numerous cities to both U.S. coasts, Tokyo, and Martinique. He is one of hundreds of masters spreading the art, and by the nature of the form, teaching from their own unique perspective. It is a living and changing form. Capoeira is practiced across the world, and with it various lineages encounter individuals from vastly different cultural histories and perspectives. This is multiculturalism: different versions of distinct forms intersecting with distinctly different cultures, and creating a unique cultural exchange.

## **Butoh: Hegemony, Multiculturalism and Original Voice**

I began an initial academic study of Butoh while enrolled in Theatre History and Theatre Historiography with Dr. Noreen C. Barnes. I was encouraged to look at the practice in relationship to Western Theatre developments and the cross-pollinations of form across cultures. Additionally, I have been intrigued by the shared aesthetic principles of Eastern and African art forms.

Butoh emerged as a parallel movement to the post-modern dance and avant-garde theatre practices in the United States in the 1960s. Hijikata Tatsumi and Kazuo Ohno were among the founding creators of butoh, a dance form emerging in post-WWII Japan that sought to define an alternative Japanese artistic sensibility freed from the constraints of traditional Japanese society and the cultural, political and social imperialism of the West. Each practitioner was highly individualistic, yet shared common impulses to explore the body in ritualistic performance, and reclaim the soul of the Japanese artist through metaphysical transformation. I have focused on the work of Hijikata Tatsumi, whose initial work was visceral, rebellious, sexually explicit and violent, and investigated the dark side of the soul.

## **Hijikata Tatsumi: The Interior Landscape**

Hijikata Tatsumi sought to give form to the interior landscape of the body, the dark unconscious self, resting beneath the surface. He also sought to liberate the Japanese artistic identity from Western commercial and political models while pursuing those things that were fundamentally human and shared across cultures, though hidden and degraded by imperialistic modernization. Highly individualistic and personally expressive, Hijikata's Butoh provided a model that was both distinct and open to interpretation.

A first generation of Japanese artists followed by a second wave of global artists were deeply impacted by his work, and were given the freedom to realize their own versions of the dance. At least at its inception, Butoh was built on concepts, not physical technique, allowing and demanding practitioners to define their own expression, not mimic Hijikata's. If each individual is unique, then the experience and expression issuing from the body must also be unique, while at the same time comment on our shared predicament of existence.

In his essay, "Remapping Theatre History," Steve Tillis demands that we re-define 'center' by considering a myriad of mutually existent and convergent histories in a global age. This is a direct challenge to Western hegemonic cultural standards for understanding where 'we' come from, and what 'our' history is. The interconnectedness of performance arts through globalization and media underscores a complicated relationship between cultural traditions, contemporary meaning-making in art, and lineage. Tatsumi Hijikata's life and work allows us to reconsider 'center', and his dance is a synthesis of international elements with contemporary and traditional Japanese

dance/theatre impulses. His homeland, Tohoku, Japan in the northeast of the country becomes a mythical place outside of time and space that he draws his artistic identity from, one that is distinctly Japanese and has universal reach. He claims "There is a Tohoku in England. The utter darkness exists throughout the world, doesn't it? To think is the dark" ("Words of Butoh" 21). Dance scholar Sondra Fraleigh expands on this notion, identifying Tohoku as outside of Tokyo, the cultural center of Japan. "Northeast is outside of center, and this outside can be found everywhere. This is the forgotten world, the real Butoh" (*Dancing* 246). Both urban and rural, avant-garde and ancient, his work falls solidly within in the intricate, complicated and interconnected nature of performance in the last century. "As the twenty-first century dawns, it is becoming more difficult to trace pure identities, and Butoh celebrates this fact even as it asserts Japanese essence. Its beauty stems from the search for corporeal universals among folk roots" (*Dancing* 3).

Early in his butoh career after the ground-breaking piece *Kinjinki* (Forbidden Colors, 1958), Hijikata claims to search for his "own subjectivity, which wavers in mixing and confusing the imaginative process and the real-life process. I would like to be sitting, without even a passport, smack in the middle of a mistake" ("To Prison" 45). Contemporary life seems to be the predicament that art serves to explain.

The French surrealist movement in theatre would be formalized by Andre Breton's surrealist manifesto in 1924. Carl Jung's theories on the collective unconscious, in which memories and impulses we are not aware of in conscious life have a fundamental influence our existence, are parallel to the 'the source' for a new theatre ritual Artaud discusses in *The Theater and Its Double*. The space of trance and ritual

structured abandonment, theatre, counter-intuitively, could be more useful than logic in its ability to access states of being that cannot be described, and to negotiate violent human impulse through performance, in order to redeem us from blindly acting out violence in life. Ritual performance in Indonesia deeply inspires Antonin Artaud, who finds the authenticity of the ritual to exceed the capacity of western theatre practice to transform viewers or practitioners. Artaud's work would be translated into Japanese in 1965, bringing his ideas back to the east, and to underground theatre in Japan at the time. This East-west flow of cultural knowledge, though often ripe with cultural appropriation, or sublimation, depending on dominant power hierarchies, suggests a fluid relationship of cultural knowledge.

Sondra Fraleigh discusses the relationship between the two in-depth in her book, *Butoh, Metamorphic Dance and Global Alchemy*. She asserts that Hijikata comes from "a long line of surrealists, he draws imagery from the unconscious. Like European surrealists, he creates fantastic, erotic imagery juxtaposing dream states and reality . . . Artaud's call for a theater of senses and his theatrical innovations inspired Hijikata's surrealism directly" (22). In Sondra Fraleigh's book *Dancing Into Darkness*, she includes several interviews with butoh practitioners and critics, and butoh artist Akira Kasai discusses the connection of Hijikata to western literature and art. "It was the literature of the twentieth century that influenced Hijikata, and surrealism in art." When asked about his relationship to theatre of the absurd, Kasai states "I have often spoken with Hijikata about Beckett. We discussed Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* . . . Hijikata congealed the esoteric absurd in dance movement. The tendency for him while developing his work

was to get away from the constraints of time - spacing the time element, or changing the timing to space" (232).

Hijikata's early work is evocative and visceral, violent and sexual, beautiful and grotesque, gestural and abstract outwardly but fully present and lived inwardly. Contradictions may actually be understood as composites; they are disparate elements living mutually within the same landscape of Hijikata's life and work. In identifying with a post-war Japanese surrealist movement in 1960's, Hijikata "appropriated an artistic technique of bringing various elements in contact with each other to see what would arise" and it is the observer who "plays a role in the interaction due the observers pre-existing mental horizons" (Baird, *Hijikata Tatsumi* 3).

This technique is reminiscent of Gertrude Stein's commitment to experimentation, dealing with themes centered on consciousness and change, whose 'landscapes' required the observer's point of view in order to be realized. Seemingly disparate elements across time and space inhabit the same world, and the omission of punctuation/stage direction/etc., demands an 'active' reader/observer. The main distinction between the two, aside from medium, is that Stein conceived of her work as moving toward the light, while Hijikata's work is profoundly explored in the dark, in his *ankoku butoh*, or "dance-step of utter darkness."

Bonnie Marranca points out in her essay on Stein, that American dance artists in the post-modern dance scene in New York City identified with Stein's work. "In newspaper accounts of the Judson Dance Theatre some of the dancers own work was compared to the circularity and repetition of Stein's writing . . . the aesthetics of the sixties has natural affinities with her own work, especially the emphasis on process and

repetition, the attachment to the idea of the ordinary, the fascination with objects, an insistence on presence" (13). Marranca also discusses Stein's desire to relate life and art interchangeably, an impulse shared with Hijikata.

The use of juxtaposition is clearly defined in Africanist performance, along with the blurred relationship between audience/performer, and is the unclaimed connection between post-modern dance in the United States as well as avant-garde theater practice. Brenda Dixon Gottschild defines the non-linear/non-narrative/circular and repetitive qualities, that also employ juxtaposition and a blurring of audience and performer relationship, as Africanist impulses sublimated into American cultural expression, where examining 'new' white American impulses in artistic expression lead us "deep in Barthes country, dealing with texts as intertexts, because the Africanist presence in postmodernism is a subliminal but driving force" (50) in American culture. It would not be surprising, as we reconsider 'center,' that Artaud's fascination with Indonesian performance ritual, that would inspire Hijikata's philosophical approach to his dance form, parallels African performance impulses found inside modern and post-modern dance in the United States that have not been recognized:

the torso articulation so essential to modern dance; the legendary pelvic contraction coined as the signature statement in Graham's movement vocabulary; the barefoot dancers reifying contact with the earth, touching it, rolling or lying on it, giving in to it. These particular components of the New Dance had no coordinates in European concert or folk dance traditions. Those traits live in African and African-American dance forms, and modern and postmodern dance received this wisdom from Africanist-inspired American vernacular and pop culture. (49)

Here Dixon-Gotschild is not refuting the heavily documented European avant-garde influence on the forms, or of the claimed lineages to Eastern philosophy and culture.

Indeed, American artists have "credited sources from the European Historical avant-garde. They have also credited Asian sources of Zen and other Buddhist philosophies, yoga and other Hindu practices, and in the martial arts. They have not given credit to the Africanist aesthetic as a pervasive subtext in postmodern performance (51).

This topic deserves detailed attention in its own right, but I would be remiss if I did not at least begin to discuss it in relationship to Hijikata's work as both an individualistic and universal expression, as her description above clearly has a relationship to impulses found in Hijikata's dance.

Hijikata's shared lineage to surrealism and Artaud would imply an indirect relationship to the Living Theatre in the U.S. Although established in 1947, their work pioneered the "movement of countercultural anti-art performance that evolved in the 1960's" (Eckersall 15). By then, they had become a "communal band of performer-protestors exploring new ways of living and attempting to blend art and life into a single revolutionary act" including "street theatre, mass action, naked rituals, and performative anarchism" (Eckersall 15). Eckersall notes that a very similar scene, though often overlooked on international review of the time-period, existed in Japan, and Butoh evolved along-side this counter-culture environment where underground-theatre lived, far from the Japanese modern dance world that Hijikata had trained in. Avant-garde and rebellious yet mythic, both global (universal) and specific (Japanese), the body is the landscape for claiming the birth of a new artistic identity. "The physical dexterity of butoh and its typical pre-modern mythic allusions seem to be directed towards revising traces of history and confronting Japan's modernity with the lived sensations of the contemporary body" (42).



## **Butoh's Emergence**

Hijikata Tatsumi was born in the impoverished rural Akita Prefecture in the Northeast of Japan, and given the birth name Yoneyama Kunio. In his twenties he moved to Tokyo and trained in western dance forms of German Expressionism, ballet, flamenco and jazz, typical of the post-WWII Japanese modern dance scene (Nanako, "Chronology" 29). In his thirties he would abandon the technique and the external focus of western dance models while plunging into readings of French literature and philosophy, contemplating the inner world and impulse for the body to 'be.'

In *Butoh: Body on the Edge of a Crisis*, the dance form is described as emerging at a point of change and upheaval within Japanese society, marked by a social rebellion "against imitation of Western politics, capitalism and cultural imperialism. In 1959, Japan's Mutual Defense treaty with the U.S. sparked violent demonstrations. Tokyo's streets and university campus's became arenas for spontaneous cultural activity, including happenings, performance art and theatre" (Blackwood). This is the context and year that Hijikata presents *Kinjinki* (Forbidden Colors) to the *All Japan Art Dance Association: Sixth Newcomers Recital*, a recital dedicated to the presentation of new works in Tokyo's modern dance world (Baird, *Hijikata* 17). With limited known dance movements, a sound score of sexually explicit gasps, a live chicken suffocated, and the implied sexual encounter of a young man and an older male aggressor, the piece created a controversy that helps Hijikata Tatsumi, along with fellow Butoh founder Onho Kazuo and several other artists, separate from Japan's modern dance scene (Nanako, "The Words" 18). Bruce Baird asserts that Hijikata was not alone in his desire to create a space to explore a new dance expression: several other artists were striving to break from modern dance

forms and identify their work in relationship to the tumultuous Japanese culture shift (*Hijikata* 16). The title *Kinjinki* was taken from the title of a novel by famed novelist and essayists Mishima Yukio, which dealt with the taboo topic of male homosexual love, while the content is said to have come from Hijikata's reading of Jean Genet. The title was used without writer Mishima's permission, and when Mishima visited Hijikata's studio to confront him, he was instead won-over by a performance of the piece. This chance encounter proved to be the beginning of a new and influential audience to Hijikata's work, propelling him from an unknown choreographer in a formal scene, to the newcomer in a field of theatre practitioners that knew little about dance: his new audience would be "composed of various artists and writers and interested college-aged people who knew next to nothing about dance" who "confess that they think dance is boring - all Tchaikovsky, tutus and toe shoes - but when they see Hijikata's dance they are amazed by how powerful, fresh, and new it is" (Baird, *Hijikata* 32).

It is at this moment that Hijikata charts the beginnings of his own dance called Butoh. He is freed from the rules of the modern dance scene and fueled by the circle of artists and intellectuals to whom Mishima introduced him. French literary scholar Shibusawa Tatsuhiko would provide him with "a tremendous amount of insight into literature and contemporary thought. From this time on Hijikata greatly expanded his association with writers, poets, and artists in other genres, leaving the narrow-minded mainstream dance world behind. He became transformed from an unknown dancer into a rising avant-garde performer" (Nanako, "The Words" 18,19).

Two short essays/artist's statements are published in 1960 and 1961 that clearly speak to this new audience and define a new artistic lineage; one translates *To Prison* and

the other *Material/Inner Material*. At the same time Hijikata curses the West's cultural imperialism and capitalism, he links his work to french intellectuals. *To Prison* quotes Herbert Marcuse, Jean-Paul Sartre, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Georges Bataille. The body is validated to serve the dance, not economics, and he positions himself in line with a Japanese cultural revolution, simultaneously explaining his work and announcing a fight against the de-humanization of the individual:

I am a body shop; my profession is the business of human rehabilitation, which goes today by the name of dancer. All the power of civilized morality, hand in hand with the capitalist economic system and its political institutions, is utterly opposed to using the body simply for the purpose, means, or tool of pleasure. Still more, to a production-oriented society, the aimless use of the body, which I call dance, is a deadly enemy which must be taboo. ("To Prison" 43-44)

While the dance *Kinjinki* is far from what most would consider Butoh to be today, Hijikata understood the direction his art had to take, whether he could claim what it was or was not. Additionally, he began to place himself clearly in the context of other influences, giving himself a muse and a creditor. In *Inner Material* he abandons European techniques that had become second nature to Japanese modern dance training, stating, "dance for display must be totally abolished" (39). He also links his arrival to Tokyo in 1948 to the impression dancer Kazuo Ohno made on him, an inspiration that distinguishes his previous investment in training from his root desire to dance. This dance was "overflowing with lyricism [performed] by a man wearing a chemise. Cutting the air again and again with his chin, he made a lasting impression on me. For years this drug dance stayed in my memory. That dance has now been transformed into a deadly poison, and one spoonful of it contains all that is needed to paralyze me" ("Material" 36). The ephemeral is conflated with that which can be distilled and lasts, identifying both the

power of live performance and a kindred spirit or brother in the new dance. He ends this short essay by crediting a debt, and perhaps earning the allegiance of new supporters: "Finally, I owe everything to the constant support of Mishima Yukio, our generation's shot with the magic bullet, who always sets an anxious, unchanging fuse to his own work and who made me create my maiden work, *Kinjiki*" ("Material" 42).

Hijikata would go on to subvert the West's commercial and political influence by dealing with death and being reborn, accessing the layers of self beneath the exterior form, and departing from other dance forms by examining the darkest side of human nature.

In 1968, ten years after *Kinjiki*, Hijikata would create *Hijikata Tatsumi and the Japanese People: Rebellion of the Body*, firmly establishing a decade of Butoh. Fraleigh describes this work as "a shamanistic dance" showing Hijikata's "maturity as a surrealist and his explicit use of the unconscious. . . he enters the stage through the audience, borne on a palanquin, a long kimono covering his naked body, and holding a golden phallus - as in Artaud's *From Heliogabalus, or the Anarchic Crowned*" (*Butoh* 22-23). Accompanied by live animals, beautiful, bestial, grotesque and erotic movement, the sounds of chainsaws and classical piano, at one-point wearing a ball-gown and another only the golden phallus, this piece shocked the audience into a new Japanese artistic possibility (Baird, *Hijikata* 2). Suzuki Tadashi, creator of the Suzuki Method for Actor Training, recognizes the essence of the work that prompted a crisis on stage and the demand for the audience to negotiate Hijikata's actions in the context of a new Japanese artistic sensibility, one that involved risk. "It was extremely intense . . . Mr. Hijikata's work was that sense of crisis. . . going in such a direction is difficult and also what emerges from it

is quite chancy . . . I rarely get that feeling of chance from the stage. That was my first impression and it's never changed" ("Fragments of glass" 62-63).

Hijikata creates a dance genre of his own, founded on ideas about what rests inside the body, not about the shape of the body. The direct challenge to the audience is also the ingredient that engages them. Like confronting the transforming landscape of Japan at the time, the viewer witnesses events that are beyond immediate comprehension, and they must individually elicit a personal interpretation for any real understanding. Hijikata's Butoh "differs radically from other forms of dance . . . a dance form in which one is free to or forced to append a private narrative over top of what one sees . . . Hijikata seemed more interested in providing puzzles than answers" (Baird, "Structureless in Structure" 101). Here the audience is left to complete the performance through their own interpretation of the experience.

With a multiplicity of ways to respond to the work, there is no 'correct' interpretation intended on the part of the artist. Butoh critic Nario Goda discusses both the global and the unfinished nature of butoh, while hinting at the political and social implications of the dance. Identifying butoh as a form with international influences, in which the body negotiates existence, the open-ended meaning provides numerous ways to encounter the dance. "In Hijikata's Butoh, half of the self is not conceived, so it is very dynamic. It is theatrical because it is alive and unfinished. In this way, the audience can read it freely. Total art is totalizing (totalitarian). We can learn to be happy with what is unfinished and imperfect" (Fraleigh *Dancing* 176).

## **Existential Questioning and Performed Identity**

While revolution and change correlate with principles behind the dance, as well as allow Hijikata the freedom to depart from a locked technique, by the 1970s his work shifts away from the shocking, and becomes characterized by a specific and recognizable style. On the path to this style, Hijikata Tatsumi found a dance form that had resonance in the streets of Tokyo and also embodied his personal experiences from childhood in a rural and impoverished farmland. From a lecture given before a Butoh Festival in 1985, the year before his death, Hijikata identifies his childhood as the source for his dance. "Like a thief I studied the gestures and manners of the neighborhood aunties, my mom and dad, and of course all my other family members. Then I put them all inside my body. Take the neighbor's dog, for instance. Fragmented within my body, its movements and actions became floating rafts" ("Wind Daruna" 76). Part of this experience was the disappearance of his older brothers, who left the countryside to fight in the war, and returned "sand in funerary urns. They left red and came back sand" (76).

His childhood also provides stories of a more whimsical nature. He celebrates childhood play and engagement with the world through creativity, abandoning logic in the face of absurd experiences, like siblings leaving home flesh and blood and returning ash. This is typical of Hijikata's personal myth making, conflating both childhood experience, a relationship to the dead, and the power of metaphysical transformation. It is unclear at points whether he is talking about his dance or his memories. "I think to myself that I am an empty box. And from somewhere close some guys appear, saying "I'm an empty box" and giggling. Some of them say, "We're just like funerary urns" and somehow communication happens. I once became a wicker trunk, which became a

bellows that drove each and every one of my organs outside, then played" (Wind Daruna, 75).

Sondra Fraleigh's interview with Butoh practitioner Akira Kasai helps to explain the dance's nature, as well as its cross-cultural potency. "Butoh is not really a genre. *It defines total presence*. Vaslav Nijinski and Isadora Duncan were both Butoh in my opinion, and Mary Wigman's *Witch Dance* is Butoh. . . her work is about the soul. And the soul is living or screaming in the physical self." Fraleigh responds, "Wigman's witch was wild and untamed, so perhaps Hijikata can be compared with her" (*Dancing* 235). The freedom from a set form, alongside the identification with the spiritual aspects of the dance, helps to explain the practitioner's ability to share the dance across time and space. This kind of fluid thinking is deeply related to a relationship with things that are formative and yet unseen, with an internal landscape that is both individual and universal. The inner resource for content, and the desire to access the subconscious along with a kind of Jungian collective unconscious, is both intimately personal and a shared condition of being human. Hijikata asserts within the body itself, "there are various mythic things that are still sleeping intact . . . . I would like to see something where such things float up like departed spirits" (68-69 *Fragments*). From this we can deduce that Hijikata's work embodies both formlessness and profound presence. Yet when asked by westerners in particular what butoh's philosophy is, Hijikata arrives at the enigmatic response: "There is no philosophy, but a philosophy may emerge from it," as butoh critic Nakamura Fumiyaoka recalls in the documentary *Butoh: Piercing the Mask*.

Rather than a codified physical technique, Butoh is based on experience and memory lived through the body, both individual and collective. Through objectifying the

body, in an almost Zen sense to empty it, it becomes the vehicle to take the form of materials and concepts in the world. While perhaps not as present in his early pieces, as the dance evolved, Hijikata "attempted to capture all kinds of emotions, landscapes, ideas and so on, by using words that were physically real to him" ("The Words" 4). The prompts for this process, especially later in life when he develops *butoh-fu*, are pictorial and verbal images used to notate the dance (Fraleigh, Nakamura 51). This method, to feel and become words, is intriguing in the absence of a set physical technique. Implied here is that the physical history, including technique training, to each individual is specific, and the methodology of *butoh* will yield as numerous styles of expression as there are artists practicing it. It is hard for me not to consider Bruce Lee's martial art form that has no form, in conjunction with the Bible's lesson that the world starts with the word that would then would become flesh. Kurihara Nanako writes in *The Drama Review*, "he was a poet, always attempting to capture amorphous life -- life that resists being settled in any particular form. Hijikata tried to create his own universe with his own language. That was one of the reasons he kept changing his themes and styles: he wanted to avoid getting trapped in a static form and losing life" (15).

Hijikata dealt with metaphysical transformation, while focusing on the act of "being," not of imitating. Inside the act of being is the potential for elemental change, like natural phenomenon, where change is not contradiction but rather integral to the life process. Here the landscape of the body has a physical outward form, but is driven by inward searching that creates this form. *Butoh*'s distinction from ballet is often noted, and may also provide another entry point to investigate the nature of the dance: "while the ballet dancer practices upright control over gravity, *butoh* practices the metaphysics



of *becoming* in a metamorphic process . . . Ballet moves upward in its airy grace and ethereal disappearances. Butoh tends toward disappearance also, but it moves downward, plying awkwardness and dissipation, and as with material nature, it can regenerate" (Fraleigh, Nakamura 52).

In Hijikata's youth he observed farmers' bodies shaped by grueling labor with the earth. His earth dance is in sharp contrast to the exalted lines of classical European dance. The forms of bent backs and labored steps, the relationship with mud, would be formative influences on butoh. Two primary characteristics appear: the first is the relationship with the earth, and the second is the possibility for transformation and regeneration as already discussed. Classical western dance would deal with the expression of the form, and of an exalted physical self that defies gravity while imitating nature. Butoh on the other hand, "is down to the earth, and searches for the identity of an the inner landscape," as photographer Hosoe Eikoh states in *Butoh: Piercing the Mask*. The butoh critic Goda would put it another way, "Ballet is six inches above the floor, Butoh is six inches below the floor" (Fraleigh, 173). In practice, the body itself is treated like a corpse, of "a dead body standing desperately upright" (Fraleigh, Nakamura 51), further suggesting the relationship to gravity, the earth and the dead.

The name itself indicates this relationship with the earth. *Ankoku butoh* translates roughly as 'utter darkness dance step.' *Buyo* a "generic term for dance, is used in many compounds such as *genda buyo*, modern dance" (Nanako, "The Words" 1). Hijikata used the term *buyo* for his early dancing, but may have chosen *toh* in part to incorporate the hardness of the sound, inspired by the hardness of the Neuer Tanz, or German expressionist modern dance forms he was introduced to in his early training. *Toh* means

step, and while there is no codified stepping in his dances, the relationship with the earth is clearly identified. According to Professor of Semantics Yoshida Toshie, it can also be interpreted as "gaining strength from stomping." Invigorating oneself through the power of the earth can also be found in Kabuki, as well as Sumo, Japanese wrestling (*Butoh: Piercing the Mask*). The animism of Shinto spiritual practice, or "the way of the gods," which influences early versions of Noh theatre, would suggest that in Japan's religious history, the spirits and ancestors are awakened through stepping on the earth.

Towards the end of his life the Hijikata writes to a student on the redeeming power of Butoh, specifically in its connection to the dead, to deal with an increasingly materialistic and confusing world:

We shake hands with the dead, who send us encouragement from beyond our body; this is the unlimited power of BUTO. In our body history, something is hiding in our subconscious, collected in our unconscious body, which will appear in each detail of our expression. Here we can rediscover time with an elasticity, sent by the dead. We can find Buto, in the same way we can touch our hidden reality, something can be reborn, and can appear, living and dying in the moment. (Fraleigh, Nakamura 50)

In the dance, the dead live through the performer, and the ephemeral moment is imbued with the potency of the cycle of life. This seems to be the only redemption in a world of increasing chaos, where history and potential surfaces through the rebirth of performance. By existing in the heightened state of the present moment, a way forward is possible through a link to the past.

In Hijikata's life, and in the evolution of the dance, there is a demand to adapt and respond to a changing world. Butoh practitioner Yumiko Yoshioka insists that, "If Hijikata were alive today, his dance would still be changing" (Fraleigh, *Darkness*, 246).

Butoh is dictated through constant searching. In the demand to be fully present and responsive is the realization that the nature of all things is to change. In the art and life of Hijikata Tatsumi, there is no end product or point of arrival, there is instead a dedication towards continual renewal. "Butoh, for Hijikata himself, was an ongoing process—it never could be finished or achieved" (Nanako, "Words" 25). The body itself is the site of discovery, memory, and the tension between life and death. Inside the body there is a vast landscape to be interpreted, one that provides the puzzles used to negotiate existence.

## Recent Choreography and Performance

I created three original works during my Graduate study at VCU. The first was a group work titled *turn and turn*, and was set on The University Dancers at the University of Richmond, and performed at their annual concert and at the American College Dance Association. The second piece, *one head, many hats*, was initially developed in Solo Performance, a class offered through VCU's Graduate Theatre Program taught by Dr. Tawnya Pettiford-Wates. A work in progress of the piece was performed at Richmond Triangle Players, as well as the 2nd Annual Richmond Dance Festival. A completed version was performed at Pregones Theater in the Bronx, NY. The third piece, *changing course: the body as vessel*, is a duet co-created with Alicia Diaz and performed as a movement installation at the University of Richmond museums, at Princeton University's Wilson Black Box Theater for the encounter "Diasporic Body Grammar," and at the Universidad of Turabo in Puerto Rico for the symposium "Fiesta de la Lengua" at the Museo y Centro de Estudios Humanísticos. In this thesis, I will discuss the development of the duet *changing course: the body as vessel*, and the solo *one head, many hats*.

### ***one head, many hats***

A work-in-progress of this piece was performed at Richmond Triangle Players as the culmination of *Solo Performance*, a class offered through VCU's Graduate Theatre

Program taught by Dr. Tawnya Pettiford-Wates. The class process encouraged writing my 'own story' with text, songs and movement in a decidedly non-linear way. The writing I generated ranged from poetic verse to text that was really more about sounds, vowels and consonants, and the way they could suggest movement. In addition, I was encouraged to use literal and metaphorical language, transitioning from spoken word, song and movement, towards a personal narrative. The creative process followed Dr. Tawnya Pettiford-Wates' model from Ritual Poetic Drama, conceived from a devising process that oriented the development of original work out of personal experience. The process utilizes African aesthetics of community and story.

My experiences in *Solo Performance* were clarified after reading an excerpt from Dr. Tawnya Pettiford-Wates dissertation discussing Ritual Poetic Drama. I had undergone a process that I had embodied, but wanted to understand the conceptual framework and method better, as well as the specific use in a communal process. I identify with her discussion of the relationship with breath/body, sound, movement and text in developing authentic original work, and the emphasis on circularity and the process of a journey versus the execution of a production. Here I find direct links to my initial training in theatre, my own artistic impulses, and some of the core-values inside movement practices I train.

The physical and written work allowed me to return to places from my own personal past, as well as physical locations and the histories associated with them that have defined my point of view. The Hudson River and The James River are conflated in time, and allow me to play back and forth from the time I spent in NYC and my time in

Richmond. Other dominant themes dealt with death, and my relationships to male figures that I still ‘talk’ to, particularly my father.

This solo gave me permission to return to my formative performance training. My early training had very little to do with learning a traditional acting or dance technique. It was instead an education on how to be a performer, being present on stage aware of the communication going on, and connecting the body and the breath and voice to that communication. Ensemble placed the importance of the performance on its ephemeral nature; in its temporal limit you could communicate an impact that would last. It had implicitly, with out always being discussed, a spiritual nature. This process was very hard to replicate or re-encounter in almost every other performance context, academic or professional, that I have been a part of since. Dr. Tawnya Pettiford-Wates course was demanding a similar process from a new perspective and context.

I realized my Ensemble training would have an impact on anything I was making that that would include music, movement and text, and I concluded my solo piece with one of many encore numbers in Ensemble, the traditional Irish and Scottish folk song *The Parting Glass*. The very last image is a memory of the ‘poof,’ a closing exercise to every Ensemble warm-up, meeting, and production that was done in unison with the whole company. As ritual, we all faithfully performed the poof, which served to collect us, focus us, and share in one communal breath coordinated with movement, our attention to the moment as we marked its passing.

What distinguishes this performance from the work in progress, and the premier of the piece at the 2nd Annual Richmond Dance Festival on April 23, 2015, is the extensive physical and vocal work I did over the summer 2015, along with a conscious

play with the majority of the piece being a dream. As I enter the performing space informally with house lights on, I slowly progress through sound (whistling a tune of my Grandpa's, tapping change in my pocket) to movement and song from capoeira (a song dealing with water and an inversion that indicates the beginning of a dream) and finally into text.

I now feel that the piece can begin to have a life of its own, and I even consider taking the material and improvising with order during performance. As it is, it does not make linear sense, and anyone trying to pin down its' meaning is missing the intent of the piece. Ideally it should evoke, through sound and movement, something in the audience member's experience that deals with loss, which happened with several audience members at the performance in Pregones Theater in the Bronx.

The piece is my experience, squeezed out of me under the pressure of an audience. Another thing I have considered is removing all the spoken words, and only using movement and song to deal with the same material.

In the beginning of the semester we read the Introduction to *Devising Performance: A Critical History* and I was intrigued to learn of a parallel process to developing work that I have come to know as the collaborative choreographic process. In my work with Pilobolus Dance Theatre, dancers play an intimate role in the creation of new work. Initially, an exhaustive improvisation period yields the raw material that is then formed into a coherent piece by all involved, while the director or directors in the room hold the final say of what is finally presented. All involved are given credit, while the material remains the property of the company. Originally all the members of any given piece both created and performed the material, with no outside eye. This process in

the early 1970s in dance was influenced by counter-culture collective ideas, and perhaps, as the reading might suggest, informed consciously or un-consciously by practices in theatre that predated it, as well as in dance by Anna Halprin on the west coast and the Judson Church Dance Theatre on the east coast who were focusing on “ideas of games and improvisation” to generate performance (Heddon and Milling 34). In its inception it certainly could be described by some of the attributes that “devising is variously: a social expression of non-hierarchical possibilities; a model of cooperative and non-hierarchical collaboration; an ensemble; a collective” as well as “an expressive, creative language; innovative; risky; inventive; spontaneous; experimental” (4-5).

Almost all of the dance choreographers I have worked with now require the improvisational input of the dancers, some extensively, and almost none give choreographic credit to the performers. I also realized that the Ensemble company that I worked with in high school had some lineage or relationship to this kind of process, for while the performers did not always generate the material or even structure the performance, there was a communal aspect to the company, and the performance was done for the ritual as much as for the impact. Considering this process in dance and my familiarity with it, I was excited to extend a form of this process into our own work. I feel that as a class we definitely impacted one another, and that my piece was informed by the input and the material generated by my peers. I also considered that I was the only male in the class, and given the nature of our work that we performed for each other weekly, and created work knowing whom we would show it to, this may have had a strong influence in what I generated. While we were creating three distinct works, that were decidedly our own, its hard to determine to what extent we influenced one another.



Additionally, each of us encountered something in ourselves that we had the opportunity to address, and as underscored in the text relative to devising and communities, “the process of participation in the making of the work, not the product itself, has a positive impact on the participants to bring about change: social, political or, most often these days, personal” (137).

The concept of theatre as ritual, or taken further by the Open Theatre by “summoning the dead to be present through the bodies of the performers” (48), would have encouraged me to go deeper into the engagement with my own dead relatives which appeared in my solo work, as well as directly relate to research on Butoh. I did an invocation for them to come visit me in my performance, though all of it happened as my own personal ritual, and was never directly acknowledged to the audience. I also asked them to leave at the end the piece, taking a moment to observe their departure as I sang *the parting glass*.

Reading *Devising Performance* helps contextualize my own performance history, and understand my experience within a much larger context. I’m not crazy to think meditating, yoga and reading might be the first step to making something new; the Living Theatre did it 50 years ago (37). I can find company with DV8 physical theatre that finds no conflict in training ballet alongside contact improvisation and contemporary techniques as a base, and then adding in Irish Dance or rope work (185). Their work is a “mixture of contemporary dance, task-based activity, social dance, language and text. The absence of a guiding ‘style’ was central to the devising process” (185). While our Solo Performance class has encouraged exploring a range of media, and instinctively and from my own education I understand this impulse, working in academia as well as

performing professionally up to this point has stunted this impulse, or at the very least, I have not found the way to explore it within classes and productions with limited to no time for process.

Early works created by Simon McBurney, director of Theatre de Complicite in the UK, “were conceived and designed to be unfinished before the first night” (180) since the continual working process was leading to a performance, but not determined by single-minded focus on product. Complicite is a physical theatre company that I have followed and admired, and it makes sense to me that the world created on stage is largely a result of continual improvisation, not codified steps and movement. Instead of working solely on acting or choreographing movement, the company practiced shared activities and games as part of the process, placing emphasis on the group creative impulse. This time is not wasted, just as our exercises and free writes in class, or even our ‘off topic’ discussions were not ‘unproductive’ time. They become a way to investigate what is waiting to be revealed, perhaps hidden, or latent, sometimes allowing the most valuable content to be discovered.

## **Process**

I had been dealing with questions like, what is the importance of being honest as a performer, what do you have that you are sharing, what is the purpose of your sharing? Fundamentally, what is it you are doing?

How do you directly respond to your own self and experience, and how do you respond to and function with the world around you? Essentially, as a person first, and then as a performer, how do you “be?” This is a question that requests for it to be

continually asked until a person shifts to 'being' and the question is not necessary. I enjoy that space of being, as well as seeking it, and have found it in capoeira and contact improvisation. I have found it with words playing among friends and with my children. I have found it profoundly while training outside, and absorbing the external world into my own movement. Yet the idea of 'acting' scared me, and I was skeptical that I would find a way to express myself authentically.

Early questions were, "what is brave, what is vulnerable, and what is the spirit and the spiritual component of all of this?" I think that when that question came in (after being absent from so many other contexts I have been working in professionally and academically) I let go of worrying about what I might 'produce' and started enjoying the opportunity to play, the demand to show to the class each week, and the community of people going through the same process both individually and as cohorts. Honesty in response to my peers' work, along with the guidelines given for providing constructive critiques of personal material, allowed me to both assess their work more freely and receive their responses without defensive impulses.

Our class process, what each of us as students brought to the table, my immediate personal experience, the plays I was reading in the course taught by Dr. Noreen C. Barnes, *Dramatic Literature and Theory: Tragedy*, contemporary societal issues, all started to influence the material. Inevitably, the readings from *Tragedy* started to cross over into my writing style and the images that came to me. It was as if the process was a funnel of everything I was observing and experiencing, none of which was a critical analysis of form or a prescribed approach to process. Boundaries between thought,

experience, being and medium were blurred and I was enjoying the process while still unsure of the product.

***changing course: the body as vessel***

The 'set' for this piece was described by eight paving stones with an empty space in the middle that we referred to as the sculpture garden, and we performed in front of a large tapestry of a printed photograph of Auguste Rodin's monumental work "The Gates of Hell." The acceptance of time passing, of our own traveling, and our use of our own bodies in our work, all contributed to both the title and the material created. The title was also created as part of a willful decision to embrace change, to take up a new direction in my own life, out of the necessity of personal circumstances.

The other important component to the piece and title was the relationship to Rodin's work, which I knew very little about at the time, aside from the remarkable beauty and suggestion of movement in all the work that I knew. I received an overview of Rodin's work from the University of Richmond Museums, where the work was to be presented. At the entrance of the exhibit was a poster stating: "The body always expresses the spirit whose envelope it is. And for him who can see, the nude offers the richest meaning" (Auguste Rodin *As recorded by Paul Gsell* in *Art by Auguste Rodin*). The notion of a vessel came in part from documentaries we had seen on early pottery: earth shaped by hand to create an open vessel (the potential to carry something inside), which of course also has the connotations of traveling, or journeying. In our case, it was the body itself that is navigating change, steered by

the passenger spirit, or is it the spirit riding a course it had not decided, which is carried by the external form?

When we visited the University of Richmond Museum, the title began to take on new meaning. Rodin had undergone a serious revolution in the world of European sculpture. He had done dramatic actions at the time, like taking the sculpture off the pedestal, distorting the limbs and torso beyond human physical ability, recycled parts of previous sculptures, either putting them in new landscapes or simply deconstructing the body parts from the whole figure. In "The Cathedral," two identical right hands facing each other might not only reference the original human frame, but also offer the possibility to a new symbolic meaning. His dancing models were not the perfect poses of ballet, but captured a dancer in mid-stretch. He found interest in the preparation for the performance over the polished product. Our piece became an interest in Rodin's own search for meaning: He was also changing course over his entire career, pushing sculpture into the modern era where his contemporaries in fine art and performance had already gone or were going, and the carrier of this change was his depiction of the spirit as embodied by the human form, the body. Following expressionistic and symbolic impulses, his work pushed further towards the abstract as his career progressed. In reaction to polished and perfect sculpture, he left 'incomplete' and abstract traces of his process.

Equally interesting to us was the human model that at the beginning would pose for hours in his studio: that live human being had been arrested in time through his sculpture, obscure and relatively unknown, but a primary resource for his work. He had studied and observed the naked human form, and the energy that

rests beneath, and his impulse was to interpret that spirit beneath the surface. In the studio, we considered an imagined scene of the nude model, the artist, and the bronze, stone and white plaster in the studio. This scenario would influence conversations with costume designer Isabella Marchi Tavares de Melo, who used cotton leotards that she dyed to match our skin tones, then added a mottled texture, and finally layered with white paint wiped by hand to suggest both movement and the trace of having been 'formed.' Because they were cotton and layered with paint, they actually felt and looked like plaster.

We looked at two other French artists from later time periods as we continued to work: Étienne Decroux, the corporeal mime, and his pieces "Los Arboles" and "La Statue," and the French surrealist Jean Cocteau. Cocteau's film *Le Sang d'un Poète* (Blood of a Poet) shows a talking sculpture that interrogates the artist, the artist examines himself, and then returns to his talking sculpture to smash it to bits with a hammer, only to be covered in plaster dust and be frozen into a sculpture. Cocteau's work inspired a relationship with becoming, taking shape and presence and then degenerating. Decroux's "Los Arboles" became an inspiration for the second section of our piece that we referred to as 'tree,' in which our two bodies come together for the first time inside the sculpture garden.

### **In the Studio**

Our initial investigations were improvisations on our own, together, and with musician Alfredo L. Santiago. This often took the form of 'rounds,' or timed improvisations with no feedback. In this process, what each individual explores

impacts every improvisation that follows. All of the material was video recorded and reviewed after each rehearsal. Personal investigation and relationships were prioritized over structure. When we partnered with limited clothing, the skin provided its own kind of resistance and connection, allowing us to slow down lifts and supported positions. We developed some movement that simply was not repeatable with the skin covered, as the skin can provide its own kind of grip, particularly in lifts. This is one reason why we preferred cotton costumes to synthetic ones, which tend to accelerate movement and serve as a barrier between bodies. We gave ourselves freedom to depart from the material to develop a relationship with each other, and then returned to the known specifics of our piece, namely that it was to be an installation, it should relate to Rodin's work, and it was already titled!

## **Structure**

### *Opening Call*

Musician plays alto saxophone in the four directions, N,S,E,W (start facing the gates of hell tapestry). Movers remain suspended in gatekeeper positions outside the circle of eight stones. The role of the musician also doubles as the role of the poet. He is the catalyst for the movement to begin, but once the movement starts, he is observing and responding to the dancers improvisationally.

### *Sundial*

Musician winds out of center, two movers embody different sculptural forms

referencing Rodin's work, moving in a circle outside of the ring of flat stones: The Poet/Thinker, Forbidden Love, Adolescent in Despair, the gatekeepers, Meditation (with arms) etc. Passage of time is indicated by rotation around the circle of stones, in the locations of the eight directions. Timing is stillness, with disjointed transitions.

### *Transition/Genesis*

Musician returns center, facing out, loud bark and then silent stutter announce the entrance of the movers to the center of the circle.

### *Tree*

The first entity formed together by the movers is a tree in the sculpture garden before the Gates of Hell. As the tree morphs, different figures appear, a spirit closed up in hiding, the holding of head (John the Baptiste), entanglement of limbs (two snakes referencing simultaneously the snake in the Garden of Eden, the Snake in Carribean myth, the DNA like spiraling of two strands, and the dual snakes of western Medicine) ending with a womb head that turns in the circle.

### *Spiraling (human fall)*

A turning cross transitions into more human forms, Adam and Eve in the sculpture garden, cast out of paradise but held inside the circle. They are victims of their own passion, debased in European Culture, while this passion and sensuality is celebrated as the forces that create the Universe in African Cosmology. Spiraling



images that we dealt with were also of two snakes, the DNA strands, the inversion of roles, who is supporting who? Sensual and possibly sexual but tormented, the spiraling of bodies up and down is a direct conversation with the falling and spiraling bodies in Rodin's "Gates of Hell."

### *Out of the Garden*

The final movement sequence indicates the only exit possible, to fall and land inverted outside the ring of stones. For us, this inversion, and embracing the fall, not only references a previous work that was adapted on us by choreographer Steven Iannacone titled "Desde el Jardin" or out of the garden, but also the suggestion of the headstand itself. Instead of perpetually falling, we turn the world upside to gain a new perspective. The final position however is a return to the gatekeeper position on opposite sides of the circle. This in part was done to suggest the possibility of looping the work.

In its final version for October 16, 2016 the piece ran more like a traditional performance piece, yet the intention had been to allow people to both watch and leave on their own timing, like you would when engaging with a sculpture. The limits of the space, and the intensity of the relationship between audience and performer made this difficult. The piece was performed five times in a two-hour time frame, and ran approximately 16 minutes long. As it is, this piece is adaptable to stage, as an installation, or for video.

### **Choreographic Methodology**

There are several choices I have made in my own work that challenge traditional hegemonic cultural standards of choreography and creative research inside academia. The following are commonplace and well rooted in many performance traditions: improvisation as performance, a collaborative choreographic process (devising in Theatre), and the repetition or recycling of themes or material. In this piece I have chosen to continue to investigate practices and methodologies that I find the greatest interest in when embarking on a choreographic process, as they also represent an ideological approach to life that promotes adaptability and responsiveness, exploration, communal existence, while using repetition as tool to provide continuity.

### *Improvisation*

In this piece, the movement sequence was relatively set, but all transitions and timing are dependent on a relationship with the musician, whose work has clear landmarks, but is essentially never the same twice. Therefore, the timing and transitions of the piece are all improvised, and depend on the audience, the context and the relationship between the performers, i.e., they depend on the moment the work is actually happening. Because the musician/composer Alfredo L. Santiago works largely within the language of jazz, the notion of the timing and elements of the piece being dependent on a relationship with each other was easily understood, and offered an immediate and engaged conversation across mediums.

### *Collaboration*

This piece is clearly a result of choreographic collaboration or co-creation with Alicia Diaz, and in conversation with Alfredo's talents. Collaboration is distinctly different from work as a sole choreographer; it can be difficult to discern where credit is due. Collaboration means yielding sole ownership of the material for the collective, in this case for Agua Dulce Dance Theater. In doing so, there is no clear way to identify the individual's contribution separate from the whole, and the final 'product' is always unique to the individual components as they relate to each other. Which is more important in water, Hydrogen or Oxygen? The question is somewhat absurd, without either there is no water. In a strong collaboration, individual members know the end is a result of their involvement with the other performers.

### *Repetition/Recycling of Work*

Rodin's ability to take his work and transform its meaning by re-using it another context was very inspiring to me. Not only is there a practicality involved in making use of what has already been created, the potential to use old material in a new context also suggests a relationship with both continuity and change, and balances the urge for new meaning with the reality of previous investigations. For me, by revisiting the same themes, or reinterpreting previous movement patterns, the language of the work becomes more complex. From the outside perspective, many ballet or modern dance performances are simply repetitive in terms of movement vocabulary - in fact they depend on understanding a very clear set of technical movement patterns in order to produce choreography. Yet what seems diversified

and complex to the educated looks 'the same' to someone outside the discipline. In the case of contemporary dance, the performer may be employing any number of diverse movement languages, or trying to make up a new one altogether! The technique is to create the technique. Invariably, I have returned to familiar themes and material in order to further define my own language, and in this piece, I felt supported in doing so, in part because of the conversation with Rodin's work.

## **DIASPORIC BODY GRAMMAR: A Model for Performance in Academia**

Pedro Meira Monteiro is Chair of the Department of Spanish and Portuguese Languages and Cultures at Princeton University. He invited Agua Dulce Dance Theater, co-directed by myself and Alicia Diaz, to participate in a lecture/demonstration, performance, and discussion titled *Diasporic Body Grammar: an encounter with movement and word*, at Princeton University's Wilson College's Black Box Theater on December 2, 2016. This was an intriguing proposal, considering my own investigation of my artistic lineage and how my work might function inside academia.

The event was a shared evening with Brazilian musician, dancer, and theorist Antonio Nóbrega, accompanied by Rosane Almeida and Maria Eugenia Almeida. Meira's initial interest was in presenting embodied movement language (dance), and engaging a conversation with critical theories that examine history, anthropology, and cultural studies as it relates to memory, colonialism, diaspora, and other topics pertinent to his Department and the Program of Latin American Studies. This was an experimental forum with an audience primarily of faculty, graduate, and undergraduate students. The performing body was the site of investigation.

For Agua Dulce Dance Theater, this was an opportunity to examine how we began an artistic relationship exploring various techniques as we developed a shared language, and also how we have defined our individual impulses since then. Influences

from the African Diaspora were a common reference point as well as the link that connected our work to Antonio Nóbrega, who studies traditional Brazilian dance and music and its relationship to syncopation. In addition we are working within a contemporary dance frame while considering our respective relationships to post-modern dance and Afro-Diasporic dance impulses.

We presented a half-hour lecture demonstration and a half-hour performance, showing a duet followed by edited versions of our solo material. Antonio Nobrega's followed our performance, and the event culminated in an hour-long discussion with all in attendance. We continued conversing with faculty and students during an hour and a half dinner. This extended format gave me a new use and context for my work inside of academia.

My initial interest was the challenge to the performer/audience relationship as we shifted from lec-dem, to traditional stage performance, and to discussion. For the discussion we were encouraged to reply through movement whenever possible! I was concerned by my ignorance of theoretical approaches to the topic, or to my own work, or the academic work of our hosts. I also considered my role as artist (versus or with) my identity as an English speaking North American white male.

Our preparation and research for this event was two-fold: to consider an examination of our creative work and impulses as diasporic language enunciated through the body itself, and to be as familiar as possible with theoretical approaches that track history and culture through the memory of the body. Although these are related, the first was looking at our personal histories and claiming how physical technique or concepts

arrived in our artistic work, and the second was familiarizing ourselves with contemporary academic discourses on identity and diaspora through dance.

I was deeply impressed by Pedro Meira's prompt and the general organization for the event: It was specific yet open-ended, it was experimental but within defined parameters. 'Diaspora' was left undefined, 'grammar' which implies rules, structure and syntax was held by the more liberal movement of the 'body.' Words and movement were given equal weight and they would 'encounter' one another. I assumed I would be accountable for theoretical approaches to my work, but found it was more a prompt to consider the information in the body as a language, and for me to discuss it as such through the body while proposing a conversation with more traditional academic approaches to performance through theory. I remembered that all performance is its own unique communication, not something executed, and that movement in particular could communicate across spoken language divides. This allowed me to register the respective limits of spoken language, written language, and embodied language, and the event provided a space where all three could suggest a new kind of knowing. Hence 'encounter' was an extremely appropriate term. It had open-ended outcomes, and as such was extremely generative, instead of produced, and facilitated dynamic conversations from multiple perspectives from varied disciplines.

The fact that there were only a few theatre and dance specialists in attendance was important: the space for me to communicate with people was not obscured by performance rules or norms followed, broken, or expected. I have found that I learn the most about myself and what I have to contribute as an artist when engaged with an

unknown audience, whose discipline allows them to see my material differently from those within my field.

Our lecture-demonstration began with an informal 'roda' or circle where the Afro-Brazilian dance-fight Capoeira takes place. Those in attendance sat in a semi-circle closed by students who were invited to play instruments on the stage. Using participatory call and responses chants, we began the encounter in the arrival of the circle. Following the discussion, a similar dance/circle was enacted and led by Antonio Nóbrega and Rosane Almeida to close the event. We discussed this use of the circle as stemming from African aesthetics prevalent in Brazilian dance forms. The circle also deconstructed the audience/performer binary by the gathering of a space, and closed with recognition of the space held by its participants. The event was marked by conscious awareness of the presence of all involved.

Alicia Díaz and I began the lec/dem while demonstrating versions of Capoeira (we first met while training in NYC with Michael Goldstein known in capoeira as Mestre Ombrihno, the first recognized North American master of the form), Contact Improvisation, and partner work that had been formative technique resources for our artistic collaboration beginning in 2002. We emphasized the use or absence of physical touch, the relationship between bodies, the relationship to the earth, and use of flow and circularity to develop our movement conversations. This was a demonstration of movement and lecture of concepts that have impacted our aesthetic as dance partners. The relationship to the earth is shared-language with post-modern dance's interest in falling, in yielding to the gravitational pull, and in African aesthetics where the body is alive in relationship to the earth. Invigorating the earth through stomping, as if it were a



drum, or placing the hands on the ground as in the practice of capoeira, also reinforce ancestral worship and connection through the ground.

In the performance, our duet *changing course: the body as vessel*, was performed in silence. The intimacy of the piece and recognition of an audience shifted the focus to the body and how it speaks. It was interesting that the elements in the dance dealing with circularity, improvisation, isolation of body movement in the hips and shoulders, and relationship to the ground, are conceptual references to African aesthetic, and they are aspects also incorporated into modern and post-modern dance as a rebellion against classical European dance, while 'borrowing' aesthetic impulses from African, Asian and Native American dance.

The end of the piece, an inversion referencing the tipping of things upside down found in Capoeira, provided the opportunity to shift into my solo excerpt *one head, many hats*. This piece employs folk songs, movement, and spoken word, and my training in capoeira as it relates to an understanding of space, along with a number of different influences from improvisation, Contact Improvisation and Ensemble performance.

Alicia Díaz presented *portrait of a deity*. Her description of the piece is as follows:

This piece is inspired by imagery and archetypes of mother, lover, and warrior evoked by different deities present in the Caribbean African diaspora such as Erzulie in Haitian Vodoun, and the Yoruba orishas Yemayá, Oshún, and Oyá. I am investigating these archetypes through a physicality grounded in contemporary dance that also references the oldest Puerto Rican music and dance form developed during slavery called *bomba*. I implement choreographic methods that mirror strict structures of improvisation used in the original cultural and religious dance forms.

In our post show discussion, questions and topics revolved around memory, the information recorded in the body, and how it transforms as it travels. The first question was something like, "what were you able to say through movement in your performance that you would not be able to say verbally?" Immediately this addressed the difficulty verbalizing what had just been witnessed and performed. Although they can reflect on one another, they are not the same kind of knowledge. Other questions dealt with negotiating gender roles and a history of violence through partnering, and whether we conceived of the distinction between black and white art, between the European and African influences in movement. African Diasporic music and dance emerges both as resistance to and through syncretic relationships with European and American culture, but under an undeniable power relationship. The forms that arise then cross ethnic/racial/social divisions, or their influence are blurred as they merge with or against hegemony.

Our responses were varied, and we entered a discussion dealing with authenticity, appropriation, and ownership/authorship. The Brazilian artists presented performance as a uniting rather than divisive activity. In their work you could easily identify the ludic, and a sense of play, while dancer Maria Eugenia Almeida, the youngest amongst us, emphasized this was also a crucial element in forms of resistance. Díaz and I agreed with them yet asserted the importance of defining specificity of difference in order to engage in open dialogue. This poses an alternative to problematic historical challenges regarding invisibility and cultural appropriation of the African impulse. In the Diaspora, there is a conflict between claiming Africaness and national identity, or claiming forms by the region were they arise. Similar arguments are made regarding tap dance, the blues, jazz,

hip-hop, as American forms. Brazilian and American identities regarding race are conflicting/parallel and complex. 'Brazilianess' was intentionally created as 'distinct from European but not African.' Samba, Carnival, Bossa Nova, Capoeira, are all deliberate components of a national identity that is distinctly *Brazilian* and clearly adopts Africaness over European identity, yet in a white-minority ruled nation where class and race inequity is still severe. By clearly incorporating African aesthetics into a national identity while at the same time suppressing and negating Africaness through social/political/economic structures is troubling. In the assertion of being Brazilian, they are not accepted as coming from Africa, or even referenced as Afro-Brazilian. I have incorporated elements from African American and Afro-Brazilian culture into my own performance lexicon, to the extent that I may not be aware of where an influence comes from. My work is an amalgam of many different influences, particularly in post-modern dance. Distinguishing lineages that have been conflated under clear power dynamics is an interesting personal challenge. Questions regarding authenticity and voice as an artist have become essential to my own process. When have I appropriated? When am I trespassing? When does this investigation paralyze artistic expression? When does it free it? When have I claimed lineage to post-modern dance, that is inspired by Jazz composition?

No one pushed too hard on their own perspective, but this topic of authorship/ownership and the use of performance underscored all of our work, consciously or not, and become the subject of most of my conversations with faculty and students in the dinner that followed.

This research allowed me to think about movement as embodied language-and as such, what uses it may serve, and what lineages can be delineated. In a syncretic approach to devising my own work, what forms, by nature of their cultural origination, perform a subservient role verging on appropriation? In the case of my own training in Capoeira, versions of the movement are inside my body, they define my inflection of certain expressions, like an accent announces origin. Yet since I am not African-Brazilian, how has the technique itself become part of my pronunciation, and its use, outside of the space of origination, a migration across culture/class and race that allows me to speak without having paid the price of its former illegality and suppression. What parts of an art form can travel and retain authenticity, and which, aside from those who practice, are endemic to the point of origination. In workshops with capoeira angola master Mestre Valmir, he discussed the development of the art form. Not only does it travel out from Brazil as an Afro-Diasporic form, practioners world-wide contribute their unique influence on it and impact our understanding of the art.

Artists by nature are borrowing/stealing/ and influenced by one another. In the search for an expression original to the individual or group, an aesthetic is achieved both by co-opting and negating immediate influences. I am conscious of the history and potential for abuse, yet also employ artistic impulses implicit in the form that may convey more to me silently as a practitioner than to anyone watching. Its impact on me is philosophical/conceptual as much as it is physical. The circularity involved in both the movement, and the viewing of it (the game is performed inside a circle of musicians and audience/practitioners) has entered my choreography more than specific exported movements. Multiple perspectives view a single activity or point of attention, changing

the space not only through what is performed but by what is remembered and seen, individually and collectively, by those witnessing. The circle both opens and contains a claimed space for human engagement.

At the same time, certain impulses in the movement suggest potential intersection with disparate forms from separate cultures. Are these not valid paths to follow? In my performance in *Diasporic Body Grammar*, Maria Eugenia Almeida mentioned dancers in Sao Paulo mixing Capoeira and Contact Improvisation. I remember in New York City at a contact jam in West Village around 2001, Capoeira was being played. It was both out of place and a perfect cousin. Out of place because there was no music, no context to truly support it, yet related because of the improvisational exchange and potential challenge to adapt as seamlessly and 'beautifully' as possible. Beauty in this sense is related to timing, intuition, and appropriateness of response, not merely spectacular physical ability. There were simply two people who knew both languages, and I as a third who could also speak and observed the conversation.

## **Conclusion**

In this thesis I have addresses the values associated with counter-hegemonic performance forms and practice techniques. I do not desire to negate the value of Western European performance models. Instead I choose to define the use of alternative means of performed expression, and consider how to support them in my own creative research, and as effective and impacting techniques in education. The impetus for this research has been towards the discovery of my own artistic lineage, while examining the cross-cultural relationships between techniques, and in the desire to establish a narrative that supports their use and purpose within academia. I believe this may help support a pluralistic and inclusive relationship with the forms, as well as expand the diversity of students involved in the performing arts. Our ideas regarding the value, purpose and use of performance must involve multiple global perspectives. In my own artistic work, this thesis clarifies the value of alternative choreographic methods involving improvisatory, collaborative, circular and process oriented expression. These methods are simultaneously contemporary and ancient, defined by a relationship with avant-garde theatre and dance movements in the United States and in conversation with African and Asian movement practices and philosophies.

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## Works Consulted

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## Appendix 1

### *one head, many hats*

#### ***one head many hats, text with notes***

##### *Opening*

*Enter: from offstage somewhere*

Entrance should be both casual and involve ritual. Casual in that the house lights and work lights are on when entering the space, like an expected guest that comes in the back door to avoid the formality of introductions. Ritual is the invocation performed before entering the actual playing space.

*Lights: slow center pool up on arrival to stage*

Acknowledge the space / reflect on what has been there before /

Tap pockets full of change, walk in a circle and whistle (Good People, or Nature Boy or Yemaya)

Head down stage center, make the sign of the cross by looking in four directions, level gaze towards front.

SIT AND SINK – Drop flat (like building blocks) – turn and recover low upstage right, eyes on horizon (think Hudson River)

Capoeira Spiraling:

Sing *foi na beira do mar* with diagonal low sweeps towards center, singing into the plane of the floor.

Capoeira movements: ginga, negassa, mea lua de frente, rasteira recovery, negativa, touch ground, self, sky,  
Invert, drop change, recover

*Lights: Front lights up*

(movement notes will be in italics and inside parenthesis)

*TEXT:*

Filled  
Covered  
Layered  
Lost

dried up river bed – dirty ole cross

Da-de-do-da-deh . . . Papi-di-me

Yell on top and curse down low  
(“what like you never had sex before”-think these lines, don’t say them)

stand concealed (*cover chest and groin*)  
try to feel, who holds the clock while you keep it reel  
REELIN in the Big Fish Everyone naked (*rowing pull*)  
Take a little dip in what’s Forsaken

STOP / THAT / POUNDING  
Tell-tale heart (*swerve head swim left*)

drive by Highway 95, (*look right*)  
Lumpkin’s jail is where we’ll start (*see Yolanda*)

(*head left*) or maybe at the tip on the edge of Man-hattan

heads – on-pikes, (*flat to audience*)  
the first de-fence,  
Wall Street,  
O-ffensive.

(*move up center, sit on stool*)  
drones game. 3 children dead. Killed by remote control, that’s the toll  
“when you can’t get up / over / in there, fuckit, bomb em”

Occupy/Climate/War (*said in three distinct directions front like creating billboards*)  
SPRING! Hep hep!  
After fall’s slaughter, spring-time red poppies. (*fingers motion up through dirt*)  
spring sprung motherfuckin’ runnin’ step  
Hep hep bipity boie, I’m broader than Broadway and I dance with joy (*skipping step*)

(*rocking –cold*)

Mind-blown,  
I'm gown,  
down the street on a bus  
slushy streets, wet feets, hustlin' by in a rush

Me oh my I've got to try to catch the train, it's a must,

While I'm gown,  
Mind blown,  
Down the street,  
On a busssssssssssssssssss

*(mouthed but silent – coo, coo, coo, like train starting)*  
coo coo coo is the only thing I hear,  
coo coo coo behind my baby's ear,  
soft curly hair that has never been cut

*(sing a version of Elizabeth Cotten's "Freight Train" holding my baby)*  
Freight train freight train goin' so fast,  
Freight train freight train goin' so fast,  
Please don't say what train I'm on  
so they won't know where I've gone . . .

*(rotate in space, while turning baby embrace is opened into a hug, sing out)*

When I'm gone oh let me be  
Underneath that willow tree,  
So I can hear old number nine,  
As she goes rollin' byyyyyyyyyyy

Be de be de be de be de beeeeeeeeeeeeeeeep

Hello, you've reached James Thornton in the Department of Theatre, please leave a message . . .

Dad, dad, hey dad, yeah,

Remember those three ghost stories you told me, behind the barn on the bench in the night pasture? I'd like to hear them.

(Improvised versions of Dad's three stories)

1. The fog rises up from the meadow at night, to the butternut tree *(arm overhead, body underneath)*  
Towards the house, workers coming in at the end of the day.

2. Donaldine meeting you in the coffee shop. Donaldine dies in November at the first snow fall. Donaldine at the coffee shop (*coffee shop, step inside door, booth to the left, see Donaldine both times*)
3. At the Venice Café in Kent with David, an old woman enters the bar, offering cookies (*Dad and David at bar, woman enters from stage left, covers head and offers cookies*).

*(wait – then come back to the stool)*

Sometimes my mind is like a dusty room, someone comes in a moves things about,  
Shuffling around,  
moving things around,  
shuffling about

*(whistle Grandpa's canoe song)*

Grandpa, in the boat, I'm up front, he's in back. (*rowing back and front of canoe*)  
We're fishing for snakes just off the shore,  
Something alive he can touch, hold, grab (*snap at water*)

Grandpa easy chair. (*sitting*)  
44 sharpened pencils in a box/crosswords  
what keeps the mind sharp after life dulls the brain

Hey Paul! What was is like, being a hero in the war?

Grandpa sitting  
*(sit down - slow reach with hand, wait, press button, release bomb)*  
squadron, squadron, squadron, dron, dron, droooooonnnne

*(stand up – find old black backpack –sing version of Tom Wait's "Shiver me Timbers")*

I'm leavin' my family  
I'm leavin' all my friends  
My body's at home, but my heart's in the wind  
Well the clouds are like headlines, on a new front-page sky,  
My tears are salt water, and the moon's full and high,  
so am I

*(start to dance with backpack – easy turning playing with its weight, putting it on and taking it off, spiraling motion)*

I know Martin Eden, gonna be proud a me  
Many before me have been called by the sea  
To be up in the crow's nest,  
Singin my say, shiver me timber's I'm a sailin' away

*(rocking body, holding back back two hands, as if holding someone)*  
Well the fog's liftin, and the sand's shiftin', I'm movin on out,  
Oh Captain Ahab, you aint got nothing on me, so come on and swallow me,  
Don't follow me, blue water's my daughter,  
I'm skipping like a stone

*(stop backpack dance)*  
So please call my Missus,  
Got to tell her not to Cerrrrryyyyyyyy  
My goodbye is written by the moon in the sky well and no-body know's me,  
I can't fathom my stayin,  
Shiver me timber's I'm a sailin' away.

*(finish and take time – set back pack down)*

Back in Richmond ...  
we live in Richmond, we live in Richmond,  
in the deep dark depths of Richmond  
back in Richmond /  
I'm a fish, swimming into the current,  
shaking my head,  
wagging my tail  
*(fish with hand, head and tail, bent at waist, fluid spine)*

Hope those boys don't catch me, Ride me! *(stop. sharp look to the side, see boys)*  
I'm a fish, keep movin' . . .

BOXING SEQUENCE:

*(Saunter, hold ground, jab, break ground, pivot. Jab, step off center, hook.  
Float / circle. Swing / recover, swing and leap)*

*Breathe in – Push out, breathe and body, three times)*

TEXT:

Reeling in the big fish everybody naked, take a little dip in . . .

Worst fear, its about losing control . . .

I'm a fish, I'm a fish . . .

No, I am not a flippin' fish, I drIve over that river E-ver-y-day!  
*(down stage center - knife hand across palm indicating motion perpendicular to the river)*

*(move left)*

And my worst fear . . .  
I am running, slow and pushing,  
Every thing is moving slowly  
I don't know why I'm running, what I am running from  
There is a slight incline, (*look up left*) I'm running down (*look down right*)  
the ground soft under my moon leaps  
As I look over my shoulder I trip  
Flying, head first, a sailors dive against the sky (*sailor's dive, leaning*)

the minute, the instant my head hits (*snap fingers, break out of falling board*)  
sinks, buries into the ground  
I hear chimes, laughter somewhere above the earth (*fumbling reach to sky then to earth*)

I am shoulder deep, upside down, naked, and everything in real time,  
(*snap fingers like a metronome*)  
The clock held by some unknown hand, my breath suspended  
EYES open, choking dirt  
I am born to the day paralyzed, naked, awake,  
With my head stuck in the earth,

Hmm, bad dream

SHshshshshshshsh, shhhh, shh hee  
(*a warning, blowing to three directions – this is a transition into the song, and a pushing out into the darkness, signifying the beginning of the end and asking the piece to close, alerting the relatives*)

SONG: (*version of the Parting Glass, Irish/Scottish traditional drinking song -1<sup>st</sup> verse is inward and close*)

(*sung inward, to relatives, sitting by their deathbeds, in three directions, palms open, palms open, palms to the earth*)

Oh all the money that ere I spent  
I spent it in good company  
And all the harm that ere I done  
Alas it was to none but me

And all I done, for want of wit  
To memory now I can't recall  
So fill to me, the parting glass  
Goodnight, and joy be with you all

LIGHTS: *up slightly*  
(*as lights come up, turn upstage – face audience, seeing them for the first time, and sing to them, open and out*)

Oh all the comrades that ere I had,  
Are sorry for my going away  
And all the sweethearts that ere I had,  
Would wish me one more day to stay

But since it falls unto my lot,  
That I should rise and you should not,  
I will gently rise and I'll softly call,  
Goodnight and joy be with you all.

*(reach up to the sky, pull down air, suck it in, silent 'poof' out,  
retreat and expand arms out to sides)*

*LIGHTS: slow fade out in time with retreating body and expanding arms.*

*Bow*

#### Music Credits

Foi na beira do mar – capoeira oral tradition song  
Freight Train – original song by Elizabeth Cotten  
Shiver Me Timbers – Tom Waits  
The Parting Glass – Irish/Scottish traditional song



## Vita

Matthew Paul Thornton was born in Ohio on July 18, 1974, and is an American citizen. He graduated from Shaker Heights High School, Shaker Heights, Ohio, in 1992. He earned his Bachelors of Arts in English from the University of Wisconsin, Madison, in 1996. He taught as an Assistant Professor of Dance at Hope College, Holland Michigan, from 2009-2011, and as an Assistant Professor of Dance at the University of Richmond, Richmond Virginia, from 2011 to 2017. Thornton performed, created work and taught with Pilobolus Dance Theater from 2003 to 2011. He has been Co-Artistic Director of Agua Dulce Dance Theater with Alicia Diaz since 2006.