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Rediscovering Breath: A Tool to Expand Awareness and Spirituality in Dance

THESIS

submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

in Dance

by

Stefanie Regan Maughan

Thesis Committee:
Professor Tong Wang, Chair
Professor Diane Diefenderfer
Professor Loretta Livingston

2014
DEDICATION

To
my family and friends
for their selfless support, encouragement, and unwavering faith in my ability
to succeed in all my academic and artistic pursuits.

To
my professors at UC Irvine
for the profound impact they have had on expanding my artistic talent
and shaping my perspective of dance.

To
the College of Fine Arts donors
for their generosity that lightened the financial burden of my education.

To
spiritual seekers of mind-body wholeness
for the inspiration they have been and will continue to be throughout my journey.

And to
my Heavenly Father
for His goodness, mercy, and unconditional love manifested in all aspects of my life.
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My heart is full of gratitude for the support that has carried me to this point in my academic and artistic career. Studying my passion of dance at the University of California, Irvine is an experience I will forever be grateful for. I am extremely appreciative of the financial support I received from generous Claire Trevor School of the Arts donors and for the research travel grant I was awarded by the arts department to further my research while traveling.

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I would like to thank my small company of dancers that willingly participated and wholeheartedly contributed to this research endeavor. The breathtakingly heartfelt and passionate performance they gave is one that I will remember for a lifetime. I feel fortunate to have worked with some of the most talented individuals at UC Irvine and am humbled by the patient trust they placed in me as I learned about myself as a choreographer and artist. I am grateful for the ways they inspired me, for their hard work, and for their friendship.

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Rediscovering Breath: A Tool to Expand Awareness and Spirituality in Dance

By

Stefanie Regan Maughan

Master of Fine Arts in Dance

University of California, Irvine, 2014

Professor Tong Wang, Chair

This thesis research project is comprised of a written document and choreographic work. The choreographic work was presented in the Claire Trevor Theatre at the University of California, Irvine on May 6 and 7, 2014. The presentation consisted of a half-hour length contemporary ballet piece entitled \textit{LU·MI·NOS·I·TY: the quality of being intellectually brilliant, enlightened, inspired} created with the intention to abstractly illustrate the journey of the mind as it transitions from a state of fluctuating, destructive chaos to quiet stillness and then from quiet stillness to brilliant, spiritual enlightenment.

The supporting research paper contained herein examines the purpose of the mindful use of breath advocated in Western Hatha-Yoga practices and in the Pilates Method developed by Joseph H. Pilates. Breath awareness, a fundamental principle to these and many other mind-body and somatic practices, is explored to further understand the consequence an observance of the breath has on unifying the mind, body, and spirit of an individual. A particular focus is placed on the yogic philosophy that addresses the power of the breath to still fluctuations in the mind, reawaken awareness of the present moment, and deepen spirituality through that process. The
philosophy of dance as a spiritual expression and healing art is addressed through the perspective of American modern dance forerunners, Ruth St. Denis and Isadora Duncan. These principles are investigated throughout the choreographic process by integrating breath and meditation exercises, somatic-based improvisation, discussion, and self-reflection into each rehearsal.
INTRODUCTION

A DANCER’S JOURNEY

Throughout my life I have enjoyed the love and support of a family that has always wished for my success. From age six to adulthood, my parents made a substantial investment in time and money to fuel my passion for classical and contemporary ballet. My parents taught me about faith in eternal truths that allowed me to understand my life through a spiritual lens. However, in spite of enduring family support and a spiritual foundation, I experienced dark periods throughout my life. I attribute those bleak times to the deeply rooted insecurities I developed as a ballet dancer, which were fed by misperceptions about myself, the dance community, and my experiences within that world.

A study of ballet was an integral part of my life from an early age and in many ways it defined me from the moment I began my training. These dance studies taught me the reward of discipline, hard work, and perseverance. My artistic pursuit cultivated within me a sense of dissatisfaction for complacency and a constant desire to improve. It suited my personality to be diligent and attentive as my teachers encouraged me to silently observe, memorize, and repeat their intentions. Praise for doing so perfectly was what I worked tirelessly for to fuel my confidence. However, this practice of quietly striving for validation from teachers, choreographers, and judges conditioned me to believe that my success depended on other’s opinions of me. Over time those voices became more significant than my own and I began to internalize their criticism, which narrowed my perspective of what I thought I was capable of accomplishing in my artistic career. Recognition, admiration and praise from others had become
the foundation for my confidence during adolescence and that dependency followed me into
adulthood. I believed I was succeeding as a dancer only if I was cast in the role I wanted, praised
for my technique, placed visibly in a formation, awarded first place in competition, or given a
leadership responsibility in my dance companies. Of course, those things did not always happen
in the way I hoped they might, which left me discouraged and insecure.

Disappointing experiences compounded against one another and rather than processing
them as a natural part of a professional dance performing career and seeing them as an
opportunity for growth, I interpreted them as rejection and failure. They formed the evidence I
used to support negative beliefs about myself. I considered the evidence and found a pattern in
my life: any time I set a milestone to accomplish I would fall short of reaching it. I looked to
those that were succeeding to understand why that was and began ruthlessly comparing myself to
others. According to my observations I was not capable enough, talented enough, thin enough,
beautiful enough, or smart enough to accomplish my goals. I believed I did not deserve the
success I wanted most because of my deficiencies and allowed myself to become a victim to my
circumstances. I lacked the confidence to make decisions out of fear of making a mistake. These
tendencies were detrimental to my progress in the dance studio and in many other aspects of my
life. I was caught in a dangerous, downward spiral of looking to others for validation, falling
short of my goals, comparing myself to others, and engaging in negative self-talk.

After graduating from college I adopted the belief that dancing professionally was not a
viable career path for me. My self-doubts were reinforced by the advice I gathered from others
that prompted me to abandon my aspirations of a professional dance performing career. This
decision led me to a desk job in corporate America where I worked for three years. I no longer
had a stronghold in the dance world and the dancer persona I once claimed no longer felt valid. Without that identifier my sense of self was nonexistent. During this time I struggled to overcome the harmful repercussions from years of negative self-talk and an unhealthy body image that I cultivated as a ballet dancer. Even though I was no longer dancing I continued to harbor destructive, obsessive thoughts about my body and blamed my weight as the reason for all of my loneliness and unhappiness. I spent my free time experimenting with different diet and exercise methods, which ultimately led to my discovery of yoga.

A year into my banking career I stumbled upon Bikram yoga, a phenomenon responsible for the many successful weight loss stories I had heard. As I began to attend class more consistently I noticed that the practice felt similar to dancing, but the environment felt safer. The teacher at the front of the room was a nonjudgmental guide leading me through a mind-body experience. Each session on my yoga mat began with a breathing exercise that warmed my body and centered my mind in a quiet, individual, and internal space. I learned that the focus of the practice was not to execute the movement perfectly, but to work organically to give my body what it needed in that moment. Throughout the next year the benefits of this process oriented, self-respecting, meditative work were tangible in my life. My body regained physical strength and with that my confidence increased. As I found greater health in my physical being I began to recognize the emotional pain I was holding on to and made a resolve to heal. I believe the principles I embodied from my yoga practice, which I will discuss in depth in Chapter 1, began to sever my dependence on and need for external validation to confirm my self-worth. I began making changes in my life and professional career regardless of the opinions of others, which led me closer to the life I had known as a dancer.
Two years into my professional finance career and one year after I began practicing yoga I returned to my study of the Pilates Method, a cross training discipline that had complimented my dance training during my adolescence. I was introduced to Pilates by my ballet teacher who believed it would help me develop the strength I needed to control my flexibility. During high school my classical and contemporary dance technique benefited from the resilience, stamina, and body awareness that Pilates reinforced. I wanted to rediscover that sense of vitality and I wanted to be able share it with others, so I began studying the method again with the intention of teaching it. As I investigated the fundamental principles of the Pilates Method—Concentration, Centering, Control, Precision, Flowing Movement, and Breath to be discussed in detail in Chapter 1—they became ideals to live by.

Studying yoga and Pilates in a safe, nonjudgmental environment allowed me to invest in my health and well-being. I was able to reconnect with and learn about myself from the inside out. In turn that helped me develop greater confidence in vulnerability and greater courage in risk-taking, which culminated in my decision to pursue a MFA degree in Dance at the University of California, Irvine. However, I was afraid to return to the dance world because of my past tendency to tear myself down through comparison and negative self-talk. I desperately wanted to avoid those destructive habits. On the morning of my first ballet class, I took a Vinyasa Flow Yoga class and when the teacher directed us to set an intention I chose acceptance. I wanted to accept my body, its limits, and potential after taking so much time away from my classical and contemporary ballet training. From there I walked into the dance studio and began studying art and movement with a new perspective on myself and on my life.
My experience training in ballet was different after three years away from the art form. Strangely, all I felt was gratitude to be dancing again. I found acceptance for my body and its limits. I was more forgiving of my weaknesses and I felt liberated from the limiting beliefs I once held about myself. I was no longer as concerned as I once was about receiving recognition or validation from others. I had developed an internal source of confidence that acknowledged and embraced the reality of my weaknesses. I recognized that I had found greater emotional health and maturity by making an investment to learn about myself through a self-sensing, internal approach. Freedom from those restrictive barriers allowed me to be more present in classes and rehearsals, which gave me time to focus on organically building my technique and exploring my artistry.

Since I returned to my study of dance I have had the opportunity to discuss in casual conversation with my peers about their own struggle with the same harmful tendencies I battled with for so long. As they confided in me they expressed their insecurities about whether their talent will measure up against their peers in the professional dance world and I have overheard them in class unfairly comparing their weaknesses to others’ strengths. In rehearsal they have spoken of the mirror’s constant feedback as a source of anxiety that causes them to doubt their ability to meet the demanding expectations of the concert dance world. Misty Copland, principal dancer with American Ballet Theater, shares a sentiment common among dancers across many genres. She says, “As a ballerina, you always stand in front of the mirror searching for flaws. You're so used to criticism—from yourself and others—that it's hard to remember that your body is something to enjoy, not just a never-ending fix-it project” (Bried). However, when the body is in need of “fixing” through rest and rehabilitation, many of my peers have mentioned their
adamant desire to continue with their performance obligations in spite of their pain instead of allowing their injuries time to heal. They do so not wanting to appear lazy or let someone down.

Some individuals have shared with me their discouragement about the input or lack thereof they receive from teachers and choreographers and the impact that has had on their confidence to work beyond the scope of their perceived strengths. In a question and answer session prior to a performance LINES Ballet Artistic Director, Alonzo King, expressed that he often observes that dancers have come from a training background that has “shrunken them,” leaving them with a narrow definition of who they are as artists and who they can become. He believes that through training and conditioning many dancers have lost touch with the individuality, freedom, and fearlessness that accompanied them as children when they were close to their intuition, uninfluenced by fear or rejection, and independent from external validation—a state of being that allowed them to excel (King). Unfortunately, dance as a profession in some environments can be “diminishing of the soul” (Eddy 23). It is my opinion that this consequence is prevalent in the culture of dance because of the tremendous vulnerability required to be a performing artist who is constantly subject to and influenced by the opinions of others.

I believe that every human being faces the universal challenge of discovering the individual he or she is divinely capable of becoming. My intention as a dance educator and choreographer is to guide others along that path of self-discovery, an objective similar to the philosophy of Alonzo King and many other artists. Through their creative processes those artists aim to strip individuals of self-doubt and limiting beliefs in order to encourage their return to a state of childlike intuition, confidence, and creativity that fuels exploration, choice making, and risk taking (King). I believe that dance educators and dance makers have a unique opportunity to
guide others along that path towards self-acceptance and self-discovery by equipping them with necessary skills and providing them with opportunities for growth.

The objective of my study was to explore how I might effectively aid another in their development of self-acceptance and self-knowing after having wrestled with that issue on my own. I explored how I might accomplish that intention while leading a small company of dancers through the creative process of preparing a work for the concert dance stage. That platform allowed me to engage in arts-based research through the lens of a dance maker. The research project presented in this document stems from a reflection of my personal experiences, observations made by looking back on my struggle to become a more whole individual, and how that influenced my interactions with the artists I collaborated with in a rehearsal setting.

The first undertaking of my literature study was to philosophically understand why my practice of yoga and Pilates enhanced my well-being and influenced my approach to dance. Through my search I identified the principle of breath awareness shared by both disciplines as one answer to that question. The remainder of my research explored the following questions: in what ways might a conscious use of breath facilitate greater internal investigation by a dancer? As a dance maker, in what ways might I employ the concept of breath awareness during the creative process to benefit the well-being of my dancers? How might that exploration during the dance making process impact the final performance experience for my dancers?

In this thesis paper I intend to further the discussion of the use of breath in dance and performance as a tool to enhance well-being and deepen artistry by opening the door to greater awareness. Chapter 1 expounds upon my discovery of the breath as practiced in yoga and Pilates and how it has the capacity to serve as a powerful tool to cultivate awareness and deepen
self-knowing. In Chapter 2 I explore the expansion of one’s spiritual being that can develop in the stillness found by observing the breath’s rhythm and how that state of being magnifies spiritual expression in the art of dance. Chapter 3 discusses my approach to a choreographic investigation of these concepts during the dance-making process and Chapter 4 outlines the insights I gained throughout that experience.
CHAPTER 1
BREATH: A DOOR TO AWARENESS

After practicing Bikram Yoga, Vinyasa Flow Yoga, and Pilates I recognized a similar sense of vitality and rejuvenation in my being. I suspected that something unified the methods and strengthened their ability to provide restoration in body and mind. As I reflected on my experience with each practice and searched available literature, I found that the methods shared a similar approach to self-discovery grounded in Eastern philosophy (Eddy 7). The most revelatory connection I found was that neither yoga nor the Pilates Method are taught without first mentioning the importance of how and why the breath is used in the discipline (Iyengar 8; Pilates 23). Both practices encourage mindful coordination of the breath with the movement of the body to facilitate deeper awareness and investigation of the inner being. In this chapter I will elaborate upon my definition of awareness, the yogic principle of prānāyāma, the fundamentals of the breath practice taught in the Pilates Method, and summarize my overall findings relating to the power of breath.

Awareness

Awareness is having knowledge or perception of a situation. For the purpose of my study, I am concerned with awareness as it pertains to an individual’s perception of the sensations and experiences within their physical and metaphysical body. This awareness relates to an individual’s ability to connect with the internal and external sensory experiences of the physical body, the kinesthetic experience of the body moving through space, and sensitivity to one’s inner
state of being (Williamson 33; Batson 2). Awareness is a skill developed through attentive investigation of one’s state of mind and body in the present environment.

Thomas Hanna, somatic theorist and Feldenkrais practitioner, describes awareness as a tool that operates like “a lens that can be pointed and focused” on aspects of the external environment or the internal experiences of the body (348). The function of awareness requires concentration and “voluntary control over one’s repertoire of sensory-motor skills” (348). Awareness allows for investigation of the unknown in order to acquire new sensory knowledge and develop skills for later recruitment. Hanna states, “It is only through the exclusionary function of awareness that the involuntary is made voluntary, the unknown is made known, and the never-done is made doable” (348). Through awareness and internal exploration, sensory-motor capabilities are added upon to expand an individual’s connection to their intuition and interiority (348).

A heightened state of internal sensitivity provides an individual with the opportunity for self-reflection. Through self-reflection an individual is able to consider whether or not their habitual thought and movement patterns revitalize and support their being (Williamson 37). Observations made during a self-reflexive process become the platform for evaluation and change. As new information is gathered an individual has the opportunity to make better choices and develop more functional habits that increase “pleasure and alleviate stress” throughout their human experience (Williamson 37). An individual may build a stronger sense of intuition that gives them insight on how to work with, rather than against, their body. The mind then becomes the body’s powerful ally as both work together to accomplish each objective from a place of “inner support” (Williamson 37). Hanna suggests that increased sensitivity to one’s internal
experience found through self-knowing promotes a “greater . . . range of autonomy and self-regulation” (348). As individuals grow in authority over their own being they are able to more confidently make decisions about self-organization independent of external influences (Batson 2). Awareness of body and mind is one tool that can promote greater self-autonomy and health, both emotionally and physically, in the life of an individual.

The organic beginning of cultivating the benefits of awareness come by gaining a sense of presence through the mindful use of the breath. Iyengar says that breath and awareness are so closely related it is as if they are “twin brothers” (124). The two constantly reinforce one another. When a physical practice places emphasis on slowing down and tuning in to the present moment by observing the constant rhythm of the breath, the mind finds greater awareness of the kinesthetic and sensory experience of the body. That state of awareness, made possible through the use of the breath, opens the door for deeper internal exploration.

**Yoga and Prānāyāma**

Yoga is a spiritual and physical practice that developed in India approximately 2,000 years ago. Through the process of cultural exchange between East and West, yoga evolved from a seated, meditative practice into the āsana, or posture-based, method infused with ideals of health and fitness practiced in the West today (Singleton). Regardless of its departure from ancient tradition, the principles valued historically are present in many modern forms of the practice. The healing art places value on guiding a practitioner towards self-discovery by cultivating greater union between the physical body, mind, and soul (Iyengar 28; Lee). The ancient Indian philosopher, Patanjali, outlined eight branches of the discipline in the *Yoga Sūtras*, a document intended to guide those on the path to spiritual enlightenment (Lee). Each branch is
important, but the branch of prānāyāma, or the use of breath, is of particular value to my study. The Yoga Sūtras describe prānāyāma as the process of disturbing unconscious breath patterns and consciously maintaining a stable, enduring rhythm of ease and balance in the breath (Holcombe). Yogic philosophy teaches that prānāyāma leads to greater self-knowing through internal awareness and investigation of the physical body (Iyengar 5; Lasater).

A simple translation of the Sanskrit word prānāyāma speaks volumes of the power found through the yogic principle of breath awareness. The word prānā means energy and ayāma describes the “storing and distribution of that energy” (Iyengar 127). This translation implies that breath is a source of internal energy that can be directed and distributed throughout the body. In yoga, a study of the breath teaches an individual how to efficiently direct energy “horizontally, vertically, and circumferentially to the frontiers of the body” (Iyengar 127). Visualizing the breath filling the body in all directions enables a practitioner to find a deeper expression of and greater mobility in each posture. I imagine the use of breath in yoga as the lubricant that grants freedom and flexibility to every aspect of the body capable of movement.

The purpose of a breath practice in yoga is not only to direct energy throughout the body, but also to promote mental clarity and encourage relaxation. One of the most consistently emphasized breath techniques focused on in a typical Hatha-yoga practice intended to serve that purpose is Ujjayi breath, although there are many other techniques taught. Ujjayi breath is inhaled deeply through the nose to expand the chest and fill the diaphragm and lungs with air. The breath is exhaled, in a deliberate manner, through the nose in a slow and steady rhythm. On the exhalation the air is gently pushed through a slightly constricted throat, creating resistance and a low, hushing noise (Miller). Yoga instructors often mention that the subtle noise of the
breath can serve as an audible indication of the practitioner’s state of mind. When the rhythm of the breath becomes shallow and erratic a yogi is reminded that their focus and energy is diminishing, rather than contributing to their practice (Iyengar 128). That observation presents an opportunity to reconnect to a steady breath rhythm, which brings the mind back to the present moment (Miller).

Learning to steady the breath is a valuable tool in understanding how to regain composure in one’s mind (Iyengar 128). According to BKS Iyengar, a well-respected Indian yoga master, “To bring back the complexity of mind to simplicity is the aim of yoga, and that simplicity comes by the practice of prānāyāma” (130). Awareness and observation of the breath quiets the mind’s fluctuations by allowing it to focus on something rhythmic and consistent. With steadiness of breath comes steadiness in the mind because it draws an individual to a “calm, quiet place within, so that they experience greater clarity and well-being on every level” (Holcombe).

In yoga, as āsanas are executed mindfully while consciously observing prānāyāma, greater self-awareness is found. That awareness makes possible subtle adjustments and corrections that potentially restore balance to the structure of the physical body. It also restores clarity of the mind to the present moment. The internal focus grants freedom to quietly observe thought processes and movement patterns that may or may not serve the individual, which in turn accelerates the process of mental and physical healing (Lee). By engaging the physical body, utilizing breath awareness, and detaching from external expectations, the healing art of yoga is able to guide the disintegrated body, mind, and spirit towards greater wholeness and integration.
The Pilates Method and Breath

On occasion I have found myself in conversation with people who do not feel that Pilates is a mind-body practice. They find the work too straining to feel a sense of rejuvenation through it. A qualitative study conducted on dance majors enrolled in a semester long Pilates course at Appalachian State University, Department of Theatre and Dance concluded that Pilates met only four of five criteria necessary to qualify as a mind-body practice according to a definition developed by Ralph La Forge—managing director of the Lipid Clinic and Disease Management Preceptorship Program at Duke University Medical Center. The research team collected reflections from the students about their experience in the course and classified them according to the following criteria of a mind-body activity:

1. The activity contains a self-reflective, present-moment, and nonjudgmental sensory awareness.
2. It includes a perception of movement and spatial orientation.
3. There is a focus on breathing and breath sounds.
4. Attention is paid to anatomical alignment.
5. The activity has a quality of being “energy centric,” or involves an awareness of the movement and flow of one’s intrinsic energy. (qtd. in Adams et al. 123)

The aspect of the definition missing from the students’ responses was an increased awareness of one’s energy flowing throughout the body. However, the study does acknowledge that as individuals become more skilled in the Pilates Method the aspect of flow and energy becomes more prevalent (Adams et al. 128).

I would argue that the traditional use of the Pilates breath, as it was designed by the method’s founder Joseph Pilates and elaborated upon by first-generation Pilates Elder Ron Fletcher, is the tool that facilitates one’s awareness of energy flowing throughout the body. Perhaps, the above definition does not link the purpose of the breath beyond the superficial focus
on breathing and breath sounds. As it is with prānāyāma in yoga, the Pilates breath produces intrinsic energy and transports it through to the physical boundaries of the body and into the space surrounding it. The coordination of the breath, as Susan Salk and Diane Diefenderfer mention in their interview with Pilates Anytime®, is often a challenge to teach. However, if deliberate and persistent attention is not given to the instruction of how to use the breath in the Pilates Method, then a critical aspect—perhaps the aspect that elevates the practice into the realm of mind-body conditioning—is neglected. The rhythmic use of the breath not only generates heat in the body and introduces a cadence to the method, but also engages the practitioner to be present to observe vitality as it is restored to mind and body.

Joseph Pilates outlined six principles—concentration, centering, control, precision, flow, and breath—as the fundamental concepts of the work he originally called Contrology (Friedman 5; Pilates 20-32; Adams et al. 124). Similar to yoga, all six principles are vital to gain a full understanding of the work, but the Pilates breath is critical in order to obtain maximum benefit from the practice. The inhalation of a Pilates breath is drawn in through the nose and the air fills the lungs as it is directed into the back and sides of the rib cage. The exhalation is pushed gently through pursed lips to create an audible exhale. An exhalation conducted in this way encourages the air to be extinguished from the lungs in its entirety as the energy is focused on finding strength in the naval to spine connection.

Mr. Pilates was a strong advocate for correct and healthy breathing practices because he recognized the importance of clearing the body’s cells of waste and toxins by stimulating the circulation of the bloodstream (Friedman 16). He exhorts, “Squeeze every atom of air from your lungs until they are almost as free of air as is a vacuum. Stand erect again and observe how your
lungs will automatically completely refill themselves with fresh air” (Pilates 23). Mr. Pilates believed that by developing the habit of breathing thoroughly—as if “you would ring a wet towel dry”—it would drive out fatigue, clear the lungs of stagnant air, and restore health to the being (Friedman 16). It was the principle of breath that Mr. Pilates placed the greatest emphasis on and was remembered saying, “Even if you follow no other instructions, learn to breathe correctly” (Friedman 16).

After the passing of Mr. Pilates, the use of the Pilates breath was further investigated by Ron Fletcher with the blessing of Joseph’s wife, Clara Pilates (Fletcher Pilates®). Fletcher had studied modern dance with Martha Graham in New York beginning in 1944 and discovered the rehabilitative nature of Mr. Pilates’ work when the demands of the Graham technique took an unfortunate toll on his knees (Fletcher Pilates®). Fletcher recalled the ideas that prompted him to study how to more effectively coordinate the Pilates movement with the breath:

Joe had always exhorted us to “breathe… you got to OUT de air to IN de air!” However, there was not a clearly shaped breathing pattern for the various moves, and Graham’s response to “where and when do I breathe?” was “I don’t care as long as it doesn’t show.” This is the way dancers and athletes work, grabbing a breath when you can. Martha’s concept of contraction and release was closing the body and sinking down to the floor on a deep exhalation, and opening the body and filling your “space” on inhalation. Graham often said: “let the inhalation be the inspiration for the movement.” It was the coupling of these ideas that influenced the development of my own concept of Percussive Breathing.(Fletcher Pilates®)

Fletcher understood the value of a complete exhale to force oxygen-depleted air and toxins from the body to allow for a full, revitalizing inhale of oxygen-rich air as taught by Mr. Pilates. After gaining a deeper understanding of the importance of proper breathing through continued research, Fletcher coordinated specific breath patterns with each movement of an
exercise. He organized the breath so the inhalation would complement the expansion, initiation, and inspiration of the movement while the exhalation would complement a deepening of the naval to spine connection. The complex, yet intuitive organization of the breath outlined by Fletcher requires careful concentration to execute each exercise with the properly coordinated breath. As a result, the mind may not entertain distractions without compromising the integrity of the work. The practice of the Pilates Method requires an individual to be wholly engaged in the present moment while mind, body, and breath work together to expand awareness.

**Summation of the Power of Breath**

In summary, a strong emphasis is placed on a purposeful use of the breath in both yoga and Pilates because of its capability to restore health and vitality to the being, both physically and mentally. The act of breathing properly clears harmful toxins from the body and the act of observing the breath flow through the body clears unnecessary thoughts from the mind to bring awareness to the present moment. Iyengar beautifully illustrates the powerful consequence of breath awareness on the state of mind:

> The mind can go in many directions in a split second. Its movements are fast and varied. But the breath cannot go in many directions at once. It has only one path: inhalation and exhalation. It can pause for a moment in a state of retention, but it cannot multiply like the mind . . . . Controlling the breath and observing its rhythm brings the consciousness to stillness. (Iyengar 4)

Observing one’s inhalation and exhalation quiets the rapid fluctuations of the mind. In that state of rare stillness and awareness the potential for greater spiritual expression exists. In Chapter 2 I explore the concept of a deepened spiritual connection developed through the use of breath and an understanding of its rhythm. I also address spirituality as it relates to expressiveness in the art of dance, which was a source of inspiration for modern dance forerunners.
CHAPTER 2  
OPENING OF THE SPIRIT

Through my personal experiences, study of literature, and interviews I have discovered an inspiring connection between breath, mind-body awareness, and spirituality. Several of the disciplines I have studied and artists I have interviewed subscribe to the philosophy that when the body and mind are unified in a state of quiet, uninterrupted awareness an individual may enjoy a more divine experience of existence. I have also discovered a similar sentiment expressed by American modern dance forerunners, Ruth St. Denis and Isadora Duncan, as I have looked to them to understand how this connection relates to the art of dance. These women maintain the philosophy that the spirituality of the dance is elevated when an artist has discovered integrated wholeness in mind and body. This chapter addresses how the breath brings oneness and increases spirituality by silencing external influences, illuminating a universal rhythm, and elevating one’s capacity for artistic expression through the eyes of these modern dance forerunners.

As I discuss ideas surrounding the soul, the divine, and the spiritual I acknowledge that they are concepts tremendously larger than myself that will take a lifetime to understand. I also acknowledge and respect that these ideas hold distinctly personal and sacred meanings for each individual. I intend to discuss them as they relate to an elevated and awakened state of wholeness in being that inspires “sensory awareness capable of pervading a whole bodily self,” but also invite the reader to ponder them with the momentum of their personal understanding and connection to spirituality (LaMothe).
Diane Diefenderfer, Ron Fletcher’s former student and well-regarded educator of the Pilates Method, recalled that Fletcher often referred to the spiritual capacity of the Pilates work as he encouraged his students to approach it with the presence of *geist*, a German word referring to spirit. Fletcher’s philosophy on engaging the spirit in his work was expounded upon by another former student and Pilates educator, Susan Salk, in an interview filmed and produced by Pilates Anytime® intended to honor his contribution to and expansion of the method. Salk expressed that the emphasis he placed on the breath was an essential component to his philosophy of finding spiritual depth through the practice. Salk summarized this idea simply in the following equation:

\[
\text{Mind + Body + Breath} = \text{Spirit (Diefenderfer and Salk)}.
\]

A consistent emphasis is placed on the engagement of the breath in the Pilates work by Diefenderfer, Salk, and other Pilates educators trained under Ron Fletcher’s influence—despite the challenges that surround teaching it—because they understand the spiritual rejuvenation that can be found in mind and body through an awareness of the present moment, established through observance of the breath. Salk expressed, “Once you feel that connection to what you’re thinking, doing, observing, deepening—that circle that happens when you put all those pieces [mind, body, and breath] together—it’s . . . divine” (Diefenderfer and Salk). A connection to the beating of the heart and rhythm of the breath enlivens and awakens an individual to a state of vulnerability that allows for greater sensing, feeling, and connecting through observation and movement (LaMothe). That divine connection between mind, body, and breath is a source of philosophical and creative inspiration for artists and mind-body practitioners alike, both past and present.
Silencing the External

Early twentieth century American modern dance predecessor, Ruth St. Denis, was artistically inspired by many Eastern cultures and philosophies. In her quest to create spiritually expressive art she searched literature on Buddhism, mysticism, and other avenues of Eastern thought, many of which influenced her creative work (Shelton; “Divine Dance” 2). Later in her career, after absorbing and adopting concepts from these Eastern traditions, she expressed her theory about the art of sacred dance in writing. She writes in “The Divine Dance” that there are “many destructive and distorting forces of habit and condition playing upon us constantly” and that as a society we are “only too conscious of our bodily limitations and discomforts” (“Divine Dance” 5). She addresses the importance of a skill, although she does not specify it to be the use of breath, that equips an individual with the ability to silence harmful and distracting influences for the sake of one’s physical and spiritual well-being. “We must learn to withdraw the searching antennae of the mind from the circumference of outward activity to the inner and upper place of spiritual consciousness and from that level begin to realize our harmonious relationship with the casual rhythm of the universe” (“Divine Dance” 1). St. Denis valued the learned capability of muting the commotion of external stimuli to experience internal stillness. She refers to that state of quiet interiority as a spiritual platform that makes building a harmonious connection with the universe possible.

However, St. Denis recognized that limited opportunities for holistic training existed in western society and attributed that lack to the Catholic Church’s perspective on “the Goodness of the Soul and the supposed Badness of the Body,” which had led to constrictive social norms and suppression of mind-body expression for centuries (“Religious Manifestations” 4). She
progressively presented her art of divine dance as the “ultimate” remedy for restoring health and unity to the disintegrated western mind and body because she believed it provided an opportunity to transcend the material being and explore spiritual awareness (“Divine Dance” 5). She believed that through a study of dance a student would acquire the skills necessary to quiet the dysfunctional forces that play upon the mind and body continuously, allowing for greater solitude and self-reflection in the present moment. She believed that the practice of dance would inspire physical and emotional healing as nourishing habits of breath, posture, strength, and grace would naturally emerge in the everyday movement and vitality of an individual (“Divine Dance” 4). In summary, according to St. Denis, a study of divine dance would restore physical health, clear the mind of oppressing external influences, and provide an individual with the opportunity to redirect their attention internally and upwardly to discover a greater realm of spirituality (“Divine Dance” 3).

Yogī philosophers express a similar sentiment concerning the healing and spiritual potential of their physical practice, which guides the mind to find awareness of the immediate, internal and external sensory experience of the body. In that mindful state, an individual is granted space to quietly observe thought processes and movement patterns that revitalize or deaden their well-being (Lee). As a yogī makes those observations with self-respecting acceptance they discover their limitations and recognize the fluctuating changes that occur in their physical, mental, and spiritual practice daily (Iyengar 30). An individual is encouraged to build from those fluctuating limitations by making subtle adjustments to their practice, allowing growth to progress organically in a way that enhances well-being. By addressing the body’s ailments—which are often responsible for causing fluctuations in the mind—through a physical
practice and stilling the mind by engaging it through breath awareness, a practitioner may find relief from the limitations of mind and body (Iyengar 14, 121). This process redirects awareness to the spirituality of the present moment. Iyengar states, “To live spiritually is to live in the present moment. When you are practicing, as long as no other thoughts come to you, for that much time you are spiritual” (160). Yogic philosophy teaches, much like Ms. Denis believed, that as the mind finds solitude from distracting, distorting, and limiting influences an individual is able to identify with a more spiritual experience of existence.

I believe, along with Ruth St. Denis and yogi philosophers, in the power of healing and spirituality that accompanies the ability to silence the mind by drawing the focus to the present moment. Consequently, doing so fills that moment with pure intention. As the mind is free from external influence, greater energy can be devoted to the moment’s objective of self-reflection, investigation, and growth. When thoughts that devalue, distract, and destroy wholeness in mind and body are silenced, an opportunity is found to connect with personal spiritual aspirations. As discussed in Chapter 1, observing the simple pathway of the breath as it enters, exits, and fills the body is one effective way to connect to that rare state of awareness and stillness that has the potential to bring spirituality to the human experience.

**A Universal Rhythm**

Isadora Duncan, another early twentieth century forerunner of the American Modern dance movement, was artistically inspired by the concept of the “Natural.” She meditated on nature in search of a movement theory that would fulfill the organic expression of the universe. She advocated that an artist meditate on, seek out, and engage with nature in order to connect with the “universal rhythm that embraces the entire cosmos” (Daly 31). Her quest was to
understand and embody a metaphysical connection with the universe through movement. Duncan describes her journey in search of the genuine universal expression of body and spirit through dance:

I spent long days and nights in the studio seeking that dance which might be the divine expression of the human spirit through the medium of the body’s movement. For hours I would stand quite still, my two hands folded between my breasts, covering the solar plexus…I was seeking, and finally discovered the central spring of all movement, the crater of motor power, the unity from which all diversities of movements are born, the mirror of vision for the creation of the dance (Duncan 75).

Through her transcendent quest, Duncan identified the cavity of the chest as the physiological location of the “human spirit” within the body. That connection to her spirit was discovered as she meditated, with her hands resting together on her chest near the diaphragm at her solar plexus, and found a connection to internal awareness through her breath. Interestingly enough, yogic tradition similarly designates the diaphragm as the point of intersection between the physiological and spiritual body (Iyengar 129). It is the act of breathing that bridges the divide between “the material and spiritual world” (Iyengar 129). The solar plexus is also considered to be one of seven important energy chakras responsible for governing personal power, will, expansiveness and spiritual growth in yogic tradition (Herring). As Ms. Duncan discovered the divine connection that sprung from this region of her chest, she felt strongly that to genuinely express the soul through movement all action should initiate from that center. The point of breath’s initiation in the body became the fountainhead of her movement theory and an underlying principle of her dance technique.

Duncan also observed that the embodied rhythm of the breath resembled the wavelike motion often found in nature—swelling, cresting, and retreating within the body. According to
Duncan, “Nature” was the source of the dance (Daly 31). Her meditative study of the outdoors prompted her to make the association between Mother Nature’s frequent expression of movement in the form of a successive wave and the likeness of that occurrence to the physical manifestation of each breath in the body (Daly 35). She observed that, “All energy expresses itself through this wave movement. For does not sound travel in waves, and light also?” (qtd. in Daly 35). In order to honor the beauty of nature’s expression through her art she shaped her movement theory on the ceaselessly sequential quality of the wave. She communicates the embodiment of “Nature” as it connects to one’s breath and movement of the dance:

He starts with one slow movement and mounts from that gradually, following the rising curve of his inspiration, up to those gestures that exteriorize his fullness of feeling, spreading ever wider the impulse that has swayed him, fixing it in another expression. The movements should follow the rhythm of the waves: the rhythm that rises, penetrates, holding in itself the impulse and at the after-movement; call and response, bound endlessly in one cadence. (qtd. in Daly 35).

Movement in nature and in the body through breath manifests itself in an endless wave. As a result, a fundamental quality of Duncan’s dance—whether lyrical or dynamic in quality—reflected the swelling nature of inspiration, the withdrawing nature of expiration, and the successive nature of the continuous cycle of the breath rhythm (Albright 2).

Through the combination of these concepts, Duncan designed a technique that engaged the spiritual self through breath and the universal spirit through nature to ultimately encompass the divine rhythm of the cosmos. Iyengar poetically describes the powerful capacity of the breath to connect each individual to the spiritual self and the concept of the universal self, which Duncan discovered through her meditation on movement, nature, and dance:
When you inhale, the self comes into contact with the body. Hence, inhalation is the evolution of the soul towards the body and the spiritual cosmic breath coming into contact with the individual breath. Exhalation, from the . . . spiritual point of view, . . . is the individual breath in the person coming into contact with the external cosmic breath so that they are one. (Iyengar 130)

According to Iyengar, each inhale and exhale observed thoughtfully allows an individual to come into closer spiritual contact with oneself and their environment. I interpret his statements to mean the following. With each inhale the essence of who we have become through our experiences swells to the forefront of our being and the heart of who we can become is revealed to us in greater clarity. Each exhale provides an opportunity to release those aspects of our being that hinder us from progressing towards the individual we can become. Through internal awareness, facilitated through breath, who we are and who we can become find greater union and begin to form the divinest expression of our being. Pondering the significance of the fact that every living being is dependent upon the environment for the same need to sustain their life provides an opportunity to recognize the oneness of the universal human experience. Discovery of the physical and metaphysical laws of nature and attributes of innate personal yearnings embodied within the act of breathing, most profoundly the ceaseless, rolling opposition of the wave, allows us to empathize, connect, and communicate effectively with those we share this human experience with.

**Powerful Artistic Expression**

Ruth St. Denis believed that the most significant offering an artist can make to society is one that motivates the potential goodness within all humanity (“Religious Manifestations” 4). However, she believed that doing so is not possible until an artist is first conscious of their unique virtue as a spiritual being, and then acknowledges their duty to guide others towards a
similar state of awakened spirituality. The following excerpt from St. Denis’s writing, “Religious Manifestations in the Dance,” illustrates the priority she places on an artist’s personal sense of interiority in connection to the effectiveness of their message:

The great mission of the dancer is to contribute to the betterment of mankind . . . . The highest function of the dance is to ennoble man’s concept of himself. This cannot be accomplished until the creative artist, whatever his field, becomes aware of himself as a citizen of the world and of his responsibility to lead instead of follow, to unfold instead of repeat and to bring self-realization to its highest point of expression. (“Religious Manifestations” 4)

I believe through this statement St. Denis is suggesting that for an artist to clearly communicate the soul of their creative expression to others, they must be deeply in tune with who they are and the ideals they strive to represent through their art. In other words, before an individual is capable of inspiring wholeness and goodness within humanity they must be on the path of self-discovery through awareness first. An experienced guide is a valuable resource on a journey meant to lead others in a specific direction; in the case of St. Denis’s artistic philosophy the journey led by a spiritually aware artist is one capable of inspiring individual and collective striving towards self-actualization.

As I have discussed, the kind of awakened spirituality that St. Denis described as a prerequisite for effective, artistic expression is a skill that can be discovered through patient, internal investigation facilitated through a meditative breath practice. Connecting with the quality and nature of one’s own breath brings an individual into closer contact with the essence of their own being and through further study inspires an individual to discover an awareness that extends beyond the scope of their personal significance. However, a meditative breath practice is not the only way to cultivate that kind of sensitivity, but is one tool I discovered through my
research and have chosen to focus on. Regardless of the method that facilitates its discovery, the skill of personal and universal awareness is invaluable to an effective artist. I received a piece of mail from Alonzo King LINES Dance Center that confirmed this insight to me in a particularly poignant way. The letter included a quote from alum Megan Wright of the LINES Ballet Training Program, who shared of her discovery of awareness and the autonomy it brought to her journey as an artist:

Here is what I wish someone had said to me: Be humble. Be small. Be part of the city . . . Help in a soup kitchen or a public school. Be affected by the poverty you'll see every day on Seventh Street. Through that, realize that the mountain of work you face in the dance studio—the fight for self-determination and personal discovery—is common to every human. There is nothing unique or special about your process. Get over not being special. And then, move on to being other things like: grateful, honest, generous, present, incisive, kind. (Alonzo King LINES Ballet)

These dancer’s words are a beautiful expression of the freedom found when awareness allows an individual to move beyond influences that obstruct personal and artistic progression. Finding relief from those obstacles clears the mind and allows an individual to devote more energy to developing other aspects of their craft. Clarity of mind and purpose allows for a more directed and inspired focus in one’s work. Jodie Gates, Vice Dean of the Glorya Kauffman School of Dance at the University of Southern California, recalled Alonzo King’s expression relating to this thought, “When the vessel is empty, the muse can enter” (King). When wholeness in mind, body, and spirit—the unified vessel for expression in the art of dance—is found through awareness, the body becomes more receptive to the tasks and intentions of the present moment.

I believe creative work, specifically the creation of choreography and the interpretation of choreography by dancers, that evolves in a state of uninterrupted clarity and wholeness in mind
and body has the potential to address universal spiritual truths to an audience with power and
effectiveness. The reason for this is because it is expressed by artists that are cultivating a sense
of personal awareness, sensitivity, empathy, and understanding of the fundamental similarities
among all humanity’s existence. Perhaps through a study of the inner being a choreographer may
be able to channel and create movement that brings visual clarity to a particular theme, while a
dancer may find greater capacity to interpret and convey the choreographic intention of the
material given, delivering it to an audience with genuine conviction. Iyengar addresses the
connection between one’s personal study of internal awareness and how it informs their
expressiveness as an artist:

. . . Remember that whatever themes you are presenting in your artistic
expression, they all depend on the internal experiences and actions with which a
yogī also works. If as an artist you practice yoga—if you are also in touch with
the internal levels of your being—you will develop a vast range of expression and
your art will become . . . known as ‘satyam, sivam, sundaram,’ true, auspicious
and beautiful. Art then becomes divine . . . (Iyengar 157)

Internal awareness deepens insight in a way that prepares an artist to reach within the cavity of
the being and draw on experiential knowledge to convey the heart of an artistic message. With
that knowledge as the foundation of expression, an artistic work incapsulates honesty and truth
as perceived in the eyes of the creator. It is the divine expression of an artist’s soul, offered to
humanity as one person’s spiritual truth to be openly interpreted by a viewer. In the next chapter I
describe how I interpreted these concepts to propel my choreographic investigation and to
construct a dance work intended to spiritually edify my audience.
CHAPTER 3
CHOREOGRAPHIC INVESTIGATION

In this chapter I describe the intention for my choreographic research, the methods and procedures I employed as I worked with my dancers, as well as the experiments and discussions we engaged in to channel the choreographic intent and movement quality I desired to see in their final performance. When I began the process of my choreographic research project I did not know exactly where it would lead. The emergent nature of the experience was extremely unsettling at times. However, I did know my intention was to explore the principles I valued in my yoga and Pilates practices in a rehearsal setting, while crafting a choreographic project for the concert dance stage. This presented an interesting challenge because yoga and Pilates are disciplines with a structured vocabulary of movement exercises repeated from class to class. In contrast, my choreographic process is unpredictable as creative inspiration comes in various ways and through various experiences. Additionally, I would be working within a contemporary ballet movement vocabulary.

To begin I set out to identify and adopt principles shared by both methods that resonated strongly with my personal experience to explore during each rehearsal. The primary principles I identified were nonjudgment and self-acceptance, breath and meditation, and a focus on the internal process of a movement experience rather than on physical demonstration. I would aspire to create an environment and present opportunities to reinforce each dancer’s individuality, intuition, and confidence and trust in oneself. I would aim to provide a landscape that would challenge the depth of their mind-body connection and facilitate the discovery of tools to
promote greater well-being throughout the creative process. I hoped that the experience would not only impact each dancer’s well-being, but also expand their capacity to approach choreography with grounded maturity and communicate it to an audience with authenticity. With a rehearsal process founded on those concepts and hindsight of my own personal journey, I began my choreographic investigation.

**Working with the Dancers**

I recruited a small company of 12 dancers to participate in the project. I had worked with all of them on other performance projects at UC Irvine. Some of them were cast members in my other choreographic works and I had performed alongside others under the direction of graduate students and faculty members. For that reason my rehearsal process was not foreign to any of them because we had already grown together in shared circumstances. Also, I feel it is pertinent to mention that myself, along with six of my cast members, previously participated in an exploration of spirituality and dance in a thesis research project led by Vincent Hardy, a former UC Irvine graduate student.\(^1\) I employed several similar methods in rehearsal that Hardy made use of to draw out each dancer’s spiritual capacity in performance.

In my first rehearsal I shared the motivation for my study and its relationship to my struggle of finding greater well-being in my life. I told them that my objective was not only to create a piece to present on the concert dance stage, but to guide them on their own path of self-discovery. I told them honestly that I did not know exactly how I would do that, but that I planned to draw on my yoga and Pilates experience for inspiration and hoped to grow with them.

\(^1\) Vincent Hardy, UC Irvine MFA Graduate 2013, conducted his research on the “Sacred Dancer,” an individual called by God to glorify His name through dance. His research project involved the creation of a choreographic work for the concert dance stage in a secular setting with a cast that consisted of Christian believers and non-believers.
throughout the process. I gave them a journal and asked them to reflect on and record any insights they might make during our experience together. I also encouraged them to write about any comparisons and connections made between the ideas we explored in our rehearsals and the experiences they had in their ballet and modern technique classes, Pilates and yoga classes, and their other rehearsals. The journal writing was for personal reflection and would not be collected as data, but rather would be used as source material to share during our discussions and to respond to three questionnaires given throughout the research period—two prior to and one following the final performance. The questionnaires would serve as data collection, as well as to ensure each dancer was reflecting on the ideas explored throughout the experience. I also invited them to set a meeting with me any time to discuss questions, concerns, or ideas relating to the work we were focusing on.

Throughout Winter and Spring Quarter I held 2 or 3 two-hour evening rehearsals each week. For several of these rehearsals, primarily during the movement invention phase, I covered the mirrors in the studio to remove any influence from that resource and to encourage the dancers to sense movement initiation internally. I generally allowed the dancers some time to write in their journals at the beginning of the rehearsal before we began moving or at the end after we finished. To begin the movement practice I guided and participated in a meditative flow that drew on principles and exercises taught in Vinyasa Yoga and Pilates in an effort to warm our bodies and center our minds. The first prompt I gave during this period of meditation was always to close the eyes, turn the thoughts toward the beating of the heart, and connect with the breath. Sometimes the meditation began standing up with a prānāyāma deep breathing exercise and other times it would begin lying down in śavāsana, the final resting pose in a yoga practice. I
often dimmed the lights during this 15 to 30 minute period of internal investigation and on several occasions the guided warm-up blossomed into an extended period of improvisation propelled by the inner sensations of the body. We would then move into the piece creation phase of the rehearsal for the remainder of the time, apart from a three to five minute cool down and śavāsana meditation to conclude the rehearsal.

I often transitioned from the meditative warm-up phase to the choreographic exploration phase of the rehearsal by sharing a quote I found revelatory from my search of literature. I engaged the dancers in a discussion of the concept briefly and then we began to work with that thought as the intention for the rehearsal. I shared some of the primary passages included in Chapters 1 and 2 that revolved around the inherently powerful nature of the breath to silence the destructive side of the mind that would allow for spiritual growth to occur. In one rehearsal I shared the following insight that describes the intriguing duality of the mind, "... The mind is the maker and the mind is the destroyer. On one side the mind is making you and on the other side it is destroying you. You must tell the destructive side of the mind to keep quiet—then you will learn" (Iyengar 32). As this theme emerged from my study, it resonated deeply with me and became my source of creative inspiration. The organization and structure of my choreographic work began to find clarity in form when I discovered breath awareness as one remedy for silencing the troubled mind and freeing it for expansive growth. As the backbone of the piece developed, a collective investigation of internal awareness by my entire cast began to propel the creation process.

Underpinning that investigation were my own self-reflexive procedures that supported me through the choreographic process. I maintained a record of my thoughts, feelings, and
observations as I guided the research project and maintained my mind-body practice. I made notes on the rehearsal process and of encounters I had with my dancers during rehearsals and in conversations outside of them. I participated in a Pilates Mat class twice a week and attended yoga at least once and often twice a week on the days opposite of my Pilates practice. I sustained that routine while taking six to eight hours of ballet each week. I paid attention to any differences I noticed in the way I approached my ballet classes and how I felt during them. I reflected on the insights gained during yoga and Pilates classes and workshops. I attentively observed language, cues, inspiration, and expertise shared by each instructor as they guided each aspect of my physical practice and found many interesting connections as I did. As my research progressed, I became particularly aware of the language my ballet professors used to teach each class. I had the opportunity to take two ballet classes a week, on average, from Professor Tong Wang and Professor Diane Diefenderfer; both are UC Irvine Ballet Faculty in the Claire Trevor School of the Arts’ Dance Department and each has extensive training in yoga and Pilates, respectively. Studying with them throughout the research process provided significant insight into how I could apply my Pilates and yoga experience into the classroom and rehearsal setting.

**Channeling Choreographic Intent**

The inspiration for my piece blossomed from my personal experience, but found structural clarity as I learned more about the philosophical journey of yoga. “. . . From fluctuation [of the mind] to stillness, stillness to silence, and silence to the sight of the soul is the journey of yoga” (Iyengar 121). I hoped to guide my dancers on a similar journey through the dance-making process and I wanted my audience to experience that journey while viewing the performance of that work. The piece evolved into an abstract representation of the mind as it
transitions from a state of fluctuating, destructive chaos to quiet stillness and then from quiet stillness to brilliant, spiritual enlightenment. To illustrate that process of change there were seven movements and a transitional section at the beginning and in the middle to further develop a narrative. Each section reflected a different state of being that I wanted the dancers to encounter honestly, as if faced with a circumstance that evoked the feeling within them in the present moment. I wanted them to experience movement as human beings expressing their soul, rather than dancers executing beautiful technical movement.

I intended the first three sections to represent the weakening of the mind into a dark, destructive, chaotic state. To generate the movement for the first section we discussed the weeping quality of the music and the experience of desperately reaching for a desired goal, but continually falling short of it. We embodied that discussion through improvisation in small groups while others observed and captured memorable movements as they danced, which I structured into a movement phrase. For the second section we discussed experiences surrounding dance that caused anxiety, frustration, and insecurity. In that conversation the mirror, self-doubt, injuries, prolonged and unproductive rehearsals, and the concept of self-destruction were shared. This discussion inspired the creation of movement phrases that communicated those ideas. I employed several other choreographic methods to generate the abundance of movement required to convey the disintegrated state of mind portrayed in the first half of the piece, but these were two significant methods.

In crafting the transition of the piece from a state of mental chaos to stillness, I wanted the dancers to recall breath as a tool that can affect that change on the mind and to understand how movement can be initiated through the use of it. I created a syncopated breath pattern of
long and short inhalations and exhalations, which we embodied through contemporary dance. We examined the concept of internal space and the physical manifestation of “inner space changes that come through breath” explored by early twentieth century movement theorist, Rudolph Laban, while concentrating on how the breath transformed the shape of our bodies internally before moving our limbs (Rubenfeld 230). Through this investigation movement became an extension of the breath and its rhythm.

I intended the second half of the piece to progress towards enlightenment of mind, wholeness in being, and expansiveness in capacity. After setting the movement for the fourth section I charged the dancers to explore the choreography as if seeing their body and learning its mechanics for the first time. It was challenging for many dancers to identify with the humanistic aesthetic I wanted because of the technically demanding choreography I had given them, so I suggested an internal dialogue to prompt an authentic exploration of their physical instrument. I wanted the fifth section to illustrate the harmonious connection found when all beings acknowledge the divine light that resides within themselves and others, a concept indicated in the final bow of a yoga practice as hands are brought to heart center and the Sanskrit word Namaste is expressed (Palkhivala). The day we generated the phrase work for this section I dimmed the lights and instructed the dancers to lie down near a partner. Per usual I asked them to connect to their breath and then guided them to make a physical connection with their partner. I prompted them to fill one another with breath through that point of contact and from there the meditation evolved into an exploration of weight sharing and assisted movement. After I concluded the improvisational warm-up I assigned each pair of dancers a word—connection, harmony, peace, divine, and integration—to define together through a short movement phrase after having shared
the experience of that warm-up. These are a few choreographic exercises I experimented with during the rehearsal process to generate movement from a place of genuine internal awareness.

Exploring Movement Quality

In general, I was looking for an aesthetic of ease characterized by an expansive, yet grounded movement quality from my dancers. I wanted the initiation and power of the movements to stem from the creation of length and rotation in the spine and three-dimensionality in the rib cage and torso, while maintaining a sense of casual fluidity in the extremities of the body. Ultimately, I wanted each movement to be an extension of the breath after it transformed the internal shape of the torso and consequently extended through the arms, legs, and top of the head. Some dancers grasped this aesthetic more quickly than others. To help others find this coordination in their bodies we dissected movement phrases and discussed the internal sensations that initiated each action—whether it be a spreading of one side of the rib cage, a rotation through the full length of the spine, or a sensation originating in an acute location in the torso that found full expression in the body through a natural extension into the limbs. Those discussions progressed to an awareness and investigation of how natural laws of gravity and momentum could be identified in the body to cultivate fluidity and grounding in the movement.

Making Performance Personal

The week of the performance I began to step back to allow my cast to digest the information we had discussed throughout the rehearsal process. We spent the week prior combing through the intention of each section. As I broke down the piece, I encouraged them to connect to each section’s intended emotion and state of being from a personal place. I wanted them to individually explore how a mood—when felt genuinely by their inner being—naturally
changed their posture, use of focus, attention to others in the space, and other aspects of their performance. I wanted this to build an awareness of how an internal experience is manifested in the movement of their own bodies. I created a handout for them to study as a final individual investigation in preparation for performance (see Appendix B). I designed the handout using imagery and action-based language that would support the internal dialogue I wanted them to engage in as they performed. I asked them to “fill in” the choreography and bring it to life through the expression of their own artistic voice, choice-making, and risk-taking (Rozestraten). Then, I made a conscious effort to let them go to draw on the personal strength and awareness I hoped they had cultivated during the creative process.

The aim of the research project was to guide each dancer towards self-discovery and self-knowing and to inspire them to find greater confidence and trust in themselves. When the performance arrived I chose to believe that those developments had taken place and that they had found a stronger intuitive approach to understanding what their bodies and minds needed to prepare for the work required of them. With that in mind, I placed in them the same trust I hoped they found in themselves and instructed them to make their own mental and physical preparations for the performance, even though it was slightly unnerving to do so. I knew, however, that it was important to demonstrate the faith and trust I had in their capability to connect deeply to their inner being and one another to portray the universal and spiritual journey we had explored for months. In the following and final chapter I outline the themes I identified through my search of the self-reflexive data I collected from my dancers about our choreographic investigation and through my search of the personal self-reflexive data I created in response to my interactions with my dancers throughout the process.
CHAPTER 4
FINDINGS

Through my choreographic research project I made the following discoveries by engaging in my own study of internal awareness and by encouraging a similar investigation by the dancers in my company. These discoveries stood out to me at the conclusion of the rehearsal and performance process.

Personal Journey

As intuitive as this finding may sound, I realized through this project how personal a journey towards self-discovery is. For that reason this research reflects my own investigation of awareness. Almost immediately, I realized that this project would challenge me to be vulnerable and humble in ways I had not anticipated. Essentially, I would publicly lead a group of talented dancers down my own path to greater self-knowing. As much as I desired to bring them on that path with me—because of the value I found in my own artistic career through the application of these principles—I realized that I could not be certain that they would follow and I could not be sure that I would communicate these insights in a way that would resonate with their understanding. While I hoped they would have a similar revelatory experience about how their state of mind influenced the ability of their body, how their state of being could be impacted through a conscious use of their breath, and how that concept could be adopted to find greater artistic and technical depth in their dancing, I could not learn those lessons for them.

The concepts I addressed in my research concern knowledge that can only be uniquely understood, individually explored, and embraced by a receptive mind. Every physical body is
different from that of another’s and even more distinct are an individual’s past experiences and future expectations. I gained a greater understanding of that realization through my interviews with TaraMarie Perri, Carmen Rozestraten, Terence Marling, Jodie Gates, Blossom Crawford, David Zurak and others. It became clear that one universal remedy would not heal and deepen every persons’ mind-body connection. The importance is not in a particular method or tool, such as the use of breath, to develop personal interiority, but rather in granting exposure to various methods and tools that allow an individual to discover the technique that inspires depth and wholeness in their being. That exploration is personal and must be propelled by an inner desire to connect with oneself. It cannot be forced by another.

In aiming to guide others towards self-discovery, I realized that I was only responsible for part of the equation to affect change in my dancers. They needed to be receptive, curious, and willing to experiment on the information and opportunities I presented. This theme was apparent in several responses I gathered from company members. Many acknowledged the responsibility they had to receive the information and use it as inspiration to deepen the exploration of their craft. One of my dancers wisely expressed the extent of influence a choreographer can have on the artistic process in the self-reflexive data I collected after the performance, “They can help you shape it and lead you on the path that you need to go, but ultimately it comes from your willingness to accept their words and explore the change that they can bring.” In general, that sense of curiosity and willingness to embrace the ideas I presented were qualities I observed in some of the more mature dancers in the cast, as well as those with exposure to yoga and Pilates or experience with a severe injury. Many of the young and eager dancers responded well to the exploration of these ideas also. Regardless of how groundbreaking these concepts were for any
of these dancers at this time, I hope a seed of internal awareness was planted through our investigation to be recalled later when they desire to deepen their personal spiritual connection.

**Underscoring the Need for Mental Resilience**

My interactions with the handful of dancers that confided in me about ideas we addressed in our rehearsals and how they pertained to their practice of dance underscored a need to attend to the mental health and conditioning of young, aspiring artists in the dance community. The theme emerged that when these individuals began planning to make dance a professional pursuit, rather than continuing it as a hobby, thoughts of insecurity, doubt, and discouragement began to weigh heavily on their minds. These thoughts stemmed from various instigators. One dancer expressed her feelings in the following way:

> I've been so self-conscious and low in self-confidence as a dancer. I feel like I am not improving ... I also feel like the teachers gave me a role in their piece and I am not doing a good job at performing it ... there's someone who could probably do it much better ... I’ve been questioning how I'm going to make it in the dance world, and if I will be able to do the things I want to do ... just knowing that the other dancers here have such amazing physical facilities, and that is something I will never have ... It's really been messing with my head and my performance in class and in rehearsals.

Her thoughts are similar to many of the other dancers that approached me who were experiencing doubts as they questioned their talent and whether it would be adequate enough to secure work in the professional performing community. The dancer quoted above was questioning whether she could meet the expectations of others when given a particular role and found herself debating whether someone else might be more capable of fulfilling it. From other dancers I learned of a sadness and frustration that accompanied their longing for a once healthy, expressive body free of pain and limitations. In general, each of those negative emotions
diminished the joy those individuals found in their practice of dance, which led to dissatisfying and discouraging experiences in classes and rehearsals. Many dancers that approached me outside of rehearsal, along with others involved in the project, noted in their final reflections that they became aware of unhealthy thought processes that were hindering their artistic and individual growth. They mentioned they recognized through the process the impact the negative emotions were having on all aspects of their well-being—mentally, physically, and spiritually.

I was faced with my own demons throughout the research project as well and in many ways I am grateful for that. Thoughts of insecurity, doubt, and vulnerability surfaced as I guided my cast through the first few rehearsals. As I experienced those feelings I realized that I would have the opportunity to test my personal application of the ideas I was exploring from a perspective of experience. I employed my hypothesis for maintaining inner strength by consciously choosing to breathe and meditate on thoughts of positivity, nonjudgment, self-acceptance, humility, and patience through the process when experiencing unproductive emotions. I found as I did so that I was able to maintain my stress and felt a particular steadiness throughout the project.

Developing Acceptance

Through my analysis of the self-reflexive data I collected from my dancers I noticed a trend of developing self-acceptance found by listening to and respecting one’s body. I believe developing self-acceptance is a critical component to unlocking future progress. First, it empowers an individual with knowledge about where they are currently in their progression towards who they want to become. Secondly, it facilitates awareness of an individual’s state of progress without the threat of succumbing to discouragement through that recognition. By
encouraging these dancers to listen to and respect their bodies, many of them found acceptance for their facility and its current level of ability. One dancer shared, “This experience will remind me in the future that I am a unique and special dancer. I am not like anyone around me and I never will be. I have to accept the body and the ability I was given and work with that.” Another dancer, who has been struggling with injury expressed, “I will continue to heal, continue to fight . . . But I no longer expect perfection, I have changed in the sense that I am accepting my journey and I have felt joy in knowing that my life is in good hands.” These dancers began to develop acceptance and began to work from a place of self-love. They did not expect perfection of themselves when they knew their body was not healthy or capable of accomplishing it. This shift in mindset was particularly apparent in individuals suffering from chronic pain caused by previous injuries. Those individuals began to find more acceptance of their body and patience in the healing process. Acceptance is one of the greatest developments I discovered through my personal mind-body study and feel that lesson continually reinforced through my practice.

**The Effectiveness of Breath and Meditation**

In reading the final reflections provided by my dancers I found that our discussions about breath awareness were insightful not only to me, but also to several within my small company. Many of them connected to the contrast found in the mind’s ability to think in several directions at once, verses the one directional pathway of the breath as it flows in and out of the body (refer to Iyengar quotation page 17). That thought resonated with them and clarified how and why observing their breath, a previously confusing and intangible act for some of them, could clear their minds and give them the opportunity to begin fresh again. Several of them shared that they began to use their breath as a tool to calm themselves when feeling stressed, overworked,
irritated, or the need to prepare for a challenging task. Many of them also expressed their growing understanding of the purpose of the breath as used in yoga and Pilates and why it contributed to the rejuvenated state of being they experienced after practicing those methods. Several of them mentioned their desire to continue experimenting with the functionality of the breath in their technique classes, particularly in ballet. One of the dancers in my company shared the benefit she experienced when she began incorporating the breath into ballet and how it effected her in rehearsal:

The breath really aided my body to get warm as well as keep my mind focused on the exercise itself. During ballet, there were days where I would focus on how my breath would act as the initiator of movement as well as a way to release any unnecessary tension I might have been holding. Overall, I feel like starting Stefanie's rehearsals with breathing exercises . . . helps center our mind and bodies before we focus on the choreography.

A few dancers commented on how the way we began our rehearsals—by establishing a connection to the breath through meditation, followed by a somatic-based warm-up, and brief period of improvisation—allowed for the discovery of various personal insights. One dancer commented that it began to change the way she approached rehearsals because it gave her an opportunity to start her physical practice over, warm up again in a different way, and refocus her attention on the task at hand with greater mental preparation. Another dancer commented on how the warm-up and cool-down process helped her become more in tune with her being. It enabled her to focus on tending her body effectively to avoid injury and on centering her thoughts to tune into her dancing. Others noted that it provided time to reflect on the concepts we were exploring throughout the rehearsal process. They found each period of meditation gave them time to prepare to apply or process the application of the concepts we were discussing. In general, the
theme emerged that beginning and ending our rehearsals with a moment of meditation and breath awareness helped the dancers develop a greater sensitivity to the needs of their body and the state of their mind. This allowed them to coordinate mentally and physically to approach each rehearsal with confidence and assurance in their ability to engage in the work required of them.

On the days I took advantage of centering my mind and body at the beginning of each rehearsal, I found mental clarity that prepared me to be effective throughout the remainder of that evening. Some days I found it difficult to enjoy that process because I felt overwhelmed by the burden of work that needed to be accomplished, but when I invested myself in that opportunity to reconnect mentally and spiritually I found more rejuvenation and productivity in my artistic process. I was able to accomplish more in less time than on the days that I rushed into rehearsal and attempted to start immediately.

**Deepening Artistic and Technical Expression**

Through my personal investigation of internal awareness I have noticed I am able to find more artistic depth and technical capacity when my mind and body are more in tune with one another. I notice this in particular when taking ballet from Professor Tong Wang and Professor Diane Diefenderfer and I connect that to the way they guide the beginning of their classes—with a breathing exercise or meditative floor barre warm-up—that encourages me to center my mind for my physical practice. I often find my concentration to be more astute because I am generally more present while participating in those classes. Also, I notice that I am more internally aware of the musculature of my body, which allows me to apply corrections and make adjustments that strengthen and improve my technique. I often feel rejuvenated after taking their classes. Similarly, in performance I have found that when I prepare my mind and body to convey the
intention of my role to an audience I am able to do so with greater intensity and artistic expression because my mind is engaged in an internal dialogue. In these ways, I have found application for my study of internal awareness in my practice and performance of dance.

I aimed to cultivate among my dancers a quality of artistic depth and technical capacity through various choreographic methods. After having discussed a specific intention I wanted conveyed in a particular section, we would rehearse a portion of it and the difference I observed in my dancer’s quality of movement was often tangible. I recognized genuine sincerity in the way they executed the movements after we explored an internal dialogue or sensation to connect with while dancing. I specifically noticed this change in the way they performed the fourth section, which required a pedestrian quality of movement. Several dancers appreciated the handout I provided in the final week and noted that it promoted depth in their investigation of the piece’s intention. One dancer said of the handout, “I felt I had a clear direction that I could then dive deeper into the movement.” In the final performance I observed a difference in the way they looked at their hands and the way their energy extended beyond their fingertips with amazing care and texture. The presence of many of my dancers, along with their quality of movement, transformed while on stage.

Ultimately, I cannot know whether this quality of movement was inspired by a deepened sense of interiority because I am unable to experience another’s state of being. However, as a dance maker working to inspire a specific texture and quality of movement from my dancers I believe I noticed a richer expression of a movement’s intention when I provoked my dancers to dig deeper internally to demonstrate the concepts I was seeking to convey. Many dancers addressed that through this process they found that performance must come from an internal
place. Others reflected that when they are in a more connected state of being they also identified a greater capacity to invest in and accomplish more in their creative work.

**Other Significant Themes**

Several other themes became apparent throughout the rehearsal and performance process. I found many dancers began to develop a new understanding of how dance serves as a mind-body practice for them because they were consciously contemplating and reevaluating the way they approached their practice of it, specifically in their classical technique classes. Many dancers commented that the work we engaged in inspired spiritual growth and renewal in their lives in a profound, unexpected way. One shared, “This dance has been one of the few moments that have really touched me spiritually in my life and it was a very profound place to grow from for me.” The natural progression of the choreographic work towards a more enlightened, heavenly state of being allowed some dancers to become caught up in the momentum and intention of the piece while performing on stage. Some found freedom to transcend terrestrial limitations, which enabled them to become carried away in performance to experience a more liberated state of being. Others commented that their involvement in this process helped to remind them who they dance for and for what purpose. They realized they were passionately working to honor their personal love of dance or to surrender and express gratitude to a Higher Being for their opportunity to pursue their passion. Their motivation to work was not money or recognition, but rather for their own well-being. Accepting that intention renewed these dancers spiritually and helped them regain a sense of balance and purpose in their work. The conclusion found on the subsequent pages summarizes my interpretation of and the value I have placed on my discoveries throughout this experience.
CONCLUSION

By reflecting on my experience of transformation and diving deeply into a philosophical study of the mind-body practices that contributed to the development of wholeness in my life, I discovered the tool of breath awareness that I wish I understood many years ago. That valuable personal discovery has enhanced my practice of dance and contributed to my state of well-being. In an effort to convey my discovery to others, specifically to my company of dancers, I found I was able to share a particle of that insight, which consequently benefited the well-being and artistic practice of a few individuals in a minor way. As I reflect on the process of my research project, I have identified many ways that I would refine the experiment to create a more conducive atmosphere for exploration and a more clear approach to instruction that would facilitate more effective learning by all involved. Nevertheless, the insights I gained through the project have provided sufficient direction for my continued exploration of these concepts.

The breath is often overlooked as a natural function of the body that continues whether we think of it or not, but through my research I essentially rediscovered it—as so many significant movement and dance theorists have in the past—as a fundamental principle and powerful tool that supports my well-being and way of life. I am humbled by the simplicity that accompanies my new found awareness of the breath and its potential if used mindfully. While I do not claim to have made a revolutionary finding in the broad spectrum of the dance community, I do claim to have made a revolutionary finding in my own life that will inevitably influence the way I approach my craft and my teaching of it throughout the remainder of my artistic career.
My choreographic approach and teaching philosophy will undoubtedly be flooded with the principles I have identified through my research, specifically the use of breath, which I hope in turn will inspire the individuals I encounter to begin their own self-reflective study of awareness and experience a similar reawakening in their own lives. However, developing an understanding of how an observance of the breath can still the mind and channel awareness of the present moment is a concept that must be individually explored through a perspective of receptiveness and curiosity. It may be enough to thoughtfully guide individuals to opportunities that encourage them to take a second look at and reflect on the function of breath and its capacity to spark their own personal investigation of awareness, but it may not be.

I would like to continue my exploration of the breath and its usefulness in application to classical ballet pedagogy because I believe significant value can be found through a marriage of those ideas. When speaking of their professional classical training, many of my professors commented that no one ever mentioned how to use their breath while they danced. They only recall being told that it should not be heard. An effective use of the breath does not have to be audible to be beneficial; learning how to inhale deeply, exhale completely, and coordinate those actions with a movement experience might be sufficient. There is more to be understood about how observing the rhythm of the breath and the path it takes to fill the lungs, back, and being can support movement within the classical framework and the mental well-being of a ballet dancer. This would undoubtedly require significant experimentation to understand how to honor the classical tradition, while placing emphasis on integrating a contemporary and structured breath practice into the form.
TaraMarie Perri, professor of yoga and somatics at New York University and founder of The Perri Institute of Mind and Body, advocates teaching classical dancers how to breathe:

Teaching ballet dancers about breathing is such a gift because of the way that breath is organized in ballet—first of all, it's not really addressed. If you first ask a ballet dancer how they breathe and what actually is happening they’re confused because the instruction is to always hold. What they find is new possibility in how to strategically use an exhale to gather everything together. (Perri)

She encourages her students to approach the first plié combination at the barre, concentrating on where to use an inhalation and exhalation to understand how the breath inspires coordination in movement. The objective is to maintain a focus on coordinating the breath and movement from combination to combination until it is habit to carry it through to the end of class. I have experimented with the use of my breath in ballet class throughout this project and experienced the development of artistic and technical depth, enjoyment, and invigoration because of it. Several of my dancers also touched on how they began exploring the way the breath aided their study of the classical technique. They found it helped them coordinate the power and strength of their mind to support the activity required of their body.

I am intrigued by the consequence that would result from the exploration of the breath in ballet and how it would influence the creative and intuitive wisdom, autonomy, and mind-body connection of a ballet dancer. I anticipate there would be beneficial findings as the breath becomes a more integral aspect of the technique. Perhaps it would cultivate greater interiority and prompt deeper internal investigation, which would elevate a ballet dancer’s artistry and well-being by encouraging awareness and self-knowing. Perhaps ballet would begin to adopt a similar aura to a yoga or Pilates practice and become a source of spiritual renewal for those studying it.
There are many questions I have concerning how a further investigation of breath might influence the artistic choices and well-being of a dancer, aside from facilitating increased awareness of and clarity in the present moment as I have addressed in this paper: What is the most effective, beneficial, and aesthetically pleasing way to breathe while dancing? At what age and stage of artistic development is it appropriate to introduce the concept of breath awareness into dance pedagogy? Is it feasible to structure and coordinate the breath to aid in the execution of specific movements in dance technique? Or is it sufficient to reinforce the concept of breath awareness by encouraging an individual to mindfully choose how to coordinate their own breath as they dance? What changes would occur in the dance culture if more focus is placed on the incorporation of a breath practice to support the movement practice?

I have also identified some of the following as potential themes for choreographic exploration in the future: breath and fluidity, breath and opposition, breath and the creation or disintegration of space, breath and syncopation, breath and emotion, breath and connection, and movement as an extension of breath.

In conclusion, the breath is just the beginning. It is one key that unlocks a door to more possibilities, more investigation, more transformation, more awareness, more self-knowing, and more spirituality. There is vastness beyond the portal opened by the awareness found through an observance of breath. I know this only from my budding exploration of it. I look forward to a lifelong study of these principles that will fuel artistic development, well-being, and spirituality in myself and others.
REFERENCES


Alonzo King LINES Ballet. “Sponsor a young artist at LINES.” Message to the author. 11 Mar. 2014. E-mail.


Crawford, Blossom. Personal Interview. 5 Feb. 2014.


Diefenderfer, Diane. Personal Interview. 13 May 2014.


Rozestraten, Carmen. Personal Interview. 10 September 2013.


APPENDIX A:
Thesis Concert Performance Project Syllabus

UCI Dance Department
Claire Trevor School of the Arts
University of California, Irvine

UCI Dance 197 - SPRING 2014
Independent Study
Code: 02536; 2 units
Weeks 1 to 6; TTh 6:00 to 8:00 PM, DS128

Course Description:
This is an independent study elective course established under the direction of Tong Wang that will provide an environment conducive to the exploration of concepts relevant to the thesis research of Stefanie Maughan. Students will be exposed to various breathing methods, meditative exercises, and other somatic principles with the intention of cultivating a deeper mind-body connection, sense of intuition, and sensory awareness. Concepts and exercises foregrounded in a western Hatha-Yoga practice and the Pilates Method will be introduced and explored throughout the rehearsal process. Students will be asked to reflect and record their thoughts on the environment, the methods presented, and the impact they have had on their well-being and artistic development in a personal journal, which will be used by the student as supportive evidence when responding to assigned questionnaires. The course will conclude in a public performance at 7:30 PM on May 7, 2014 in the Claire Trevor Theatre.

Course Content:
The course will be introduced to and will develop the understanding and skill to master the following elements:

1. Basic fundamentals of Hatha-Yoga and the Pilates Method and how they relate to one’s well-being and the development of artistry. Those principles are: breath, control, centering, precision, fluid movement, concentration, nonjudgment, acceptance, awareness, and a process-oriented focus.
2. Three different methods of breathing and meditative stress-relieving techniques.
3. Appropriate warm-up and stretching techniques.
4. Proper spinal and pelvic alignment explored through choreography.
5. Awareness of the abdominal and techniques to strengthen the connection to the core.
Student Learning Outcomes:
Students are expected to demonstrate the following throughout the rehearsal and performance process:

1. An understanding of the principle of breath as it relates to aiding and initiating movement, as well as a tool for finding mental and physical awareness.
2. Acute body awareness and the ability to isolate, initiate, and propel movement from each aspect of the body while maintaining a grounded sense of ease and grace.
3. Techniques to reduce stress and eliminate injuries.
4. Confidence and maturity in making dynamic artistic and musical choices.
5. Greater exploration, development, and refinement of individual artistry.
6. A strong sense of discipline, work ethic, and willingness to take risks as students explore new movement pathways in choreography.

Methods & Procedures:

Procedure
The beginning and end of each rehearsal will consist of journaling, breath work, active and passive meditation, and the exploration of somatic principles through āsana-based yoga and Pilates mat work. The majority of each rehearsal will consist of developing, learning, staging, and refining contemporary choreography. The students will learn a variation of steps and phrase work, which will be performed in the Claire Trevor Theatre on May 7, 2014 at 7:30 PM.

Methods
1. Physical demonstrations by the instructor.
2. Verbal instruction by the instructor.
3. Exploration of choreographic tasks through collaboration with instructor and other students.
4. Supporting different movement styles and aesthetic intentions with the aid of classical technique.
5. Working with a variation of musical/rhythmic support.

Requirements:
Attendance
Consistent studio attendance is the most essential component to this studio-based class as the course will conclude with a public presentation of an original choreographic work in a MFA Thesis Concert. Therefore, attendance is strictly enforced.

1. Absences will not be permitted. If a situation arises where an absence is absolutely necessary, one must inform the instructor when they are aware of it immediately (preferably before the day of the scheduled rehearsal).
2. In the event that a student must miss a rehearsal that individual is responsible for learning all material and catching up on all notes covered during their absence through the help of their peers and video recorded. The student should come prepared to the next rehearsal with this information.
3. The beginning and end of each rehearsal are essential to the research process because of that students are expected to be prompt and stay through the end of the rehearsal time. A student should discuss any needs to be tardy or leave early throughout the quarter with the instructor as soon as possible.
4. It is the responsibility of the student to notify the instructor of any reasons she/he is unable to participate fully in rehearsal. If a student is medically unable to actively participate in the class she/he may mark choreography or observe, if necessary. However, if a student has excessive “watch” days this may result in removal from the choreographic work.
Journaling & Questionnaires
Students are expected to maintain a personal journal of their thoughts, discoveries, and observations that surround the methods, exercises, and somatic principles that will be introduced and discussed throughout the choreographic process. Journal entries should occur at least twice (2x) a week, preferably on the days that the course meets. Student journals will be private, but the thoughts recorded will serve as a reminder of the students’ experiences throughout the learning process. Journal entries will be used as supporting evidence when completing the three (3) questionnaires that will be given throughout the course.

Participation
Active participation in all exercises, discussions, and studio course work is necessary for the student to be successful in the class. At times students will be encouraged to work collaboratively with the choreographer and other students as they contribute to the choreographic process.

Proper attire for technique class
Students are expected to be dressed appropriately at the beginning of class. Hair should be neat and out of face. Studio clothing attire should be clean and show the body modestly and allow for full range of motion.

Thesis Concert
Students will have the opportunity to perform in an MFA thesis concert at the conclusion of the course where they will demonstrate their technical skill and sense of personal artistry. The final performance will also provide an opportunity for the students to demonstrate any influence the course material has had on them as performers.

THESIS CONCERT:
Wednesday, May 5, 2014 @ 7:30 PM
Claire Trevor Theatre

Evaluation/Grading:

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Rehearsal Schedule:

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Week 1</strong></td>
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| 4/1                   | Time: 6 to 8 PM
Where: DS128;
Who: Everyone
Plan: Refresh/Clean | 6 to 8 PM
DS128;
Everyone
Set connection piece;
Anne Hitt (SM) for full run | Monday, 6 to 8 PM
DS128;
Raymond, Tracy
Clarify transitions, set duet |
| 4/3                   |                                  |                                 |                                                                      |
| 4/4                   |                                  |                                 |                                                                      |
| **Week 2**            |                                  |                                 |                                                                      |
| 4/8                   | Time: 6 to 8 PM
Where: DS128;
Who: Everyone
Plan: Finish connection piece | 6 to 8 PM
DS128
Everyone
Set NS2; Set finale | Friday, 6 to 8 PM
1100;
Ray, TS, CH, SB, KN;
Silence section; Ray, CH duet/silos |
| 4/10                  |                                  |                                 |                                                                      |
| 4/11                  |                                  |                                 |                                                                      |
| **Week 3**            |                                  |                                 |                                                                      |
| 4/15                  | Time: 6 to 8 PM
Where: 1140
Who: Everyone
Plan: Finish finale | 6 to 8 PM
1140
Everyone
Define movement quality | Monday, 6 to 8 PM
1140;
Raymond
Clarify movement, quality, and intention |
| 4/17                  |                                  |                                 |                                                                      |
| 4/18                  | **(Dance Escape)**               |                                 |                                                                      |
|                      |                                  |                                 |                                                                      |
| **Week 4**            |                                  |                                 |                                                                      |
| 4/22                  | Time: 6 to 8 PM
Where: DS128
Who: Everyone
Plan: Timing & quality (2, 3, 4, NS) | 6 to 8 PM
DS128
Everyone
Timing & quality (connection, NS2, finale) | TBD |
| 4/24                  |                                  |                                 | TBD |
| 4/25                  |                                  |                                 | TBD |
|                      |                                  |                                 | Clean, quality |
| **Week 5**            |                                  |                                 |                                                                      |
| 4/29                  | Time: 5 to 6 PM
Where: DS128
Who: Everyone
Plan: Run for stamina | 7:30 to 9:30 AM
DS120
Everyone + Breakfast
Run for stamina |                                                                      |
| 5/1                   |                                  |                                 |                                                                      |
| **(Physical Graffiti)** |                                  |                                 |                                                                      |

**Week 6: Show Week**

<table>
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<td>4:45 to 9:00 PM</td>
<td>6:00 to 11 PM</td>
<td>6:00 to 11 PM</td>
<td>6:00 to Party Time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Where:</strong></td>
<td>DS 128 &amp; CTT</td>
<td>DS128 &amp; CTT</td>
<td>DS128 &amp; CTT</td>
<td>DS128 &amp; CTT</td>
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</table>
| **Plan:**               | 5:00 Tech Piece & Run piece 2x | 6:45 Warm-Up
7:30 Full Tech Run
9:00 Full Dress Run | 6:45 Warm-Up
7:30 Invited Dress
9:00 Work Notes | 6:45 Warm-Up
7:30 Performance!
9:00 Reception! |
Week 1:


**Tuesday 4/1:** KN, MA, AO develop prior to run (2nd section). Scramble out? TS turns walks at Ray; he stumble, Change transition from 3rd to 4th to partnering (3rd section). Define last 4 8-counts when all ladies join to end (4th section). Define time of beginning group work to box section; timing of contagions (NS section).

**Thursday 4/3:** Set Connection piece.

Week 2:

**Tuesday 4/8:** Finish Connection piece.

**Thursday 4/10:** Set New Slate piece 2; Start setting Finale.

**Friday 4/11:** CH, SB, KN run in separate Ray and TS. CH rhythm & quality (silent section)

Week 3:


**Tuesday 4/15:** Finish Finale.

**Thursday 4/17:** Movement quality (all)

Week 4:

**Tuesday 4/22:** Transitions (all). Movement quality & timing - 5 dancers (section 3), 4 dancers (section 4), & New Slate.

**Thursday 4/24:** Movement quality & timing - 5 dancers (section 3), 4 dancers (section 4), & New Slate.

**Extra (TBD):** Smaller group to clean if needed

Week 5:

**Tuesday 4/29:** Quality & Stamina

**Thursday 5/1:** Quality & Stamina
APPENDIX B:

Intention Handout

Introduction:
1. Raymond—this is your story. You embody this story. This is your mind. It begins and builds. Show the build and change through each movement.
2. Tracy Raymond—Tracy you are a small dangerous negative person that exists only to pull Raymond down. Hang on him. Drag him down. You build in size and strength throughout the first section of the piece.

Section I
1. **Movement 1: Everything** you want most is JUST BARELY outside of your kinesphere. You reach for it and can’t grab it. (You’re in bed and drop your phone on the floor. You don’t want to get out of bed. So you REACH for it. BUT YOU CAN’T GET IT!) You reach for it again and it feels further away. You try to reach harder. You fall. You fail. You will never get it. You are chasing a carrot that is dangling just out of your reach constantly, exhaustingly like a human chases and reaches, not a dancer.
2. **Movement 2:** Something inside you turned dark. It turned bitter, rotten, hollow, negative, angry, heavy. It turned mean, aggressive, antagonistic. You try to resist the downward pull that heavy weight has on your limbs, on your heart, on your head, on your body. But you give in eventually. Its too strong, too heavy—you succumb to it. You are dark and rotten and negative like a human is those things, not a dancer.
3. **Movement 3:** You fell into a dark pit. You can’t see. You want to get out. You are scared. You yell for help. NO ONE HEARS YOU. You are cold. You are lonely. You feel like you might die. You are frantic. You grab anything—your head arms hand leg to find where you are in space. You feel like you are in prison and the walls are closing in on you. The air is thin. You can’t breathe. Show me you can’t breathe. You CAN’T BREATHE like a human chokes for air, not a dancer.

Transition:
1. Raymond Tracy—Raymond you have had enough with Tracy. You want her to leave. Tracy fights back but loses strength EACH TIME you fight back.
2. Sarah, Caitlin, Kaitlyn, Tracy, Raymond—just breathe. You embody breath. Show how breathe calms, quiets, finds stillness, pushes darkness out, sustains.

Section 2
1. **Movement 4:** You are seeing your body for the first time. Really LOOK at your body. Examine it. Explore your physical instrument. How do your joints work? What does your hair or your skin smell like? What about your toe nails? See and touch it like a human, not a dancer.
2. **Movement 5:** Connect with someone. Breathe with them. Look into their eyes. Say their name. Share their weight. Hold them up. Brush shoulders with them. Have a personal experience with someone. Connect in harmony with your friend moving next to you like a human, not a dancer.
3. **Movement 6:** All along you’ve been blind. Finally, you can see clearly. You can see colors—and they are brighter, richer, purer, more stunning than you thought. You can see the stars in the sky so clearly—they are more radiant than you thought, they are closer to you than you thought, and one of them is INSIDE OF YOU and you had NO IDEA. When you realize that…
4. **Movement 7:** That star inside of you elevates you, propels you, carries you, FREES YOU. It excites you. It feels like rushing wind, sweeping you onto the tallest mountain with the most beautiful view. You are safe, free, unencumbered, liberated as a HUMAN, not a dancer.