



University of Utah

UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH JOURNAL

**THE FEMALE BILDUNGSROMAN THROUGH MOVEMENT AND
PERFORMANCE**

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Modern Dance

ABSTRACT

Through the creation of an evening length dance work entitled “New Year” and its subsequent epilogue, “4137 Sampson Toad Road,” I explored the choreographic creation of a collective, female bildungsroman. The bildungsroman is a narrative form centered on the spiritual and psychological development of a protagonist (Hardin xi). It is biographical in nature and recounts the formative years of this character within a plot that highlights moments of growth and transformation. Since its emergence, however, this rhetoric has been dominated by male ‘coming of age’ stories. In challenging this pervasive narrative, I as modern dance artist embarked on a collaborative process that interwove movement and spoken text into live performance.

In working with a cast of female dancers, we explored the role of memories in our continuous process of “growing up.” By identifying significant life experiences and then creating and performing stories, these women were able to reclaim past memories. In some cases, these past moments were completely redefined; painful experiences became accounts of strength, embarrassing moments became funny, and serious life changes became hopeful. In other cases, there was power in simply acknowledging past events and providing validity for the thoughts and emotions tied to those experiences. Together

we discovered the power of a community that shares, listens, and responds to each other's stories. This space of dedicated attention and support sparks empowerment.

This type of community emerged within the cast of performers as well as within the audience. In turn, the resulting dance work presented a blended autobiographical tale that fused the experiences of the entire cast to create a collective, female bildungsroman.

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*“Memory is individual
We are made,
in large measure, of our memory.
This memory is made
In large measure, of oblivion” (Borges, 1979).*

INTRODUCTION

Our specific life experiences that translate into memories have first become stories. These fleeting moments in time are lost if they do not become narrations. They are the stories that we mentally tell ourselves in reflection, they are the stories we vocally narrate to audiences of friends, family members, or new acquaintances, and they are the stories we listen to about ourselves that eventually become remembered truth. My earliest memory is an image of me sitting on a couch in Ohio playing Candy Land with my grandma. She is wearing a large cotton shirt that has two plastic, vertical buttons near the collar with large marron roses in sweeping, circular patterns. Her greyish brown hair is buzzed from chemo. This image is tangible. I can see the layout of furniture in the room and feel the plastic board game pieces in my fingers. However, this memory became ingrained in my head through the repetition of stories from relatives. These details emerged from storytelling; I was only two years old and had no way of remembering this specific event. Yet, there it rests, a complete memory. Our remembered past is created through stories that we edit and re-edit.

My research involved the production of an evening length dance performance “New Year” that premiered in November 2017 and an epilogue work entitled “4137 Sampson Toad Road” that was performed in April 2018. My artistic process to explore the interplay of memories, storytelling, and performance began through literary works. As a Modern Dance and Spanish double major, I have been fascinated by the interplay of narrative in both of these mediums. For example, the influential Argentinian writer, Jorge Borges demonstrates the pliability of memory and its reconstruction through many of his short stories. These narratives

explore the emotional and mental forces that impact the configuration of memory and sparked my interest in the interplay of memory, narratives, and the physical act of storytelling.

Specifically, the short story “Funes el Memorioso” (“Funes the Memorious”) develops the complexity and fluidity of memory through its relationship to storytelling.

“Funes el Memorioso” (1944) tells the fictional story of Ireneo Funes who remembers absolutely everything after receiving a terrible head injury when he fell off a horse. Borges describes, “Sabía las formas de las nubes australes del amanecer del treinta de abril de mil ochocientos ochenta y dos y podía compararlas en el recuerdo con las vetas de un libro en pasta española que sólo había mirado una vez” (161). (“He knew the forms of the clouds in the southern sky on the morning of April 30, 1882, and he could compare them in his memory with the veins in the marbled binding of a book he had seen only once.”) Funes is characterized as a machine who has photographic capabilities and like a human clock, can say the exact time of day by looking at the sky (161).

By contrast, the narrator has a limited, imperfect memory and he notes throughout the story that his narration is a failure compared to the actual sequence of events, “No trataré de reproducir sus palabras irrecuperables ahora” (166). (“I shall not attempt to reproduce his words now irrecoverable.”) He is telling an ‘irrecoverable’ story, one that he has butchered. Every time that the narrator says “I remember” as a way to introduce another memory, he adds an expression like “I believe.” This disclaimer of sorts removes the reliability of this narration and places a deep emphasis on the forgotten, misremembered, and edited memories.

The juxtaposition of these two characters is interweave throughout the text and directly compares a perfect vs. limited memory. However, Borges makes it clear that Funes could not tell this story because he is a cursed with a perfect memory. His mind is completely occupied by the catalogue of memories, “En efecto, Funes no sólo recordaba cada hoja de cada árbol de cada

monte; sino cada una de las veces que la había percibido o imaginado” (170). (“Funes not only remembered every leaf on every tree of every wood, but even every one of the times he had perceived or imagined it.”) His perfect memory transforms Funes into a prisoner who is isolated and forced to become a detached spectator. He cannot interact, he cannot think, he is only forced to remember. Borges declares, “Sospecho, sin embargo, que no era muy capaz de pensar. Pensar es olvidar diferencias, es generalizar, abstraer. En el abarrotado mundo de Funes no había sino detalles, casi inmediatos.” (172). (“I suspect, nevertheless, that he was not very capable of thought. To think is to forget a difference, to generalize, to abstract. In the overly replete world of Funes there were nothing but details, almost contiguous details.”) Funes with his perfect, infinite mind is consumed by details and the catalogue of memories.

Through the narrator’s limited memory that has forgotten specifics and recreated the past entirely, a story is born. Borges shows us that remembering is an act of creativity. It is necessary to forget, so that we may choose what is important to remember. We must lose details, so we can reclaim the specifics that are important. There is power in the limited memory, there is power in choosing what we as humans remember, what we forget, and what we edit. Launching from this idea that memory involves a creative process in itself, I began my own research dedicated to remembering creatively with a group of dancers. This process involved forgetting intentionally, recreating the past, and editing our memories.

Through this process of recreating memories, I produced an evening length dance work through the framework of the bildungsroman narrative. The bildungsroman emerged in the last third of the eighteenth century and surrounds the spiritual and psychological development of a protagonist (Hardin xi). This biographical narrative is centered on the formative years of the protagonist within a plot that highlights moments of growth and transformation. Since its emergence, however, this rhetoric has been dominated by male ‘coming of age’ stories. In

challenging this pervasive narrative, I created a female bildungsroman through performance that incorporated movement, spoken text, singing, painting, and writing. This dance work was dedicated to telling the stories of women—their experiences, memories, and reflections.

In Chapter 1, I unpack three distinct female bildungsromans that were significant to this creative process. Each of these narrative gives voice to a very specific marginalized identity. In telling these stories, these often-unheard experiences are shared. There is empowerment in telling and listening to stories that are intensely individual and also, very collective in nature. These specific narratives deeply informed my own creative research and the ways that coming of age narratives can be reclaimed. In Chapter 2, I take readers inside the artistic process of this piece. This includes reflections on how this choreographic material was generated. Here, I discuss the many ways that this show was individually autobiographical and also, collectively shared.

In Chapter 3, I explore each part of the show that exist as smaller episodes or chapters that make up the larger bildungsroman. Each section has specific research roots and plays a very distinct role in the storytelling process. In Chapter 4, I discuss “4137 Sampson Toad Road,” a dance piece that premiered in April 2018 which serves as an epilogue to “New Year”. Although created after “New Year” was originally performed, this individual piece emerged as a microcosm for a bildungsroman narrative. A similar but slightly unique artistic process was employed to create this performance of narrative through movement and text.

Through this creative research, I discovered that the process to create and perform a story is often more significant than the initial experience itself. These moments pass in a fleeting instant. However, the way that these experiences are translated into stories and thus, memories is what has a lasting impact on our bodies and minds. This creation and performance of stories validates these experiences. The emotions initially felt whether of pain, fear, shock, humiliation, or even excitement are acknowledged and justified. Also, this act of storytelling has the capacity

to transform. Deeply embarrassing experiences can be translated into humorous memories, devastating moments can become hopeful stories, and unforeseen surprises can be processed with comforting knowledge. These transformations are empowering. My research claims that when our lived experiences are created into stories (through movement and/or words), they become memories. When these memories are shared and felt by other people, who form a sort of community, these experiences are reclaimed and can allow for growth, redemption, empowerment, and hope.

CHAPTER 1:

THE LITERARY WORKS THAT SPARKED THIS CREATIVE PROCESS

The day-to-day memories of my undergraduate career involved my constantly weaving between dance and Spanish literature classes. With my body still pulsing from the kinesthetic rhythm of a movement class, I would sit in a tan plastic desk and begin a discussion on the irony or motifs flowing throughout a Spanish short story or poem. After my hands were stained from the repetitive movement of notetaking, I would dash off to a creative rehearsal or begin writing an analytical literature essay. My college career was deeply characterized by the fusion of movement and literary research. Although they appear drastically different, these two fields have become intertwined for me. Thus, this modern dance performance thesis has been deeply informed and influenced by significant literary texts.

The bildungsroman narratives: *Primera Memoria*, *Empanada: a lesbiana story in probaditas*, and *Blue is the Warmest Color* each share the transformational journeys and stories of women. Each of these books carries the thoughts, struggles, and memories of marginalized experiences. By hearing these voices, individuals with similar identities and experiences can be empowered and their own stories reclaimed. Each of these narratives was specifically influential to my own creative process in terms of their structures, storytelling methodology, and plotline.

Primera Memoria by Ana María Matute shares the experience of the Spanish civil war from the perspective of Matia, a 14-year old girl. The narrator, many years after these initial events, reflects on her adolescent experience. As the title indicates, this novel is her first memory—the first memory of the war, her transition to adulthood, and her first experiences with sexuality and being an independent individual. Through this collage of memories, Matia paints a multidimensional image of her experiences with trauma. This novel informed my creative dance work in distinct ways. First, I was interested in the relationship between the current narrator and her past selves, these two selves emerged as distinct voices that converse throughout the narrative. Also, Matia holds a marginalized identity as a young girl during the Spanish Civil War. Yet, her perspective is vital, her voice needs to be shared. This act of narration brings to life a more complete understanding of the physical and mental pain that the Spanish Civil War provoked and creates a space for the narrator to reclaim these experiences. *Primera Memoria* captures the power of storytelling to provide resilience to past trauma and transformations.

The adult Matia and her teenage self have a vital relationship throughout *Primera Memoria*. The entire plotline exists within the reflections and thoughts of an adult Matia. Emily Eaton describes this collaborative narration, “As the protagonist, Matia, offers a past-tense account in a temporally unlocatable present, the narrative voice folds in upon itself, or echoes itself incessantly, such that it is impossible to differentiate between the thoughts of the adult narrator in the present and those of her fourteen-year-old self in the past” (181). The past and present self of Matia become deeply intertwined. Even though this story recounts a 14-year girl, it is indistinguishable from the story of a woman who has lived many more years than those directly narrated in this novel.

The memories narrated in present tense are in fact reimagined and recreated past experiences. Through reflection and selective creativity, Matia has recuperated and rearticulated

her young identity. This fusion of perspectives is apparent in the use of parentheses which mark a departure from the present. These parentheses share events that occurred earlier in her life, to add a commentary that her older self-connected, and to place her current self within a narrative. For example, when Matia and her cousin, Borja are visiting the cliff edge, she interjects, “(Aquí estoy ahora, delante de este vaso tan verde, y el corazón pesándome. ¿Será verdad que la vida arranca de escenas como aquella? Será verdad que de niños vivimos la vida entera, de un sorbo, para repetirnos después estúpidamente, ciegamente, sin sentido alguno?)” (Matute 20). (“Here I am now, in front of this grass so green, and with a very heavy heart. Can it be true that life uproots scenes like that one? Can it be true that as children we live our whole lives, in one gulp, in order to repeat ourselves later, stupidly, blindly, without any sense whatsoever? (20).) Matia interrupts the progression of childhood events to present thoughts and reflections that have emerged after years of lived life. The word ‘ahora’ or ‘now’ functions as a lexical marker that shows the presence of an older Matia who has interlaced her voice into the experiences of her childhood self. These memories are creatively reconsidered. The narration is not a retelling of fixed circumstances but instead is alive and breathes with change and reconsidered reflections.

Matia presents a marginalized perspective; one that has been undermined by the men and boys in her life and one that is untold when it comes to the perspective of war stories. Simply the act of telling her story, gives voice to this particular experience. Eaton describes Matia’s place in society, “And yet, the child Matia is rightfully more apprehensive of authority figures than is Borja, for her sex makes her more likely to be denied a voice; literally the opportunity to speak her mind” (188). This narrative, in turn, allows Matia to share her perspective and experiences that were silenced when she was a teenager. Years later, Matia is able to discuss her sexuality that was once laced with fear and uncertainty and to process her traumatic memories of the war including death and change. Eaton describes the significance of this storytelling, “[The novel]

features a Matia who has gained some sense of self, some form of empowerment through the act of narration” (193). Matia projects a reflective lens on her past experiences and reclaims these moments with an empowered voice. This act of storytelling gives light to her struggles and provides liberation for her once suffocated experiences.

Primera Memoria informed the way that I approached my own artistic process. I explored the way that the present performers could interact with their past selves in a dynamic relationship. A collaboration similar to the one between Matia as a present and past self presents an exciting commentary on the changes someone experiences in their own coming of age narrative. When working with the performers, each memory was encouraged to be recreated, reevaluated, and continuously edited each time that we revisited them. In this way, the performers had a living, changing relationship with their stories. Also, I was specifically interested in giving voice to silenced memories; vulnerable thoughts, intimate feelings, and unexpressed memories were all ideas that we workshopped together. Through this collective process of telling, listening, and communally sharing past stories, we were empowered as individuals and as a community as we connected with each memory.

Empanada: a lesbiana story in probaditas presents a bildungsroman of the intersectional identity of Paloma, a Chicana lesbiana. This novel creates a space where contradictory identities coexist, where oppressive definitions and categories are challenged, where transitions occur, and where the marginalized and the voiceless are acknowledged. Anel I. Flores employs a fluid, non-linear rhetoric and the literary device of bricolage to capture a non-linear bildungsroman. This novel informed my own creative process specifically in the way that Flores plays with the fluidity of time and blends many literary styles and in the way that Paloma reclaims her story as a queer Chicana woman through a luscious, sensual, and messy narrative.

This novel progresses in a collaborative but non-linear way. There is a flexibility in the narrative; we as the readers are not pulled along a chronological progression. Instead, we are sucked into a web that is reflective of the complexity of lived experiences. This switching of time captures the inner dialogue between the present and the remembered that *Primera Memoria* created with the narrator's commentaries. In one moment of the novel, Paloma is in the heat of a high school romance, in another she is in her college dorm room, then a baby is growing inside her, and later she is in her late 30s positioning herself to remember the past. In this blending of time, the past and present collide and coexist. There is a reconciling of experiences through time that allows Paloma to reclaim painful and 'shameful' memories.

In addition to its fluidity of time, *Empanada* is interlaced with different layers of bricolage that present these experiences with deep creativity and fusion. Bricolage is creating (whether that is in art or literature) a work from a wide variety of sources. Each short chapter has a different rhetoric; from childhood memories, to sensory recollections of food, to developed metaphors, to prayers, to even horoscope forecasts that work to create an intersectional work that mirrors the thematic exploration of intersectional identity. Throughout the narrative, memoir-like prose and poetic fiction collide and blend in a way that muddles where truth and imagination begin and end. The horoscope forecasts are especially interesting as they blend the real and surreal. In the chapter "2004 Yearly Horoscope Forecast: Cancer", the words add layers of outside commentary onto Paloma's experience, "When you get the invitation from the east coast school to take feminine literature, don't get excited and sign up. The program will just be a bunch of books in dresses" (100). Although this commentary exists in the hypothetical with a metaphorical layer it adds an echo to Paloma's experiences of challenging the expected norms of femininity and the lack of representation of queer voices, her reality.

The final layer of intersectionality within the rhetoric of *Empanada* lies in the blend of Spanish and English. Flores's words are a bilingual construction that are weaved together to create a third space that belongs fully to neither language. This work creates a fusion embodied by the duality of language. This third space is described by Debora R. Vargas in "Cruzando Fronteras: Remapping Selenia's Tejano Music Crossover" as "...a geopolitical as well as discursive space symbolized by the socially constructed in-between territory" (225). This partnership of language throughout the narrative engages a discussion of the intersectionality of culture that many Chicano/a/x families experience. In many of these chapters, English structures the sentences with a sprinkle of Spanish throughout. However, in the chapter "Pink Cake" each English sentence is echoed in Spanish, creating a beautiful, poetic call and response rhetoric, "You gently ice my pink Mexican birthday cake. I can't wait to taste. *Tiernamente le aplicas el betún a mi pastel rosado Mexicano de cumpleaños. No aguanto las ganas de probarlo.* There is a little left over on your lips. *Sobró un poquito en tus labios.* You taste it. *Lo pruebas*" (107). These sentences layer upon each other, adding suspension and intrigue, and creating a third space where the intersectional and the complex exist.

Through this novel of fusion and interplay of languages, literary styles, and time, Paloma shares memories that are vulnerable, intimate, and messy. With an identity that has received shame from family and religion for so much of her life, Paloma can reconcile these experiences with confidence. Sara E. Cooper explains, "Flores daringly strips bare the societal, family, and self-imposed cover-up of what is real and vulnerable, what is dangerous and taboo, what is scary and seductive in her life." *Empanada* creates a space where the marginalized story of a lesbiana can be shared and its raw essence that is complicated, messy, vivid, and always changing.

Queer bildungsromans like *Empanada* are important because they give voice to experiences that are shared by so many people but often lack representation. In "A New Kind of

Coming Out: Queerness, Conflict, and the Postmodern Bildungsroman” Andrew J. Owens describes the significance of this genre, “Narratives of maturation, known canonically as bildungsromans, are especially important to our current moment and to the ever-expanding fields of queer and gender studies precisely because they challenge stereotypical narratives of successfully —coming-out and contribute much-needed nuance to the expansive range of queer experiences in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries” (3). In these terms, *Empanada* is imperative to provide voice to traditionally untold stories. This work provides an account of the ‘coming out’ of a Chicana lesbiana, and of the growth and challenges she faces as she negotiates her own coming of age. Her story exposes readers to the fluid and complicated daily experiences that Paloma faces. We cannot simplify the queer experience to fit into societal constructions of ‘normativity.’ Nor leave them only to the queer theorists in academia, which is not accessible to all individuals. By weaving these memories into a dynamic narrative, Paloma reclaims her experiences and provides empowerment for queer and Chicanx individuals who can find connection in these stories.

Empanada informed my process to create a dance work that also plays with the fluidity of time and elements of bricolage. After witnessing the creative way that Flores weaves together memories without a chronological framework, I explored the way that memories could be performed with a similar fluidity of time. At points throughout the show, dancers shared their first remembered experience and also, their last memory. Rather than the dance’s progression being based on the most recent experience, these individuals launched into the future and shared the last memory that they *will have*. Also, each section of this dance work moved through a different style that played with movement and speaking. In some sections, the dancers moved and spoke, danced in silence, improvised, and spoke in monologues, dialogues, and larger, shared conversations. Also, there was components of singing, painting, and writing all included

in the performance as ways to tell stories. This performed bricolage was inspired by *Empanda* and the ability of this structure to capture the diverse ways that we interact with memories and stories. Lastly, I hoped to share the intimate, the complex, and the messy stories of these dancers to capture how they had grown as individuals and within communities. These stories were meant to empower the performers as they reclaimed these experiences and empower the audience who could find parts of themselves within this brave journey of storytelling.

Blue is the Warmest Color is also a queer bildungsroman imbedded in a graphic novel. The narrative surrounds Clementine, 15-year-old high school student that is experiencing a period of deep identity questioning when she meets a blue-haired artist named Emma. After a series of seemingly fated encounters, these two young women begin to develop a strong friendship that eventually teeters into love. This novel takes place in France during the 90s, a time when, “homophobia and self-hate remained a looming threat” (Broverman 41). This novel explores the rebellious, reckless energy of a young woman, but also her tenderness, fear, and deep confusion. *Blue is the Warmest Color* is beautiful and devastating bildungsroman, “Adolescent identity-seeking plays out against a mixture of heart-thumping decisions and brief but steam-heated romantic interludes” (*Publisher’s Weekly* 34). This narrative emerges as passionate and tragic, sweet and violent, it leaves a bittersweet resonance behind.

What is truly captivating about this novel is its use of images and space to develop the plot. This story is told in the form of a flashback as Emma reads Clementine’s diaries after her tragic death. The pages set in the present tense showing Emma in mourning are painted in cool hues of blues and greens. While all of Clementine’s diary entries are depicted in black and white with Emma’s electric blue hair the only splash of color on most pages. This style of drawing adds a distinct tone to the narrative, “Maroh’s moody exaggerated drawings and cool-hued colors give everything a dreamlike patina” (34). These dark colors with small hints of blue allow a

sense of love and other deep emotions to be depicted with only color. For example, there is a moment (page 60) where Clementine is leaning against the wall with the hope of talking to Emma the next day filling her spirit. The wall is covered in a gradient blue and she is sitting in the right side of the frame with an eager expression spread across her face. This blue spread seems to embody the feelings erupting out of Clementine's body and her developing love. Maroh's creative use of color inspired me to consider the colors I used within my own work, bring a mindfulness to the costumes I utilized. Also, I was intrigued by the more unconventional ways that I could depict emotion and stories.

In addition to color, Maroh uses space and page layout in innovative ways to develop the storyline. Will Eisner describes the special characteristics of graphic novels, "...the major dependence for description and narration [in graphic novels] is on universally understood images, crafted with the intention of imitating or exaggerating reality" (5). *Blue is the Warmest Color* uses beautifully crafted images that manipulate reality and show the depth of Clementine's experience from the depth of her mind. At the beginning of the novel, after Clementine first spots Emma in a crowd of people, she has a dream about her. The first image shows an Emma and Clementine's figure (with their arms wrapped around each other's shoulders) standing upon the sleeping figure of Clementine. The next image zooms into their black and white torsos (heads cut out of the image). Then there is a square filled only with Emma's face, then just her lips and nose. Next, there is a long, thin panel that capture just her eyes. The last three images on the page, return to Clementine's head resting on the pillow. In the first, she is alone. In the second, Emma has appeared next to her, and in the third, Emma kisses her on the cheek. These images have manipulated reality and imposed snapshots of events that never happened but instead were created through Clementine's memory. As a reader, you physically feel yourself being pulled into Emma's gaze. Then you feel the shift of being alone to having Emma appear next to

Clementine. Through this exaggerated reality, you feel the longing of Clementine and her desire to feel the presence of Emma by her side.

Maroh brilliantly uses space to create movement between frozen images. *Reading Comics: How Graphic Novels Work and What They Mean* explains, “What happens between the panels is the viewer’s vantage point moving through time and (usually but not always) through space...For one thing, reader’s get to fill in the lapse of time represented by the blackness of the gutter” (Wolk 131). Between each of the frames in *Blue is the Warmest Color* time is progressing and space is changing. Even though there is stillness and each figure is locked into a specific shape, the movement is anticipated and change is acknowledged. I was very interested in incorporating this same play of space and movement in my dance work. On page 67, Clementine is surrounded by complete emptiness of space, encircled with complete whiteness. This use of space evokes the deep sadness, confusion, and aloneness that Clementine is facing. On page 97, after an erotic scene, there is just two squares with the two women holding hands and then an image of a CD laying crookedly next to a boom box. There is so much left unspoken in these space that allows the reader to fill in the implied movement.

As I entered the choreographic process, I looked to construct the spatial relationship of the dance work with this graphic novel aesthetic. I was interested in the way that movement can be created through physicality and can also be implied through missing gaps. Also, I began to examine the relationship of the dancers to the audience and how this could be manipulated through proximity and perspective. With Maroh’s powerful construction of space in mind, I considered the space between each dancer and between the audience as a mode to tell each story. With this careful attention to interpreted time and space, the audience becomes a significant character in the work.

Blue is the Warmest Color also revealed to me the way that movement and gesture change as a character changes. Over the course of the novel, the images and implied movements of Clementine developed as she grew up and matured in different ways. Her interactions with others changed and the way she saw the world (as depicted in these journaled images) also appeared differently. With this in mind, I became interested in developing the ways that the dancers moved and interacted with each other as they acknowledge their own life changes and the diverse ways that their memories had impacted them. *Blue is the Warmest Color* is a fully embodied bildungsroman that captures these coming of age experiences through the text, visual images, implied movement, and through its genre; a graphic novel is the perfect book of transition between childlike picture books and comics to adult based content.

CHAPTER 2

THE CHOREOGRAPHIC PROCESS TO DEVELOP PERFORMED STORIES

Creating an environment where memories could be remembered, shared, created, and edited was fundamental to this choreographic process. In many ways, this process launched from research regarding the power of self-reflection. Ursula M. Straudinger describes, “Evidence shows that life reflection is a social-cognitive process that begins in adolescence and continues across the life span. It serves different functions across the life span, but at all ages it contributes to self-insight and a self-critical perspective” (148). This fundamental process of reflecting is imperative to establish an individual’s identity, to gain self-insight, and ultimately to become conscious of one’s own coming of age narrative. Straudinger describes that this process of self-reflection can be an empowering experience, “Thinking back over one's life may help one to find meaning in losses and failures and accept mistakes and weaknesses, and one may actually mature by doing so” (156). When reflection takes place, individuals re-contextualize experiences within their own framework. Devastating, frustrating, and embarrassing moments can be acknowledged

and transformed into memories that recognize the past circumstances and provoke individual growth.

While the end result of this process is empowering, it can be difficult and draining to initially reflect on these events. Straudinger explains how this demanding exercise can be approached, “Striving for new insights about oneself and about life in general is challenging and taxing. Reflecting together with a trusted person, thus, may facilitate the process” (148). In these terms, I created a choreographic process surrounding life reflection within a trusted community. There was support in the way that dancers responded to each other’s stories, so that no one had to feel alone as they exposed intimate memories.

The collaborative creation process began with a cast of eight female dancers. Each dancer was wildly individual with webs of memories weaved deep inside of them long before the process began. Rehearsals were organized so that I met with small groups each week in order to work more individually and more deeply. These performers were divided into two duets and a quartet. Half way through the process, additional rehearsals were added to intermix these groups and also, to begin to weave together these distinct sections.

As these rehearsals progressed, small communities emerged within each group. These dancers who had passed each other millions of times in the hallways but had never shared classes or conversations, were brought into a collective, intimate experience. One duet rehearsed until 9 pm each Tuesday night. These two dancers entered these rehearsals with deep exhaustion and their daily grievances. There was a sense of release at the beginning of each rehearsal that came from the comfort of being surrounded by understanding peers and having a space to tell stories, reflect, and create. These two dancers developed a goofy energy that often erupted into laughter and silliness.

On Friday mornings at 8 am, I rehearsed with another duet of dancers. The three of us met at the end of a long week when the bright morning light seeped in through the studio windows. There was a unique energetic mix that combined a sense of tiredness from the past four days, a hopefulness as the weekend neared, and an exciting momentum to get through the day. These early morning rehearsals were magically productive and brought two dancers together that would not have another opportunity to meet. Lastly, I rehearsed with the quartet on weekend afternoons. Within these gatherings, there was an easefulness and calmness that is different from the day-to-day rush that emanates from the studio walls throughout the week. These four dancers generated diverse material both in terms of speaking and moving. Each of these individual rehearsals gave way to small communities that would not have developed without these rehearsals. Together these dancers shared intimate spaces together by exchanging stories, creating new material, improvising, and dancing. Within a couple weeks, these dancers had transitioned from simply peers working side-by-side to friends.

This community building was fostered by the creative practice and structure of rehearsals. Each rehearsal began with a Creative Check-In. These check-ins involved each dancer telling a two-minute story from the past week while continuously moving throughout the space. This ritual-like process allowed movement and text to become interconnected through a dynamic relationship within the body of each dancer. This also allowed each dancer to become more comfortable with talking; performed speech is often more uncomfortable for dancers than simply silent movement. The Creative Check-Ins also allowed us to get to know each other through little snapshots of each person's life over the past week. Some of these stories were hilarious like when a dancer shared her desperate journey to find floss at work. Or another dancer spoke about her shocking weekend where she randomly met a famous rapper at a party.

In some cases, these tiny stories inspired additional creative research and lead to developed sections in the final work. However, most Creative Check-Ins simply provided an opportunity for this cast to tell a quick story that what was on their minds. This practice demonstrated the power in telling stories especially when surrounded by a group of people who can witness and respond. I found that after each Creative Check-In, the space opened—there was a tangible change in the energy. The dancers felt safe to contribute ideas and create movement and text. On the rare occasion, when I omitted the Creative Check-In, the rehearsal felt compressed, rushed, and not as honest. These check-ins provided a moment of breath before either diving into the act of creation or of rehearsing what had already been developed. They allowed us to connect as a community and to embrace the inner-workings of our very original lives.

Following each Creative Check-In, I would introduce a speaking prompt. Sometimes dancers would be given time to free write thoughts and brainstorm a story, other times we would dive right into shared storytelling. These prompts ranged from first memories, to recollections of times they had been brave or scared, to even daily experiences of taking the bus to school. After recording each of these responses, I deconstructed and reconstructed them to create a collage of memories. During the performance, dancers told their original stories in a variety of ways: ranging from preserving all the details, to telling another person's story, to manipulating stories with different perspectives or imagined details. In this way, the show was deeply autobiographical in nature—carrying inseparable memories from each and every dancer. However, as these stories were told, they were altered, reimagined, and reclaimed to carry a new relevancy. By the nature of this process, these stories did not belong to a single dancer. They could not be separated into neat categories. Instead they overlapped in a complex, shared,

collective truth. The bildungsroman narrative created in this dance work is one of many females, one that bleeds in and out of very specific and very universal experiences.

CHAPTER 3

“NEW YEAR”—THE SECTIONS AND PERFORMANCE

I. Introducing the “New Year”

“Happy New Year!” We yell these words every single year. Surrounding ourselves with family and friends, we celebrate the end of each year and the beginning of a new one in the company of others. We share countdowns, drinks, and stories of the past year. Surrounded by people who matter to us, we reflect on our growth and change over the past 365 days, creating our own informal bildungsromans. We make plans for the New Year through resolutions that encourage us to continue our personal journeys. In these terms, the New Year is a time that humanity stops its progressive rhythm and takes a second to establish memories through stories.

During this holiday, newspapers, journals, and new stations launch their own “A Year in Review” to highlight the exciting, the devastating, and the progressive moments shared across the world. They create stories and codify the memories that are tagged to a specific year. Social media becomes filled with individual summaries of the past year. Facebook even has a feature to automatically create an online photobook with a user’s most significant photos from the past year. The New Year has led to a culture of storytelling and memory sharing through many mediums. This holiday has become the way that we codify our experiences over the past year into memories that represents significant milestones in our lives.

The New Year became the framework for this dance work. I was drawn to the repetitive rituals surrounding this holiday and the way that this event creates a space to discuss memories. Motifs of a New Year’s Event celebration were used as the beginning, ending and also in middle sections of the performed work:

The audience is gathered and a gentle hum of conversation fills the non-traditional concert space. People are sitting on couches, art and photographs hangs in symmetrical patterns and wood accents the walls. Eight dancers begin walking into the space and with powerful steps they shout, “10-9-8-7-7-7-6-5-4-3-2-2-1, Happy New Year!” And the dance has begun.

Several times throughout the work, this same count down is repeated as if to mark another shift into a new year. Following the months of the calendar, a cyclical structure is maintained that returns us to the end of one year and the beginning of a new one every 365 days. This repeated countdown marks the repetition of this cyclical holiday that occurs over and over even as life events radically shift and develop year-to-year. For example, halfway through this show, the performance was interrupted by another countdown that led into an abstract proclamation of New Year’s Resolutions. Two dancers listed the number of days they anticipated participating in certain activities during the upcoming year. They planned to jump in leaves, eat peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, watch a raccoon, trim nose hairs, eat bratwurst, sleep with the lights off, sleep with the lights on, and dance. New Year’s Resolutions are known for their high failure and are often critiqued for involving unrealistic goals. In this work, I included simple, comical resolutions that could surround small, daily actions rather than extensive fitness goals or self-improvement plans. The article “Self-Initiated Attempts to Change Behavior: A Study of New Year’s Resolutions” looked at 382 students at the University of Wisconsin to study the role of resolutions. This study found that “Such resolutions offer an advantage in that they are presumed to involve the development of self-initiated plans (as opposed to plans which may develop with the assistance of a therapist or other outside agent) at a mutually accepted time: the first day of a new year” (Marlatt and Kaplan 124). These resolutions empower individuals to reflect and make plans for the future. I found significant similarities between the process of reflecting and distinguishing significant memories and that of establishing New Year

resolutions. To create both of these, importance is given to certain life events (that have happened or will happen). In these terms, resolutions become a sort of future memory that you cast into the upcoming year.

Within this New Year framework, each dancer was introduced through a comical phrase. Each performer was coached to develop a catchy sentence that captured an essence of themselves. An excerpt of the dialogue is included below:

“My name is Hailey and I used to be shy and now I am confident and ready to fly.”

“My name is Bayley. It rhymes with Hailey.”

“My name is Nora Henriksen and I am from cold, cold, cold Minnesota. Now I live in slightly less colder Utah.”

“My name is Natalie and I used to be a goody good. But now, I like to break the rules and rebel and live freely.” (said to the tune of the Indiana Jones theme song).

The vocal performance of these introductions was manipulated to be individually poetic and to carry a distinct rhythm and rhyme. Each presentation resembled the quick introduction of a sitcom. Imagine the reel before *Friends* that features each character doing something that captures their unique personality. Or listen to the sing song intro to *New Girl* that says, “Who’s that girl?” “Jess!” These sitcom introductions create a memorable identity for the show and the characters. Likewise, in this dance work, each performer was presented as a distinct character. Within the first minute of the performance, the audience was introduced to each dancer in a way that captured a part of their personality.

The way that a person introduces themselves recognizes how someone identifies themselves and is often tied to what people remember about them. In a conversation with a new person, people can be drawn to share where they are from, where they work, details about their family, or their personal hobbies/interests. The first information shared creates a mini-narrative where identifying details are selected that then begin to codify the persona of an individual. People become like art museums that curate what is seen about their lives, when it is seen, and

how it is seen. Humans emerge as types of characters that are slightly tweaked from reality, just in the way that they present themselves to the world. In turn, the snapshot introductions at the beginning of this work were meant to characterize these individuals and begin to expose the personalities of these multidimensional individuals who each carry webs of complex memories.

II. Interweaving the Memories of Daily Actions

The next section of “New Year” was inspired by the repetitive rituals that surround each person’s seemingly mundane life. Each of the performers have collectively traveled to work and school millions of times. Most of these commutes have been lost as our minds creatively cast these experiences into oblivion. However, I was interested in building significance out of a framework that recognized the seemingly ordinary and routine. This process began with a sharing of many memorable moments on a bus. This led to a flood of experiences and the space erupted into an unraveling of stories. We exchanged tales of interesting characters spotted on the bus, awkward conversations, upsetting moments of forgotten items, and urgent attempts to catch the bus. There were also times when we all fell silent as we listened to the honest fear for safety many of these women had felt when traveling on public transportation.

This offering of stories seemed to overflow from these women; I was shocked by the number of stories shared around bus transportation. As soon as one memory was shared, the other performers made more and more connections to their own lives. After this initial story dumping, we worked creatively to manipulate these stories by adding a lens of magical realism. Magical realism encompasses an artistic movement that was first described by the German art critic, Franz Roh in 1925 as an artistic tendency where “mystery hides and palpates behind represented objects” (Zamora and Faris 16). In the 1940s, this term was adopted by Latin American literature as the “combination of realism with the fantastic so that the marvelous seem to grow organically within the ordinary, blurring the distance between them” (1). The fantastic

coexists with the routine without acknowledging that there has been a shift in the realness of the experience.

I was drawn to this genre as a framing device within my creative process because of its nature of fusion. Magical realism rejects the stifling need to root narrative in material reality that fails to capture the dimensionality of lived experiences. Louis Parkinson Zamora and Wendy B. Faris argue that magical realism, “conjures a narrative space that we might call the ‘ineffable in-between’” (45). This in-between space welcomes contradictions, mystery and fantastic reality. It is in fact a more accurate portrayal of our lives considering the relationship of our experiences within the context of imagination and creative reflections. Zamora and Faris describe this genre as the remystification of narrative which creates, “a space within which the reader is unable to explain what is narrated but can only experience it” (46). Through magical realism memories are reclaimed through intense creativity. This allows space for mystery, curiosity, and play. Most of all, magical realism demands the full embodiment of experiences because they cannot be fully understood through passive consideration. Instead these stories must be experienced. Here lies the role of dance—through movement, the stories that interweave the ordinary with the fantastic, reality with magic.

With each story originally told by the cast, I prompted each individual to imagine the full extent of mystery that existed behind each memory. Through exciting creativity and imagination, these ordinary thoughts were reclaimed to carry a more multi-dimensional narrative. One woman described looking around to find herself on a bus surrounded by dozens of Santa Clauses in brightly colored suits. Another explained a bus ride on Halloween when the bus driver handed out bowls of mash potatoes. Unfortunately, her bowl began moving violently. Also, another story described an adventure to find a costume shop on top of the bus. These stories are not fiction, they are not fantasy. Instead they involve each dancer more fully embodying these memories

with deep creativity and more personalized details. These stories have been remystified; this layer of magical realism does not remove the validity of the experience, rather it makes these stories a more real portrayal of their memories than the ordinary version.

III. Kinesthetic Storytelling

Another significant component of the creative process involved the use of movement to tell stories. I was specifically interested in the way memory resides within our muscles and carries the remnants of past experiences. The article “Trauma and Memory” describes the way that memories have a physical presence within the body, “A century of study of traumatic memories shows that semantic representations may coexist with sensory imprints” (Van Der Kolk 1). These experiences reside with sensory imprints, they are deeply ingrained in the body. Our experiences hold a certain physicality. Muscle memory, for example, is the remembering of movement captured in the body. Jeff Friedman coins this ‘embodied knowledge’ (156); this is a way of knowing and remembering that capture memory through the physicality of the body.

In the next performed sections of “New Year,” I explored unspoken narrative in the form of embodied knowledge. The movement of the body was used to remember and translate experiences. Part of this material was generated through an improvisation structure that called on the dancers to create phrases based on a remembered experience or based on personal connections to a poem or other piece of literature. The body can tell stories that are incredibly honest and accurate to capture the diverse remembered experiences of our lives. When working with one duet we explored the way that two bodies remember experiences together. Together we played with touch and partnering and the way that bodies navigate embodied knowledge. This duet intended to capture the physicalized memories of different relationships and the navigation of experiences in relation to others. The music in this section had a kaleidoscopic layering of sound and incomprehensible text. The dancers moved in relation and against the music; their

bodies physicalizing the varied ticking of a broken clock that keeps a pace with sudden jolts of speed and extended moments of slowed timing. Without a single word spoken, they captured remembered experiences moving in and out of each other, in a repeated separation and joining of bodies.

A different duet explored moving in unison and the shared story this created without physical contact. A relationship is developed between dancers as they negotiate space and time together. There is a shared reality, a collective embodied experience that begins to coalesce as these performers moved both together and individually. The material for this section came from childhood memories that were validated as real, lived experiences rather than degraded as juvenile or immature. Much of the choreographed material was inspired by poems from *The Fourth River*. This book shares the experiences of young adults as they navigate personal life changes and impactful events. Sheila Squillante, the editor, describes, “We called for work that showed the connection between the places of our youth and the adults we have become. We wanted work that tells the story of the way nature plants itself inside us as children and grows like ivy up the solid surfaces, through the cracks and fissures of our personalities and our principles as we grow up” (x). This compilation of literary works highlights the experiences of young people and the way this transforms these individuals as they grow up.

Launching from these poems and short stories, the dancers and I collaboratively created movement embodying these mini-bildungsromans that together acknowledge the reality of growing up. At the end of this embodied narrative, a vocal story was performed that told the story of a child looking out the window and witnessing a raccoon scamper across the white picket fence. However, one of the dancers explains that the adults in the room cast off the child’s proclamation as an unreasonable imagination and discredited the true reality of the raccoon outside. This is a tiny snapshot into the way that adults doubt the thoughts and experiences of

young people. This lack of validation removes the authenticity of children and teenager's realities. The way that we treat individuals' stories and experiences can have a significant impact on the growing up process and the identities that individuals come to claim. With this in mind, the raccoon story appeared again later in the show where other dancers acknowledged the presence of this animal and validated the experience of this child. I was interested in creating a choreographic process where memories were shared and transformed, but also a space where experiences were validated by a supportive community. The act of sharing and receiving acknowledgement from people supports the reclaiming of memories.

The last section where the dancers moved without a simultaneous vocal narrative occurred toward the end of the show. This movement followed a short monologue that described the experience of having Trump elected on the individual's 21st birthday. This day was submerged in deep contradictions. She was filled with celebration, excitement, and new freedoms, but at the same time she was devastated, frustrated, and scared. In a single instant, she felt confident, but also, powerless. The next movement phrase explored this tangible frustration through movement. Six dancers moved through the space in quick walks, pivots, and diving twists and turns. Each dancer always moved with a partner which provoked endless crossings of paths and changes of directions. This section required the exertion of a lot of energy and was performed to "Milestone 2 (Skux Life)" by Moniker. This piece of music comes from the movie *Hunt for the Wilderpeople*. Although this reference was unknown to most of the audience, this song comes from a part of the movie where Ricky Baker and his adopted father are journeying through the mountains. There is power in their steps and their spirits are full of angst, a desire for rebellion, yet also there is fear and frustration. These feelings resonated through the bodies of the performers as they shifted, bounced, spun, rotated, and slid. These embodied contradictions through movement and pauses captured what Molly Heller describes as, "the attempt to balance

contrastingly rich opposites in order to feel alive” (35). These memories could not be fully represented through a vocal description, they required a physical embodiment to capture the energy, feeling, and resonance of contradictory experiences.

IV. Storytelling through Dialogue

Another section of this dance work played with dialogue and conversation as a way of telling personally identifying metaphors. Growing up there were many games that I played with friends that involved creative responses. One example is the game “Never have I ever” which involves a person sharing a declarative statement about something they have never done and everyone else in the group must reveal if they have or have not done this same activity. This game is played by elementary school children, teenagers, it appears in ice-breaker activities for group events and in more risqué, late night environments. However, in each of these situations, “Never have I ever” provides a space for small stories to emerge. If someone shares, “Never have I ever swam with sharks” and someone in the group identifies that they actually have done this, a story is demanded. “Conversation Starters World” explains that, “Behind every never have I ever question is a great story to be told.” This game creates a space for collective sharing and responding. Another game of this nature is “Would you rather?” where a person invents a scenario where one person must elect their preferred option. This involves questions like, “Would you rather have a house shaped like a circle or triangle?” Or, “Would you rather ride on a flying magic carpet or a see-through submarine?” These unlikely questions are layered with magical realism and enter conversations into hypothetical worlds of imagined realities. Through this game, people have the opportunity to discuss unique circumstances and develop stories that hold true to their identities and imagined realities.

This game-question structure was used to create another mode of storytelling in “New Year,” starting with the framework of an interview; an interview always involves questions,

storytelling, and hypothetical situations. It is a significant event in the development of an individual, a pivotal experience in the continual process of growing up. I remember attending my first interview and negotiating the steps to present myself as responsible and capable. As I left this glorified conversation, my palms were shaking and I remember feeling that I had taken a significant step to become independent. Thus, an interview-framework was used to introduce the way that storytelling itself can also become part of the growing up process. When the first two questions were asked, the dancer responded with comical responses (that would not be well received in an actual interview) and then proceeded to interrupt the interviewer and ask her own questions. As this interaction continued it became more and more abstract and entered a world of hypothetical imagination. (An excerpt of this conversation has been included below.) This conversation captures the way that we identify ourselves through dialogue, in the presence of a peer. Hypothetical thoughts have the power to characterize us and tell our stories in more abstract ways.

“If you were in a conflict with a co-worker what would you do?”

“I would punch them straight in the face?”

“If you were in your dream position, what would you be?”

“I would be a sloth cuddler.”

“If you were a vegetable, what would you be?”

“A Califlower”

“Why?”

“It’s hard on the outside, but soft in the inside. If you were a highlighter what color would you be?”

“Blue- because it’s the easiest to see through.”

“If you were a pump what would you be?”

“A Louis Vuitton Pump because I’m fabulous! If you were being brave, what would you do?”

These abstract situations eventually transitioned into the question, “What would you do if you were being brave?” Although this question maintained the same hypothetical structure as the previous questions, it led to three dancers sharing real lived experiences that they had self-

identified as moments of bravery. Each of these monologues remained in the conditional verb tense ('I would have') which allowed these individuals to slightly remove themselves from the past action and tell these narratives from a more reflective and hypothetical stance. The verb tenses that we use when telling a story allow us to interact differently with the content we are sharing. In these terms, I was interested in having a playful relationship with the different verb tenses used.

During the first brave story, one of the women was standing on the edge of a cliff trying to gain the courage to cliff jump into the water below. It was coated with feelings of uneasiness, fear, and the desire to conquer inner doubts. The second story was told from the perspective of an eight-year old. Her family was moving and she was frustrated and scared with the thought of leaving the only home she had ever known, moving several states, and trying to start over. She was devastated to be losing her closest friend but, in the end, chose to embrace the huge life change and not look back. The final story shared a similar struggle to uproot one's life and home but was told from an 18-year old perspective. This dancer explained the fears of leaving her family and her friends to begin a new life at a college all the way across the country. She explained the sensation to be filled with both a sinking fear and excitement at the same time. All of these stories describe experiences of uneasiness, fear, and inner battles. However, these women were able to reclaim these stories by painting them as moments of bravery. This acknowledgement transformed these memories into experiences of strength and determination. In this way, the fear they all felt was validated and they could emphasize their perseverance through these challenging times. These moments become essential parts of their own bildungsromans.

V. Stories that Narrated Movement

In addition to performing stories through the structure of dialogue, movement alone, and spoken text paired with movement, we incorporated spoken text as narration to movement. This was achieved by having a single performer who was sitting tell the narrative, while another group of performers danced. This allowed a clear story to be shared while the movement embodied this experience in a more abstract way. This, in turn, added more complexity to these stories—these stories welcomed more audience connection and encouraged more open interpretation. The first narration projected the audience into a warm summer night where the bloated moon hung above the ocean:

“You looked at me and said to me, “I am the moon before day breaks in” and you let yourself feel what you’ve always wanted. I heard the rumbling surf pound against the sea wall in the bulge of my stomach. And I pulled your legs up to my body. A few light leg hairs tickled me, while your lips curled around mine. Your tongue dove into me like a wave.”

While these words roll off the performer’s lips, four dancers move behind her. This quartet involved intimate physical connection; they leaned upon each other, supported each other’s body weight, and traced the edges of each other. The shared physicality of this dance seems to connect to the spoken monologue but in a way that is much more platonic. This pairing of movement to text offers more ambiguity and widens the opportunities for audience imagination. Both stories explore the feelings associated with human connection—easeful happiness, nervous excitement, pounding anticipation, and calming support. These experiences of relationship and connection were such critical moments in every performer’s own coming of age narrative. Also, this story of both words and movement offered a narrative of creativity; the spoken text leaves out details of gender and calls upon layers of metaphors, while the movement works with and against this story. Together these two elements transform the original experience into a creative memory. This edited version holds a unique realness that through metaphors and paired physicality represents the original experience with creative authenticity.

At the end of the performance, a second story narrating movement was performed. This story is the longest spoken piece in the show and shared the experience of watching death creep into her grandmother's body. The performer describes arriving at the hospital and watching her grandmother body rattle up and down with sudden, giant gasps. This woman's back was wired like the back of a computer monitor. In a room charged with quiet energy, the dancer explains feeling each breath grow further and further from each other in a tangible distancing. The monologue was slow. The progression of the story was interrupted with memories of this grandmother who was a painter, innovator, and advocate. There were long pauses as the performer remembered sitting in silence watching time creep its finger across her grandmother's body. This memory was constructed with creativity and an essence that brought the audience into the hospital room.

While this performer shared this monologue, the rest of the dancers moved across the space in a horizontal pattern. Their bodies danced one at a time like words running across a page or trains trucking across a straight track. We created this movement through an improvisational score that involved each dancer embodying their own experiences with death—these memories seemed to resonate through their bodies. Experiences of loss were a universal component of all the performers' lives and was a significant marker in their journey of growing up. Often these dancers did not have the words to describe these memories and felt more comfortable allowing these narratives to be physicalized. Each dancer found movement that navigated moments of vertical progression and moments of pause. Together this dance and this text created a conversation of the process of death that involves love, pain, and a journey of healing. By sharing this story (and each dancer's kinesthetic version) this deep suffering can be reclaimed to no longer feel like a loss of power or an assault from the world. Instead these memories become

owned, something that belongs to these people and that can be shared on their own terms. The creation and telling stories of loss allows people to establish an empowering sense of resolution.

VI. Finding a Sense of Independence and Collectiveness

In my own experience, I have found that the journey to become independent is one of the most significant processes in a person's bildungsroman. There are many steps to become independent like making difficult choices by yourself, taking responsibility for every part of your life, and beginning to explore your relationship with and apart from others. Each of these is extremely challenging and allows one to grow up in many complex ways. During the choreographic process, we discussed what it looked like to be confident and complete while being alone and the many challenges we have experienced to accept greater levels of independence. These conversations are very unique to a group of women in a university setting and opened up a special community within our cast. In turn, the movement for this section was created through prompted exercises where each dancer was guided to reflect on her individual identity and her diverse experiences of being independent. Through these reflections, their bodies immediately began physicalizing these memories and thoughts. I was astonished by the rawness and vulnerability of these initial movements. After setting a sketch of their individual movement, I encouraged them to find a continual play and responsiveness to their initial thoughts and memories. The performance then included eight solos with each dancer continually exploring what it meant to be alone and independent; it was a beautiful collection of bodies breathing, turning, isolating, and flourishing at the same time.

The final section of this show involved a resolution of sorts that captured the collectiveness that was created through this choreographic process. As a group we came to establish the characteristics and experiences that everyone in this group shared. These similarities were something very unique to this group of people and are not aspects that could be

translated to any other group of people. During the performance the dancers proclaimed these declarations, which included statements like, “We are all young women and we have all worn Crocs.” Or, “We have all been alive when Pluto was a planet and we all witnessed the election of our first black president.” And, “We have all climbed a mountain.” These simple statements are pieces of our identities as a collective group. Through hours of rehearsals and time spent creating, we all became a community that shared and listened to each other’s stories. In this experience, I realized the importance of having an audience to experience one’s stories. Most times the community is comprised of a close circle of friends or family that you meet with or call regularly. However, whatever the structure, we realized the need to have a supportive group that allows you to share your own bildungsroman, to process through significant moments of life change, and reclaim experiences through a creative process of remembering.

CHAPTER 4:

“4137 Sampson Toad Road” AS AN EPILOGUE TO PERFORMANCE STORYTELLING

A thick fog hangs in the air as warm lights cast a deep glow on stage. All of a sudden, a dancer runs and leaps onto a bright pink trampoline. Three more dancers come running on stage and one at a time, they jump on this trampoline and run in a curving circle off stage. When they reenter again, they each share a small phrase that fits into a larger story:

“In 2013...”

“We all lived together...”

“It was a...”

“Crazy...”

“Melting...”

“Aeromatic...”

“House.”

This was the beginning of “4137 Sampson Toad Road.” The audience was introduced to four roommates who lived in a quirky house—a house that had a picture of floating baby heads

on the wall, a house with a cat for a landlord, and a house that locked the doors when it got shy so these tenants had to jump on the trampoline to get through the window. Not only was this building peculiar, but these four women who lived within it had equally odd and distinctive traits about them. Through the course of the piece, the audience learned that Emma's favorite tea is African Red Bush and that she has a strong connection to all Labrador dogs and that Hailey dislikes abnormally long toe nails on anyone. Also, Cameron likes to play the ukulele and sing to herself all night and Tori hates the concept of sour cream even though she has never tried it before. She thinks the concept is disgusting. This piece became a way for the five of us to come together and tell stories. These stories blended absolute accuracy with layers of imagination and creative liberty to capture the experience of living with people. As a cast, we found that when we have lived with different people, we have changed, adopted new quirks, adjusted our living habits, and essentially developed into new people. Thus, through the lens of a fantastic home layered with real memories we created a bildungsroman.

In many ways, "4137 Sampson Toad Road" exists as an epilogue to the evening length work "New Year." After months of the initial process, I had fine-tuned specific choreographic processes that blended vocal and physical storytelling. Our first rehearsal involved creating statements that characterized the identity of each dancer through specific likes and dislikes. These identifying statements were then embodied through movement. Later I paired the dancers in groups of two. A type of conversation emerged where each dancer introduced the specific quirks of the other person while they both moved through their embodied stories. In these terms, these introductions developed the performers into specific characters through their real experiences. The next part of the choreographic process involved the creation of a lot of material. We created movement together through improvisational scores, through prompts and setting

material, and through teaching specific phrases. Also, the vocal narration was created through a deeply choreographic process. Through writing and speaking prompts based on personal experiences, we explored the many strange living experiences in our lives. In these terms, the narration that emerged was a collage of each person's memories that incorporated layers of magical realism and realism. The lines of reality and the fantastical were deeply blurred; another world was created where there was a different expectation for normal.

“4137 Sampson Toad Road” explored the way that a community is created within a home and the way this community becomes both a place to share stories and also to form new ones together. A peculiar house with even more peculiar roommates is the perfect setting for a bildungsroman to emerge. In the middle of the piece, a dancer shared a story where she learned that her grandfather had died. In this moment, she was held by her roommates as she cried. Later, they all decided to go camping to honor the presence of this man who loved all things outdoors. The physicality of being with people who love her and being surrounded by the very things her grandfather loved, allowed her to mourn and honor his death. The act of telling this story, allowed me to process through the death of my own grandfather which occurred in the middle of this choreographic process. I also learned from different audience members that this story deeply connected to their own experiences with death, mourning, and receiving support from intimate communities. For the storyteller, she was able to gain empowerment from telling this story that acknowledged her pain and recognized her strength through this situation. Through “4137 Sampson Toad Road” a bildungsroman was created that shared a collage of imagined and real stories that each highlighted these individuals' experiences and personalities through movement and spoken text.

CONCLUSION

Growing up, I remember that some of my favorite memories were listening to other people tell stories. There were countless nights that I would sit at our small wooden kitchen table with a plastic floral table cloth and beg my father to tell me a story about his life. He grew up on a hog farm in Nebraska and I loved listening to his exciting stories that seemed layered with adventure and hard work. My favorite part of visiting relatives was to listen to the stories that had become a part of our family canon. These tales had been told and re-told so many times, they had clearly adopted their own set of details. My grandfather would tell me stories of playing the drums in a World War II band and my grandmother would share her experience starting the first women's art collective in Youngstown, Ohio. There were endless stories of the mischief Uncle Greg caused being the youngest sibling and having four older siblings to teach him how to cause a raucous.

Hours of my life were spent listening to audio books with my brother. As we became enthralled in the adventures and conflicts of these elaborate plotlines, we would gasp and laugh together. This was the first time in my life when my brother began to become a friend instead of just an annoying, bickering sibling. Through stories, our relationship bloomed. In middle school my entire summers became lost in books. I would hide in corners of the house and let myself be consumed by these tales. There was nothing I loved more than being welcomed into an intimate story.

Two summers ago, I had the opportunity to study abroad in Spain. One of my favorite parts of this three-month adventure was listening to the stories of the many people I met along the way. I spent countless hours talking with my host mom late into the night about her life and

how she had watched her country transform once Franco was no longer the dictator. When I stayed in hostels, I met people from all over the world and would ask them questions about their lives and experiences growing up in their respective country. One day while I was sitting in a café in Bologna, Italy journaling about the many incredible stories I had heard over the past couple days, a poem on the wall caught my attention. It read:

Le Bar des Heros
 Whose memory is this again? It was
 (summer and it was dark
 I remember you standing against the wall
 (Like a banchsee, a white spirit
 And we kissed- hours sounded good
 (In your arms
 And we were heroes- just for the space
 (Of a 52-bar hit
 (David Sanson/Saadane Anf)

The words “Whose memory is this again?” echoed in my head for weeks. The many stories that I had been obsessed with all of my life belonged to their tellers. They had been transformed from experiences into stories with touches of imagination and simple edits. There were layers and layers of creativity embedded within these memories.

From this intense love of stories and many months spent pondering the nature of memories, I became inspired to further research this relationship of stories to our ever changing lives. As a Spanish major with an emphasis on literature, I had come across incredible books, short stories, and poems that transformed communities simply with their words. There is clearly power in a narrative being created and shared. However, through these studies, I have also realized that certain marginalized perspectives are often missing from the dominant rhetoric. With this in mind, I began a journey to create a female bildungsroman through movement and spoken text. This process to highlight the experiences of a powerful group of women who each carry a distinct web of memories in their minds and bodies was deeply empowering.

This choreographic process and performance gave way to the creation of a community that built a collective story. This story building process recognized the highly individual experiences that each performer carried with them and provided space for each of these memories to be transformed. In this way, the performers and myself were able to reclaim past memories into self-defined and creatively constructed stories. In some cases, these past moments were completely redefined; painful experiences became accounts of strength, embarrassing moments became funny, and serious life changes became hopeful. In other cases, there was power in simply acknowledging past events and providing validity for the thoughts and emotions tied to those experiences.

Together we discovered the importance of constructing your own bildungsroman. When we define the influential moments in our lives and when we decide what situations are most significant, we gain control and can consciously form our identities. The process of creating and framing our own narrative acknowledges the way we have changed and grown up. We become the curators of our own life; we decide which stories are at the entrance of our 'museum,' which memories we hang together, and which ones we repaint or add an edited label. This act of curating is empowering to establish the people we become.

One of my favorite parts of this performance was involving the audience in this storytelling process. After the show, there was paper available for audience members to write their own memory that corresponded either to the prompt of their first memory, a time they felt brave, or a time they were afraid. Each of these prompts directly corresponded to a part of the show they had just witnessed. This simple activity allowed the audience to participate in this story creation process and take a moment to acknowledge and share a significant moment in their past. (These responses have been anonymously documented below.) I was shocked by the honesty of these responses that captured a remembered moment. Some of these papers shared

small fragments of a moment in time, others were dramatic, shocking experiences, and yet, others captured experiences of pure joy or fear or sadness or change. It felt significant to have these mini-stories physically documented. It was like cradling a bird's nest to hold these notes in my hands with each person's unique handwriting sprawled across the paper—they were each so delicate in their raw vulnerability.

I realized through this experience of creating physical and vocal stories and in reading the audience responses the great importance of storytelling in human life. The act of storytelling has the power to form communities, support processing intense emotions, and reclaim past experiences. Also, it is an effective framework to use in dance choreography. I discovered that the collaborative relationship between spoken text and movement can introduce exciting narratives that play with both literal and abstracted meaning. I am interested in further exploring the way that text can be incorporated into dance work without lessening the fullness of the movement or seeming out of place. As I enter the professional dance world with a deep interest in choreography, I am deeply invested in continuing to research the play of text and movement to create dynamic performance work.

Lastly, I would like to acknowledge the importance of the bildungsroman to acknowledge the experiences of all individuals at all ages of their life. Children, teenagers, adults (of all ages), and the elderly have the right to their own bildungsroman that is of course ever changing. We like to denote growing up as the transition from the late teenage years to the 20s. This limited range removes the validity of experiences from children who are of course growing up and experiencing real moments of change. In turn, I would like to broaden this definition to recognize that human life is really an endless process of growing up—you continue to grow up even in your 50s, your 70s, and beyond. With this mind, the bildungsroman narrative becomes a

framework accessible to anyone to acknowledge their story, creatively transform experiences, and reclaim memories.

Audience Responses:

First Memory

- “Riding in my dad’s purple car, a Simca, very small, with him and my mom. My parents were already divorced, so this, for me, was a major event.”
- “One of my earliest memories is meeting my paternal grandparents for the first time, that I could remember, and seeing the stairwell in their home in Denver that I fell down when I was three years old. I don’t remember the tumble down the stairs- but I do still have the scar on my head.”
- “My first memory is in my first house when I was somewhere between the ages of one and three. My brothers were sliding down the stairs into our basement on a mattress and they had me go with them. I remember being freaked out.”
- “Walking on an elevated cement and garden divider with a teddy bear.”
- “I remember my family trip to the Uintas before we moved to Wisconsin. I had broken my toe several weeks earlier and insisted on wearing my Lion King slippers! I’m certain I pirated skirts and hats from various sympathetic members as well.”
- “Pulling my baby brother off my parents’ bed so that he would wake up to see what Santa brought us.”
- “My parents were throwing a Christmas party when I was about one and a half. My mom had the flu, and she ended up falling and breaking her cheekbone (she had fainted). I remember the paramedics carrying her away in a stretcher. I was crying while they took her out.”
- “I cried when my mom told me that she was having a boy.”
- “My first memory (that I can remember) is riding the bus to school one day and meeting my best friend because I sat next to her.”
- “When I was three years old, I was lifting under the kitchen table playing with my dog. For a reason, I, myself do not understand, I just bit my dog. Shockingly, he bit me back—right on my eye. I still have scars from the stitches I had to get.”
- “Finding Easter candy in the front room of our house. I was probably three years old. My mom had hid little peanut butter cups under a pillow on the couch and on the keys of our piano. I was so happy and excited.”

A time you felt brave

- “A time I felt brave...when I started ballet.”
- “When I held my first girlfriend’s hand in public”
- “I was both deeply afraid and brave when I ended my five-year relationship. It was painful, terrifying, and strange but also exhilarating because for the first time in a while, I felt truly free.”
- “A time I felt brave was deciding to travel abroad (some of it by myself).”
- “Sitting in a bean bag with my friend Olivia at age 3.”

- “Speaking up for injustice—specifically making sure that people with less finances/mean receive equal resources.”
- “Laying on the operating table about to go under for a surgery that would change my life. I was ready and prepared for whatever happened next.”
- “A time I felt brave was one time in Colorado, my two friends convinced me to give this cute waiter guy my number.”
- “A time that I was brave was when I fell in love with my best friend. And realized I was not straight.”
- “The night Natalie was born I felt brave. She was the second of three babies—all girls. She was beautiful then—she is beautiful now—and will always be!”
- “The memory of my sister’s pregnancy announcement. Knowing that I would be the one to help her for the hard times. And then the memory of my nephew being born, what an incredible day.”

A time you were afraid

- “Walking/running away from my parents’ house at night and being chased/followed.”
- “I felt afraid admitting to my grandmother that I was sexually abused.”
- “I am afraid. Not of something but of sometime. The future scares me as much as the uncertainty that comes with it. But what is there to do but embrace it.”
- “When I was 6 years old, my grandpa passed away. When we got back I had a nightmare my whole family got off the plane and I watched them leave without me.”
- “Walking across campus late at night passing bushes and dark corners, hearing noises, questioning if I could defend myself—and feeling silly and angry at the same time.”
- “I used to be very afraid of the dark. Especially out in the woods. I thought an animal would eat me. I became a camp counselor in the woods and had to quickly get over that fear. I distinctly remember walking down a particularly dark path to get to my cabin. At first it was the most terrifying thing but after a few weeks, I got used to it and fell in love with the dark.”
- “My first kiss. His tongue. Instead of a wave, it was a jet plane. It was disgusting. I was afraid.”
- “When I was very young, I was afraid of the dark. Or afraid in very dark places. Now I sometimes enjoy sitting in a very quiet and dark room.”
- “When I was two, I was sailing on a lake and a storm came up. My boat kept capsizing and tossing me in the water. It was tall and the water was cold and I was wearing clothes that kept soaking up with water. At some point, while swimming around the boat, I nearly drowned. For years I never wanted to sail again. My fear was strong that it feels silly now. At some point the fear subsided, I don’t know how or why...but I feel love had something to do with it.”

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