Title
Topography of Stream: Nurturing the Authentic Self through Dance Improvisation and Stream of Consciousness Technique

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Topography of Stream: Nurturing the Authentic Self through Dance Improvisation and Stream of Consciousness Technique

THESIS

submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

in Dance

By

Sarina Ascencion Ramirez-Ortiz

Thesis Committee:
Professor Lisa Naugle, Ph.D., Chair
Professor John Crawford
Associate Professor Chad Hall

2018
DEDICATION

To

my family

Thank you for your unending love and support. You all keep me grounded and strong.
Your love guides me in becoming a better sister.

To my mom, I cannot begin to explain how much you have inspired me to become the
woman I am today. Thank you for your constant support and encouragement.
I would not be here without you.

To Vincent, thank you for encouraging me to follow my dreams and reminding me that I
can do anything. You are my person, my partner, my love,
and I truly cherish your presence in my life.

To my grandma and nina, thank you for loving me and pushing me to do better.
Thank you for being such strong, inspiring women and teaching
me to reach beyond my own expectations.
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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Topography of Stream: Nurturing the Authentic Self through Dance Improvisation and Stream of Consciousness Technique

By

Sarina Ascencion Ramirez-Ortiz

Master of Fine Arts in Dance

University of California, Irvine, 2018

Professor Lisa Naugle, Ph.D., Chair

This work explores the connection between the stream of consciousness writing technique and dance improvisation, examining if the two practices can reveal an understanding of the “authentic self.” Throughout the process, the dance participants experienced a variety of scores, prompts, and questions for movement improvisation and stream of consciousness writing. The dancers participated in discussions interspersed between the movement and writing prompts. As a culmination of the research, the dancers performed in a structured improvisation dance performance. The concert included international musical compositions, recorded stream of consciousness excerpts, video projection, a paper stage, and dirt. Despite initial struggles with writing down their exact thoughts and feeling confident in their movement choices, the dancers learned new aspects about their identities and emotions which in turn revealed a clearer understanding of their authentic selves.
PROLOGUE

January 3, 2018

New newness, is it fresh or just cleansed, dusted off, shake the dust, it fades away, sparkling in the light. Do you believe? Belief can be, can be tricky, changing, questionable. That’s okay, right you know. I didn’t always think that. Acceptance, just accept. Not all things are that easy. Ease, that’s interesting, or not at all. What’s in a name, a word. How do we assume meaning, I mean it. Do you? Yes of course but you don’t always mean what you say. Mean. Meant. What is even meant to be anymore. To be. What will become. Of us. You. This. Promises, those keep us going, they can break us down until we come back up. For what? Air? Love? Promises. I promise. Can I possibly be filled with more love? Always, there is always more room for love. Light. There it is, that cramp, I feel it in my bones and inner flesh. Fleshy beings. Sleep oh how it consumes, be consumed by the light. Warm, white comforting light, red flowers, poppies, popping up in my head. Mapping, physical mapping or spiritual mapping. Healing. Scribbles, scribbling meaning, pause. What was that? Family holidays, vacation, exhaustion also comes along. Sleep. Take a break. Re-energize your heart. Don’t forget about it. That cramp, it lingers. Water, you need to drink, consume, consumed by what. Belief. Consumed by belief. Believe in whatever it is you believe and believe with all your might. It can change, but give it your all. Be consumed by your guided light. Continue on and you will soon find peace. Flourish.

January 23, 2018

Slow, think about it, what’s ending, energy where does it reside, sadness, I’m sad sometimes too, tell me about it, trust me I know, we all know, talk about it, arm wooshes around, back in the back, what about life, what about it? Spots, there are spots like freckles telling stories, we all have them, what do you want, wanting, hope is there, or is it in disguise, love, love, happy, can you see it, it might be there already, in you, within, inside, no more, be the important one, be, being, okay and alright, you’re right, float above me, lost.

January 31, 2018

A thought, quick, flutter past, thoughts, think, don’t think, I think I will, quiet noise, silence, that one time laughters broke out, love, missing someone, that feeling of missing, like someone is gone, laugh, remember that, hold on, Jaxon makes me laugh, I can learn from him, I see it, love, dirt between my toes, earth, get back to that, the ground, feel it, be part of it, thoughts, they run wild, I want to be wild, free, can we be? Perhaps, but no we must focus on life, life things are a pain, be free but only a little, not too hard, don’t think too hard, cramps, they are coming along, just fine, keep it up, you can, almost there, do you see it, the light, faint but present, God, God is sometimes faint but present, I’ll get closer some days and others not, think, think, think, scribble away, my dearest.

Sarina Ramirez-Ortiz
Stream of Consciousness Personal Journal
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

“...we never step into the same river twice...though a river changes its constituent nature at any given point of reference from moment to moment (many), it retains the identity of a river (one) at all times. We never fail to recognize the river qua river amidst the changing circumstances of its nature.”

Joseph F. Rychlak referencing William James

When considering my identity, there are a few words I could use to describe myself: strong-minded, female, Hispanic, leader, organized, fiancé, student, and dancer. Although these descriptions are true, these words do not necessarily feel authentic or complete in bringing forth who I actually am. As an advanced dancer, I am sometimes assumed to understand how to move in a way that accesses the “authentic self.” I can recollect multiple experiences in dance classes where teachers have asked me to show my “authentic self.” Move authentically; let movement flow from impulse; dance in a way that shows the audience who you are. In these moments, I would try to access my authenticity, however, in the blink of an eye, these loosely held words were forgotten, and the class of dancers had moved on without necessarily knowing what “authentic self” means. My research explores the experience of authenticity and how the practice of dance improvisation is one way to uncover an understanding of the self.

An investigation of authenticity includes exploring the notion of identity and bringing that into awareness while dancing. Does awareness of identity and the “authentic self” influence movement quality? If so, then how can an improvisation practice nurture authenticity? In this thesis I primarily explore approaches to building an improvisation practice that is grounded in the stream of consciousness writing technique. In the article “What is the Stream of Consciousness Technique?,” Lawrence Edward Bowling defines stream of consciousness as a style of writing in which the author transposes direct thoughts into written form (Bowling 345).
This writing form is familiar in literature, but is not necessarily at the forefront of dance teaching, though teachers of choreography often use writing in the creative process. When combined with dance technique and composition, the stream of consciousness writing technique offers a multi-layered lens into awareness of “authenticity” that may be perplexing at first, yet valuable in understanding the self.

I first encountered the stream of consciousness technique during my undergraduate studies. In one of my English classes, I was asked to read Virginia Woolf’s Mrs. Dalloway, a stream of consciousness novel. During that period of time, I noticed the stream of consciousness technique being utilized in some of my other classes. Those narrative writing sessions, though short and seemingly inconsequential at the time, gave me a sense of how difficult it was to understand myself and transfer my thoughts to paper. It was expected that I write out my thoughts, yet I had no preparation for identifying my inner self through the stream of consciousness and transposing it into writing.

The physical sensation of writing, uninterrupted, for ten minutes begins with a creeping ache at the elbow before spreading through the forearm and engulfing the hand with a cramp. The experience of this sensation would come up in my stream of consciousness journal entries during the research process:

*Sleep, take a break, reenergize your heart, don’t forget about it, that cramp, it lingers, water, you need to drink, consume, consumed by what. Belief, consumed by belief.*
(Sarina Ramirez-Ortiz, Personal Journal 1/3/2018)

*Allow joy to be, can be, can it wait a little longer, familiar sensation, creeping at the elbow, keep driving forward. I believe, philosophy of belief, statement, statements you mean.*
(Sarina Ramirez-Ortiz, Personal Journal 1/9/2018)
By writing more often and allowing the muscles in my arm to experience the ache of writing, I would eventually surpass the usual cramping sensation which often turned into a sweet relief. In an effort to understand how the stream of consciousness technique can be implemented into a modern/contemporary dance practice, I allowed myself to weave this form of writing into my creative processes.

While practicing this technique, I noticed a similarity between the cyclical pattern of connections in writing and the bodily connections in improvisation. Writing consists of three main experiences that repeat and overlap as the cycle continues: 1) what just occurred in thinking, 2) the words that are then written on the page, and 3) new thoughts that will occur in the next moment. In movement, I have noticed the cycle of remembering previous movement choices, making active decisions in the present moment, and connecting to future choices. Dance improvisation and stream of consciousness writing are similar in that there is a relationship between the past, present, and future experiences, formulating an evolution of being. How can the perception of time, a past-present-future flow of events, be interwoven between stream of consciousness writing and movement improvisation? If this interweaving can be cultivated, then perhaps it can serve as a foundation for bringing forth the evolving authentic self in dance technique and performance.

The method in this research encourages dancers to write, speak, and dance, with each method utilizing active choice-making. The dancers have the opportunity to listen to inner rhythms and attend to the linear, nonlinear, or fuzzy in-between experience of thought and choice. Journal prompts provide a visual space for documenting, questioning, and becoming aware of how participants identify everyday physical motion and thoughts. This thesis aims to
engage and nurture the authentic self, a being that may be hidden within, by creating a bridge between the stream of consciousness technique and dance improvisation.
CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

“Spend enough time in the hyper-awareness of improvisation and you will undoubtedly begin to question such things as the nature of thought, or the source of desire, or even the structure of self. You will sense yourself thinking in movement. You will feel and respond to what your mind wants, or what your back wants, or even what the space wants. And you will know that you do not end at the boundary of your skin. You are literally a part of the world, and the world permeates your soma, thinking and choosing from inside you.”

Kent De Spain

In an effort to understand how the authentic self can be nurtured, I studied some of the prior research in dance improvisation and the stream of consciousness technique. I found that much of the written work in these areas did not directly connect all three aspects of my research (dance improvisation, stream of consciousness writing technique, and authentic self). Many of the resources on dance improvisation mentioned aspects of the self, identity, thoughts, and consciousness, without directly connecting “authentic self” and the “stream of consciousness writing technique.” Recognizing this gap in current research, I began to look at other disciplines such as music improvisation, psychology, literature, theater, and meditation. I focused on sources that explicitly recognized relationships with one or more of my research aspects.

In “A Theoretical Basis for the Concepts of Self and Authentic Self,” Leston Havens takes a psychoanalytical approach, discussing the possibility of a defensive “authentic self” that is constantly adapting due to cultural rejection of authentic impulses (Havens 370). The process of adapting to rejection can reveal a false self. Havens asks, “How can authenticity have meaning when personality is partly the product of society's impositions through parents on the child's instinctive life?” (372). When viewed through the lens of dance, the question of imposition may relate to possible experiences in the technique studio, looking in the mirror, validation, or rejection of how one executes a given phrase or form of the body.
Havens suggests an analysis of infant development: “What feels real is an ‘id impulse’ that occurs to the infant or child when it is ‘relaxing’” (Havens 373). This suggests that when a baby can just exist “not by reacting,” they can experience “a sensation or an impulse” that can “feel real and be truly a personal experience” (Havens 373). The “spontaneous gesture” that arises as an impulse in an infant is, according to Havens, “the True Self” (373). Havens also discusses the idea of self-reflection as critical to the development of an authentic self, noting that recognition of ownership over impulses brings a “primitive form of reflection” (375). The True Self emerges with a sense of “aliveness” when impulse is met by a feeling of ownership (Havens 375. Connecting to the concept of reflection, Havens concludes that “the concept of authentic self arises from the possibility of human acknowledgment and ownership of one's own impulses and values” (377).

When considering how the concepts of impulse, meaning, values, and ownership might be present in dance, I discovered the book Landscape of the Now: a Topography of Movement Improvisation. This book, written by Kent De Spain, includes transcriptions from multiple interviews with distinguished movement improvisation artists: Anna Halprin, Simone Forti, Ruth Zaporah, Barbara Dilley, Steve Paxton, Deborah Hay, Lisa Nelson, and Nancy Stark Smith. One of the questions that DeSpain poses is, “what is good?” (De Spain 73). De Spain mentions, “Every movement, every choice, every structure used in an improvisation reflects an underlying sense...of what is ‘good’ and what is ‘not good’ within the practice” (73). Many of the improvisation practitioners agreed that “what is good is an improvisation free of thoughts about what is good,” which suggests that real-time thoughts and fears about what is good and what
isn’t may be more hindering than beneficial (De Spain 73). Self-reflection may work best through discussion after—rather than before or during—the practice.

In the article “She Stuttered: Mapping the Spontaneous Middle,” artist and theorist Sher Doruff discusses the improvisatory work of choreographer Jeanine Durning. Durning’s work, termed *ing*, investigates the spontaneity of vocalized, stuttering thought as “a practice of non-stop saying, acting, and being in the continuous present...The mouth mobilizes thought in the transition where language exits the body” (Doruff 4). In discussing spontaneity and creativity, Doruff references time as an “instantaneous present,” the instant that “shimmers in the vibration of the future-past hyphen that divides the present” (10). The theme of division or boundary is common for Jeanine Durning, and she considers, “Perhaps that's what I feel: an outside and an inside and me in the middle. Perhaps that's what I am: the thing that divides the world in two - on the one side the outside, on the other the inside. (That can be as thin as foil.) I'm neither one side nor the other, I'm in the middle” (Doruff 4). The idea of boundaries and locating the self somewhere in the middle is a prominent idea to explore further in the research.

Kent De Spain also discusses the relationship between the self and the world as a blending and weaving of the inner self with life beyond your physical boundaries (81). De Spain’s discussion of “porous” beings invites dancers to question their physical and mental boundaries, who they are and where they are in the world, and how it can contribute to understanding their sense of self through reflection (81). This overarching idea contributes to the effort of developing the self as permeable, consistently giving and receiving as an active contributor to their surroundings, while also noticing what the self is a part of.
Viewing improvisation as a means of attention was another significant viewpoint shared among several sources. Dance improviser, Peter Fraser, wrote an article titled “Gaps in the Body: Attention and Improvisation,” in which he discusses the experience of “improvisation as a practice of attention” (Fraser 73). Paula Sager’s article, “Journey of the inner witness: A path of development,” discusses a similar practice called Authentic Movement (AM). This practice focuses on “turning attention inwards, listening, waiting for an inner impulse to move” (Sager 366). Within the field of improvisational research, other sources agreed that the improvising person experiences a heightened state of awareness and attention while improvising (De Spain 167-172; Sarath 5).

Paula Sager’s article, “Journey of the inner witness: A path of development,” explains the practice of Authentic Movement as “a way of knowing self, a way of knowing the world and others” (Sager 2). Authentic Movement involves the roles of mover and witness, with the mover attending to inner impulses as they stand, sit, or move in the space with their eyes closed (366-367). Although the practice of dance improvisation may include the witness-observer relationship at times, my work is distinguished from AM because it is focused more on individual writing of the stream of consciousness without witnessing another person as the writing prompt.

In noticing the lack of dance literature that directly connects movement improvisation to stream of consciousness writing and vocalization, there is a need for further research into how the stream of consciousness writing technique may help develop a broadened sense of the artistic, authentic voice in movement, writing, and speaking. The current work of Jeanine Durning establishes an alternative bridge between dance improvisation and the use of the
inner/outer voice that can be recognized as the “self.” In Sher Doruff’s article, Jeanine Durning says:

It seems that the ‘true’ voice, the voice of the self that is, exists exactly in the transition of emission from the vast space of the interior world to the reasoned concreteness of the exterior world, escaping, impermanent, immaterial. At the blurred, and sometimes terrifying edge of speech and body, of interior and exterior, untranslatable as separate, as difference, this is where the voice is. (Doruff 22)

Durning’s work is an investigation into how the use of the voice can become a transformative passageway where the “self” can be discovered. Although her work engages with the speaking voice, the scope is limited to stuttering speech and does not specifically identify “stream of consciousness” and “authentic self.”

In the article “What is the Stream of Consciousness Technique?,” author Lawrence Edward Bowling discusses and compares the writings of different authors from the late 1800’s to the early 1900’s. Many authors give credit to specific people and others claim to be the first inventors of the technique. Bowling confirms that there is much disagreement as to where the stream of consciousness technique began and its exact definition (333). He argues that there are “different variations within the stream of consciousness technique,” which make it difficult to pin down (Bowling 333).

At the start of my research process, I used the term “interior monologue” interchangeably with “stream of consciousness,” but Bowling argues that they are different and require different explanations. Bowling discusses French author Edouard Dujardin, whose definition of “the stream of consciousness technique” is interchanged with “interior monologue” (333-334). Dujardin’s definition of “interior monologue” cannot encapsulate all the senses and images that consciousness has to offer (Bowling 337). Bowling explains how parts of the stream may arise
by means of sensation or images, which “the mind does not translate into language” (337). This idea connects to the different ways people learn. Bowling concludes that the stream of consciousness technique is a “narrative method by which the author attempts to give a direct quotation of the mind—not merely of the language area but of the whole consciousness” (Bowling 345). The stream of consciousness differs from spoken discussions or conversations because it lacks the punctuation, linearity, and full sentence structure of premeditated thoughts.

The psychological perspective of the stream of consciousness sheds light on an alternative understanding that contains a few aspects similar to the literary definition. In his chapter, “The Stream of Consciousness: Implications for a Humanistic Psychological Theory,” psychologist Joseph F. Rychlak argues: “Ideas are not simply constituted of bodily sensations in building-block fashion, since they take on variegated forms in expression” (Rychlak 100). Rychlak references thought not just as sensation, arguing that ideas are “clothed in different verbal attires and enacted from altering perspectives without losing their identity in meaning expression” (100). This argument slightly opposes Bowling’s claim that consciousness also consists of “images and sensations” (334). In dance, sensations hold greater value than Rychlak insists, in both the physical manifestation of movement and the thoughts that are included. The psychological and literary perspectives offer complexity for deeper research and understanding.

Rychlak discusses William James’ comparison of consciousness to a stream or river whose nature shifts with the flow but “retains the identity of a river…at all times” (Rychlak 100). Even in becoming aware of a shifting identity, Rychlak suggests that a person continually recognizes the self as the self, despite shifting circumstances and thoughts. The article titled “A Consciousness-Based Look at Spontaneous Creativity” by Ed Sarath, a professor of Music at the
University of Michigan, similarly discusses the idea of an “expansive consciousness” in music improvisation (Sarath 3-4). Sarath mentions, “In heightened consciousness or transcendence, generally compatible with peak experience or flow...the idea of self and Self enables us to distinguish between states of consciousness and corresponding experiences of time” (3). Although Sarath’s statement slightly opposes Rychlak’s, the overarching understanding maintains that consciousness, known as the stream, is a vast space where the self can be consistently expressed in heightened states of improvisation.

With the lack of research specifically connecting all three aspects of my work, this thesis aims to develop an improvisational practice with a foundation in the stream of consciousness writing technique. Existing work in the fields of improvisation, dance, music, psychology, and literature have intersecting lines of discovery that can be mapped and linked to each other (Appendix A). These overlapping ideas can help connect my research to the field of dance improvisation in a way that challenges dancers to dive into their inner workings and thoughts. This research investigates if the stream of consciousness technique helps dancers become better attuned to their authentic selves during movement improvisation practice.
CHAPTER 3: METHOD

“Clutter, declutter, do you see me? Yes I can, hello there, there it is, what, dark, with hints of light, like after the storm, calm after the storm, river, never the same twice, words float and flood the stream, it’s the same stream but not. Rooted, stay rooted, grounded, mud, muddy mud, it’s wet and damp, I can sink into it, here I’ll stay, rooted below.”

Sarina Ramirez-Ortiz, Personal Journal 11/7/2017

Overview of the Process

The stream of consciousness writing technique was practiced with seven undergraduate dancers and incorporated into the movement research. The dancers used their personal journals to transcribe their thoughts which were then used to discuss authenticity and the development of improvisational dance prompts. I included myself as a participant-observer in the stream of consciousness writing sessions and some of the movement-based research explorations. The undergraduate participants were female students at the University of California, Irvine, with ages ranging from eighteen to twenty-one years old. Each of the participants were studying dance as their major, with two of the dancers in their first year of study, three in their second year, and two in their fourth year. Their dance education ranged from ten to eighteen years of dance technique training and one to six years of dance improvisation training. The research process spanned the course of seven months and was organized into three phases: 1) Diving into the Stream, 2) Topographies of Stream and Self, and 3) Crafting the Structure and Space of the Concert.

Phase 1: Diving into the Stream

During the months of October, November, and December of 2017, I met with seven dancers once a week over a six-week period. Each session was approximately two hours wherein
I would direct short improvisation sessions with stream of consciousness writing and speaking. I introduced the use of prompts, which consisted of broad instructions to guide improvisational choice-making and writing. This phase of the research introduced dancers to various forms of creation through different approaches to movement. I created prompts to give the dancers before a movement or writing session:

1. Written reflections with discussions after the scores were experienced
2. Affirmational statements, questions or quotes to guide the initial stream of consciousness entries and ease the dancers into writing down their thoughts
3. Vocalizing sounds or the stream of consciousness during movement improvisation
4. Writing stream of consciousness observations while others improvise
5. Experiencing the sensation of touch or contact improvisation while vocalizing the stream of consciousness
6. Hearing affirmational statements while simultaneously improvising
7. Hearing descriptions of images and sensations to encourage recollection of memories and past selves to guide improvisation

These approaches were all utilized in the first phase of the research to encompass a broad range of how movement scores might be experienced and eventually embodied.

In the first few sessions, dancers were guided by scores to acknowledge their identity and personal selves through solo improvisations and individual journal writing. During each session, I developed movement prompts for the dancers that included guiding questions, tasks, statements, or affirmations. Dancers were asked about their current states of being and how they might access their inner states as a source for improvising (Appendix B.1). The dancers improvised in the space at the same time but were only attending to their personal movement response. To increase their awareness of bridging stream of consciousness thoughts with movement improvisation, the dancers were invited to say out loud, “Okay, I’m listening.” This cue served as a vocal reminder to return to their movement intentions and inner states when they
felt they had stopped listening to their bodies and were moving for the sake of moving (Appendix B.2).

In Phase 1 of the method, we also looked at how the authentic self might manifest through inner thoughts. We practiced stream of consciousness journaling during each session. The journaling was timed, ranging from five to ten minutes, and the dancers wrote non-stop in their personal journals. I provided the dancers one to two prompts each week as a way to continue journaling outside of the rehearsal space. Some of the entries were open-ended in the sense that they were asked to write about their current state, while other entries were guided with specific premises or in response to observations (Appendices B.3, B.4, and B.13-B.19). As a participant-observer, I participated in these journal writing sessions along with the dancers.

When the dancers investigated guided movement scores, they worked as solo dancers while the rest of the group observed and simultaneously journaled their stream entries. This is similar to the process of witnessing and giving voice to what is observed, which is a process found in Authentic Movement (Sager 371). I directed the movement sessions, which also included broader questions that the dancers could utilize during their explorations (Appendices B.1, B.2, and B.7). Between each movement improvisation session, the dancers were asked to write a stream of consciousness journal entry, uninterrupted. As the sessions continued, I gave affirmational statements and questions to the dancers to help guide their weekly stream of consciousness entries (Appendix B.3 and B.4).

After the dancers experienced the movement and journal prompts as separate sessions, I altered the movement prompts to include vocalization of sounds and thoughts. This was a development of the initial prompts and sessions which focused on a written method separate
from the movement. Dancers were tasked with projecting spoken sounds out loud in conjunction with their movement improvisation (Appendix B.5). After working with sound and movement creation, dancers then began to vocalize their stream of consciousness thoughts. One of the prompts they worked with focused on narrating their inner topographies (Appendix B.6). Dancers were asked guiding questions before they began improvising, such as “what does your inner topography look like right now,” “are there hills and valleys,” or “is it under water?” Dancers were asked what each curve and crest within their inner world represented. Within this score, dancers were encouraged to think about this imagery and then vocalize what came to mind through stream of consciousness thought. After exploring these improvisation prompts and journaling about the experiences, the group would gather for open discussions about any revelations they noticed.

**Phase 2: Topographies of Stream and Self**

During the second phase, I met with the dancers twice a week over the course of five weeks in January and February of 2018. The work in the second portion focused on fleshing out the layers of the stream of consciousness. As a progression from Phase 1, discussions shifted focus from the dancers’ physical experiences journaling to the content of the dancers’ journal entries. Movement improvisation sessions were paired with written journal entries that were built around the same concept, task, or question in an effort to dig deeper into their physically moving and internally thinking authentic selves. This was a development from Phase 1, in which the dancers would often work with stream of consciousness entries focused on one idea or concept while the movement scores focused on other ideas. Discussions developed into open
conversations that were occasionally led in the direction of the dancers’ comments and tangents while other times guided by questions I asked.

For the first layer, the dancers practiced consistently writing down their stream of consciousness entries. The flow of their thoughts and the ease of writing them down on paper fluctuated over time. Their movement improvisations progressed, becoming visually dynamic and open from the observer's perspective. The dancers made a range of choices between maintaining stillness or locomotion, to internal and external focusing, to choosing to write during improvisations. Dancers were occasionally asked to recall moments or memories of a time when they experienced certain emotions. In an effort to crack open their authentic experiences and bring them into view, the dancers were then guided by specific questions, such as “What do you believe in, and can you believe in it with all you have?” (Appendix B.13).

After writing their stream of consciousness entries, the next layer consisted of reading excerpts of their entries out loud before having an open discussion about what came up. This transitional point served as the connection between writing the stream and speaking it vocally. The dancers also explored the idea of “meaning” during a movement improvisation session. They were asked to write down a series of words that held meaning for them. These words, which ranged from people to emotions to places, were then read aloud by me, in no specific order and containing everyone’s words, to be utilized as the sole impetus for movement improvisation (Appendix B.9). This score, “Dig, Keep Digging,” provided a limitation or boundary in which the dancers continued exploring the same concepts in order to develop a larger awareness of what else might manifest when the time given to create was prolonged.
After becoming familiar with hearing their written streams and inner thoughts read out loud by other people, the dancers were then encouraged to vocalize their inner streams of consciousness during dance improvisation sessions without any guiding questions or tasks (Appendix B.10). This score, called “Falling In: Streaming Soloist,” developed into another version called “Hello, Okay, I’m Here,” in which the dancers formed a larger circle surrounding the improvising soloist. As each dancer decided to walk into the middle, leaving the boundary of the circle, they would give one of three vocal cues to initiate a trust fall between the soloist and observing dancer. The task for the soloist included vocalization of thought in conjunction with movement and later shifted to movement improvisation without vocalization. The dancers also worked with scores that gave them opportunities to experience basic weight sharing and contact improvisation in which they became familiar with providing physical support for each other.

The dancers then investigated how vocal inclinations, tone, and tempo of the voice while reading out loud might influence their movement improvisations. In reading their entries, tempo and pauses became a part of the improvisational responses. Dancers moved into the next layer, which investigated how they read their own written thoughts out loud. Dancers selected excerpts to practice and record in preparation for the third phase. They practiced reading with partners to prepare for recording the audio of their stream of consciousness excerpts. The dancers also began working with a new solo movement score which began with the prompt: “Improvise a movement solo that shows us who you are, but you cannot dance” (Appendix B.11). The dancers were tasked with becoming aware of their natural inclinations and habits in a way that connected to themselves as people, rather than as dancers.

**Phase 3: Crafting the Structure and Space of the Concert**
In February and March of 2018, I worked with the dancers for six weeks as we prepared for the structured improvisational concert. The concert, which I shared with another graduate student, took place in the Experimental Media Performance Lab at the University of California, Irvine on April 6th and 7th, 2018. This theater space was intentionally selected because of its unique performance capabilities. The space is similar to a black box theater, featuring a rectangular performance space with no set seating arrangement. Throughout the process, the dancers and I often observed each other’s improvisations during Phase 1 and 2 while forming a circle around the moving dancers. This influenced the decision to have the audience sit in a round for the performance, opening the possibility of perspective from all angles. The dancers performed at the center of the space, stepping into the middle while making improvisational choices. I was also able to use video projection during the show and incorporate scenic elements that would otherwise not be available for use in another space.

The title of the concert, *always already in the world*, was formed to capture the essence of the research: a person’s identity and authentic self is constantly present within us. Leading up to the concert, I developed the overall structure for my half of the show. Some of the prompts and scores that were developed during Phase 1 and Phase 2 were utilized in creating the themes and timeline. For example, the score “Hello, Okay, I’m Here” was incorporated as the opening portion of the show. The dancers were given the opportunity to choose when they entered the middle of the space and improvised as soloists. There were also open ensemble improvisation sections where the dancers had more freedom to make movement choices outside of a set score or prompt. The show included composed soloist, duet, and ensemble phrase work in addition to open improvisation sections. Once the entire structure was created and set, the dancers practiced
running the structure of the show with improvised sections before we added the last elements (i.e. voice recordings, music compositions, scenic elements).

The pedestrian solos each dancer improvised during the last part of Phase 2 were developed into more complex movement solos during Phase 3. The dancers utilized excerpts from their journals to help guide their compositions. The dancers performed their personal solos in the show with audio from longer excerpts of their recorded journal entries. These solos served as foundational source material for other composed elements. After workshopping their personal solos, the dancers were tasked with creating new interwoven solos in which they utilized gestures and movements from everyone’s phrases. These new solos were available to the dancers to use as source material during the show. The dancers also learned a portion of one of the dancer’s solos to include as a structured unison phrase. Throughout the performance, the dancers listened to their own recorded streams of consciousness (longer excerpts for their solos and shorter excerpts during group work) to use as inspiration for their movement. The audio clips were also layered with musical compositions.

Before the show began, audience members were encouraged to contribute to the sound score of the performance. I collected the recorded stream of consciousness excerpts that the dancers completed in Phase 2 and placed them into an online survey. Before my half of the show, audience members were asked to read from the survey list and choose the excerpt they would like to hear during the performance. The excerpts were uploaded by the sound designer during intermission and arranged to be played during the first section. The dancers used these partially randomized selections, which were different each show, to influence their movement improvisations for the opening score “Hello, Okay, I’m Here.” Since the audience members were
choosing the content and order of the excerpts to be heard during each performance, the dancers heard different excerpts each time and utilized the voices as impetus for new movement choices.

The dancers also utilized some of their composed movement solos and previous improvisation prompts to create video content for projections during the show. We met at a local park to record videos of the dancers improvising together. I also recorded the dancers’ movement solos being performed outdoors. I mainly utilized wide shots and some close up shots to gather video for the performance. I coached the dancers on how to film a first person viewpoint of their solos. The dancers held the video camera in their hand as they danced their movement solos. In an effort to collect enough footage for the concert, we recorded for a total of around 5 hours. Much of the content did not make it into the concert, but the recordings that were included provided visual information for influencing their improvisations during the performance and creating a relationship between past memories and past selves with their current experiences.

The last elements that were introduced in Phase 3 were scenic elements. The flooring of the stage was made out of butcher paper, which formed a square inside the circle of audience seating (Appendix C). Setting the audience in a circle provided a sense of fluidity and all-encompassing perspective while also connecting to the idea of boundaries and what exists in the middle. Audience interactivity was included to coincide with the theme of connectivity. As the audience members entered the performance space, they were given the opportunity to draw circles on the paper stage. These circles were then utilized throughout the show as part of the spatial environment. The paper stage was also used to give the dancers a chance to write their stream of consciousness thoughts down during the show. The circles contributed to the theme of
flow, fluidity, and connection between inner thoughts, relationships, and movement, among other things.

The last scenic element was dirt, which was brought on throughout the show by the dancers. The dirt related to the theme of digging deep into identity and the authentic self. It contributed to the physicality of being grounded within the stream of consciousness. The intention of the dirt also provided inspiration for the title of my half of the show. To encompass the significance of the dirt, I titled my portion of the show “Here I’ll Stay, Rooted Below,” which is from an excerpt of a stream of consciousness journal entry that I wrote earlier in the process. Leading up to opening night, the dancers and I had to sift the dirt in order to remove any solid rocks. Throughout the course of one week, we sifted 315 pounds of dirt two times through to ensure the dirt was soft and smooth.

The inclusion of music was the final auditory element introduced in addition to the recorded stream of consciousness narratives. The musical works used in the show were composed and created specifically for my half of the concert. I asked three international composers to create music for the performance. The composers, two Italian-based musicians and one based in the Netherlands, collaborated with me in creating the music. I sent videos of the movement structures and written excerpts from stream of consciousness journal entries to aid in the creation process. The process included many online conversations and emails due to the limitations that come with international collaborations. The three musical compositions were designated by section, creating a three-part show.

Each section of the performance was distinguished by themes, movement prompts, and stream of consciousness entries. Section I was titled “Hello, Okay, I'm Here,” which gained the
name from the movement score that begins the dance. This section was coupled with Cindy Giron’s composition, “lands.” Section II, which took on a theme of fear and struggle, was called, “It's Heavy, in my Bones.” This title was pulled from a selection of my personal stream of consciousness journal and was paired with Matteo Mezzabotta’s composition, “Eis antron.” Mezzabotta titled his music composition after an Ancient Greek term for “into the cave.” He chose this as a metaphor for relating the inner self to a cave that may hide darker aspects of ourselves. The last section, Section III, was titled “Quality Materials / Made to Last,” as an ode to the journal in which I wrote throughout the research process. This final section was accompanied by Tania Carboni’s composition, “For a Dancer.”
CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

“The content of much of their work exists at ground level: humans, moving, supremely alive in and engaging with the experience of the moment. No stories. No pirouettes. No frills. Just people.”

_Kent De Spain_

When I first discussed the research terms and definitions with the dancers, I observed the dancers’ conversations were restricted to the use of the terms I gave them: “authentic self” and “stream of consciousness.” With those terms alone defining the scope and range of their experiences, they still seemed limited in identifying what they had actually done and learned about themselves. The work had required immediate shifts in focus so the dancers’ experiences were in the foreground rather than their thoughts being confined or limited by the original defining terms. It is clear that each dancer was challenged to expand their awareness, not only as physically engaged artists, but as people. From the discussions we had about the research, the dancers agreed that the experiential learning of this process broadened their personal reflection and engagement with identity.

_Awareness of the Stream of Consciousness_

In Phase 1 of the method, the dancers began to practice the stream of consciousness writing technique by transcribing their thoughts in written journal entries. We discussed their experiences and their approach to the writing process. They said they struggled to maintain the inconsistent, unpunctuated format of their thoughts as they existed within their mind. The dancers confirmed that they were re-interpreting their thoughts before writing them down so thoughts that were fragmented or disconnected in their heads were being altered and written in full, organized sentence structure. In our first discussions, the dancers also said it was
challenging to write down everything that happened during the stream because their thoughts moved faster than their hands could write. I recognized this limitation and gave the dancers the option of audio recording any stream of consciousness entries that they completed outside the research space, instead of writing them out.

The initial struggle with writing their thoughts was addressed by increasing the practice of journal writing outside the rehearsal space. We practiced writing for longer periods of time during our meetings and the dancers completed weekly journal entries outside of rehearsals. Further along in the process, the dancers became appreciative of the writing experience to the point where they would do extra journaling in addition to the assigned entries. The dancers noted that it was more difficult to journal their stream of consciousness thoughts when they didn’t have any leading questions or guidance. To increase the flow of thought, I gave the dancers guiding questions, statements, or themes as a source for initiating the stream of consciousness and easing them into the process of writing their thoughts (Appendices B.3, B.4, and B.11-B.17). The dancers were then able to open their minds to more personal thoughts and unrelated ideas that flooded in and out of the stream. The content and themes of their entries, which will be discussed later, shifted in depth and complexity.

The movement improvisation sessions changed with each rehearsal. In the first few sessions, the dancers talked about trying to be gentle with their bodies while becoming aware of their current states. It seemed as though the dancers were moving in non-stop patterns. The non-stop journal writing may have contributed to the non-stop moving. In an effort to curb exhaustion and unintentional movement choices from moving constantly, we talked about how they might increase their range of choice to include elements such as stillness, repetition, or
dynamic shifts in time. To encourage more thoughtful, intentional, complex choice-making, I incorporated movement scores that required active listening and responding to phrases, words, or sentences that I spoke out loud during their improvisations (Appendices B.7-B.9).

**Discomfort and Vulnerability**

As the dancers began to recognize their stream of consciousness and question the choices and physicality of their bodies, they were then introduced to vocalization. I wanted to ease the dancers into using their voices by first focusing on sound. The dancers worked with a simple movement score where they were asked to match their movements with vocal sounds (Appendix B.5). This exercise was challenging for them, and one dancer said that her voice sometimes felt stuck. Another dancer confirmed that previous impositions of what dance *should* be seemed to force dance and voice as two separate entities. One dancer questioned how, as babies, we are born with sounds as our language, yet this language seemed to be forgotten, making the task difficult to accomplish. While recognizing the difficulties of using sounds, the dancers questioned if they might be able to find a sense of comfort within the discomfort of vocalization.

After the introduction of using their voices, the dancers were asked to speak their stream of consciousness out loud during a movement improvisation prompt with their eyes closed. The prompt focused on mapping their inner topographies. This inner-directed self-awareness was meant to encourage the dancers to notice themselves within their thoughts and physical bodies (Appendix B.6). For example, I participated in this score as a mover and I also observed and listened to the other dancers while writing down my stream of consciousness entry, which included this written excerpt:

*Sunflowers, yellow sun, brightens my day, water in a case, my brother, I miss my baby brother, I miss them all, Kailee, Cris, Lexie, Ella, Jaxon, houses are not homes, family is*
home. Cracked, like pavement, still strong, just....just. Flowers in the valley, like poppy fields, dusk to dawn, light, lights of my life, my family (Sarina Ramirez-Ortiz, Personal Journal 10/17/17)

This exercise revealed the prevalence of family bonds for the dancers because their vocal stream of consciousness mapping of the inner self turned into a mapping of their relationships.

We discussed the idea of the self being presented as a sort of lineage, portraying how we see ourselves in the world, which may be through internal images or memories of past selves that we are hesitant to share in our movement and thoughts. In mapping the inner self, the majority of the dancers were drawn to mapping their relationships with loved ones, such as family members or friends. In addition to hearing this pattern in the vocal mapping, the dancers’ movement choices fell into a common pattern during the prompt. I think their movements were of similar quality to each other because the dancers were focused on speaking, which invited slower gestural phrases, miniscule, internally focused movements, and complete stillness. Their movement choices seemed limited, yet they created a subtle sense of calm focus as they drifted into a state of non-stop speaking. When first asked to close their eyes while vocalizing, the dancers said this created a feeling of fear. We questioned whether it was a fear of trust or fear of the self.

When the dancers were asked to discuss their stream of consciousness entries with the group, four of the dancers felt comfortable enough to share frequently while three of the dancers didn’t share as often. When we discussed the idea of vulnerability and trust throughout the process, the dancers recognized feelings of discomfort and fear in sharing with a mixed group of close friends and acquaintances. Five of the dancers had been in the UC Irvine dance department for at least one year while two of the dancers were in their first year of school. As time went on,
the dancers mentioned that the act of sharing their inner thoughts and dancing with each other created a deeper connection between the group. During the concluding discussion of the research, one of the dancers talked about how she realized she was hesitant to share early on, but then realized that others were trusting her with their thoughts and this encouraged her to contribute to discussions more frequently.

The work that was happening in the rehearsal space was morphed and crafted as the dancers’ levels of comfort and confidence increased. My expectations were challenged because I originally thought that sharing their stream of consciousness thoughts and written entries out loud would only engage with vulnerability and trust within the group dynamic. However, after the dancers and I reflected on the entire process, they confirmed that speaking their journal entries out loud was more than just an opportunity to be vulnerable and trusting of the group; it challenged their personal expectations, revealing feelings of self-doubt and struggles with self-acceptance. The journey of self-acceptance became significant to the goal of the research and the ultimate aim of understanding the authentic self through the act of acceptance.

Acceptance: Filtering and Censoring Thoughts

As we dug deeper into the stream of consciousness and the “self” during Phase 2, the dancers talked about the challenges of accepting themselves and their innermost thoughts. The dancers realized how much they filtered and censored their thoughts, both when writing their journal entries and when communicating with people during conversations. During one of the discussions, the dancers agreed that they felt their opinions and thoughts would not contribute to conversations and that they were not worthy of being heard. This unfortunate feeling embodied the fear and insecurity of allowing other people to hear personal thoughts. The dancers talked
about how they were afraid to say these thoughts and emotions out loud because this would reveal them as true, demanding that they face these unwanted emotions head on. By filtering their thoughts, the dancers were inhibiting the authenticity of their choices, both in the stream and in movement.

Vocalizing the inner stream of consciousness cracked open the door for the dancers to experience truth and honesty with themselves. In the last reflective discussion, the dancers talked about how filtering their thoughts as they wrote them down was a last-ditch effort at hiding truths they didn’t want to acknowledge. Speaking about intangible thoughts and emotions brought some personal details to surface. Although the dancers’ confidence in writing and ease in speaking increased with time, many of the dancers’ entries would substitute names with pronouns, such as “you,” “he,” or “she.” These identifiers created a vague approach to addressing personal issues. When I talked to the dancers about possibly replacing these pronouns with names, three of the dancers in particular noticed a break through. By recognizing that they were hiding names and subsequently changing the writing to include them, the dancers said they could express themselves more truthfully.

During one of the movement prompts, a dancer noticed that she didn’t feel like she was *dancing*, but rather allowing organic movements to surface alongside her thoughts. This connection to movement and dance is significant, revealing that perceived natural, authentic movement can still arise while learning how to be comfortable with unfiltered thoughts. The movement score that revealed these connections was a remodeled version of “Dig, Keep Digging.” I asked the dancers to select a journal entry, which would be read out loud during the movement improvisation session (Appendix B.9). I let them choose because I wanted to ensure
they felt ownership over their thoughts. As the entries were read, we observed each soloist’s movement improvisation as she listened to her own thoughts. When we discussed observations, the dancers agreed that this exercise first instilled feelings of fear that their thoughts and movements were not good enough. Although the initial emotion was fear, the dancers noted that hearing their thoughts read by someone else also revealed clarity and focus on the truth of the words. They said they found a sense of freedom by hearing their thoughts as they moved.

**What is Good?**

The process of filtering brought up a second realization for the dancers: what if their thoughts or choices were not *good* enough? Throughout the process, the dancers felt that their journal entries had to make sense and their movement had to look a certain way. They noted the parallels between this experience and the current culture of multitasking and being involved in multiple commitments at school. The dancers talked about the necessity of being committed to as many things as possible, comparative to a competition. This seemed to draw parallels to the early observations of non-stop movement improvisation. As a group, we also discussed the prevalence of cultural influences and how we might go about breaking the cycles of multitasking by focusing on self-care and choice.

When asking the dancers “what is good,” a few of them agreed that in order for something to be experienced as “good,” there must first be a negative “bad.” One of the dancers recalled cultural influences as the marker for what is good, arguing that the idea of “good” can only be perceived as a social construction created by culture. This is significant to note in connection to Leston Havens’ article in which he discusses a defensive “authentic self” who constantly reacts and adapts to rejection of impulse (370). When considering this as a possible
implication in dance, it becomes clear that the dancers felt primed to be defensive during movement improvisation and journaling as they attempted to protect themselves from feelings of rejection early on in the process.

The dancers’ noticed that the negativity of their expectations lessened after they recognized their fear of not being good enough and accepted the truth of their choices and thoughts. There was a moment during the last week of rehearsals before the concert that I observed a particularly well-connected ensemble movement improvisation session where the dancers explored a larger variety of choices. During the improvisation, the dancers listened to a mix of recorded stream of consciousness words and excerpts that they recorded during Phase 2. The dancers recognized new perspective when I asked them if they thought the session felt good and why. Since the dancers were at the end of a school quarter at the time, they noticed an extreme amount of exhaustion. One of the dancers talked about how she felt more availability of movement choices because the dancers were not on top of each other, moving all the time. She took time and care to watch for what the space needed from her. The exhaustion led them to make the choice of self-care, allowing them to slow down and truly examine what they thought was good and necessary in that moment.

Self Reflection: When and How it Occurs

As the participant-observer and lead researcher, I discovered how the movement scores I utilized shed light on the deeper retrospective process of self-reflection. The dancers agreed that after practicing the act of listening while moving, they had actively reflected on the streams of consciousness and other phrases that they were hearing, which then informed their movement. I recognize this experience as in-motion self-reflection. If thoughtful reflection occurs during
movement improvisation as the dancers are actively listening to prior streams or other guides, then I think this holds significant value for self-reflecting on past selves, identity, memory, and ultimately, the authentic self.

When the dancers participated in movement improvisation scores in which I simultaneously spoke out loud, I realized that the request for them to immediately reflect on and decide their movement while simultaneously listening to me may have been experienced as interruption of flow (Appendices B.7-B.9). The sensation of considering my words while moving could have been perceived as “essentially invading the act of improvisation” (De Spain 13). However, the dancers noted that it instead opened a pathway for thought to be recognized in the moment of moving because they were actively considering what they were hearing. This *in-motion self-reflection*, however intrusive it seemed from my perspective, was recognized by the dancers as a form of guidance. From my observations of the movement improvisation prompts, the dancers’ movement vocabulary was nurtured and expanded because they were bridging their movement with active listening and understanding. They weren’t moving for the sake of moving.

Alternatively, discussions were also applied as a mechanism for self-reflection after the improvisation had subsided. Discussions provided opportunities to talk about individual thoughts and ideas, recognize any habits in the movement or writing, and think about how those experiences were revealed in the stream entries or movement improvisations. I think self-reflecting on previous experiences such as these promotes a form of introspection that considers ownership of prior choices. Ownership of impulse and choice was a significant aspect of Leston Havens’ research on the authentic self. Havens defines the development of the
“authentic self” as directly connected to feelings of ownership over choices and values, which is recognized through self-reflection (375-377). The dancers noted established feelings of ownership and acceptance after they stopped filtering their thoughts and began to acknowledge their feelings, emotions, and choices as their own, finding confidence in sharing them.

**Recognizing the Authentic Self as a Complex, Evolving Being**

A variety of questions arose for the dancers and myself as we tried to understand the authentic self through movement improvisation and stream of consciousness. The dancers grappled with understanding their relationships, beliefs and values, vulnerability and trust, what is good, and what it means to be human. There were multiple instances when the dancers identified themselves as deeply connected people. Their stream of consciousness entries in particular revealed that they connected their relationships with family and friends to the overarching theme of love. One of the dancers said she didn’t realize that she was so full of love and that it was a central theme in her identity. Another dancer had an alternate experience, saying she feared her thoughts would reveal that she didn’t have any love left for certain people.

As the dancers considered their identities in connection to people, they realized the fears, doubts, and guilt that were also present could be attributed to the experience of losing precious people and relationships. As a participant-observer, I resonated with these mixed emotions prevalent in my journal entries:

*I almost lost it, the popcorn, suck it down, don’t cry in front of these strangers, breathe, popcorn, just add the butter, you used to add the butter, it’s funny, I can’t even add butter to popcorn without thinking of you dad. That’s how much you affect us, butter and popcorn...I wonder if the kids would feel this too, popcorn, popcorn, popcorn, butter, add salt, not too much, don’t make it soggy, dad, dad, I wonder if he’s okay, could he be?* (Sarina Ramirez-Ortiz, Personal Journal 1/27/2018)
These mixed feelings, common for all the dancers, were presented as an opposition to the sensation of love. However, I realized that the complexity of the authentic self naturally results in opposing experiences. I think that the varying emotional responses are significant to consider in understanding the “authentic self” as a self that also survives traumatic life experiences. During the concluding discussion with the dancers, we discovered that seven out of the eight participants, including myself, had experienced some form of a traumatic life experience, ranging between deeply affecting break-ups, divorce, death, and struggles with self-acceptance.

Towards the end of Phase 2, I asked the dancers what they thought it meant to be human (Appendix B.17). Their responses captured a glimpse into the complexity of human identity, and I think this encapsulated the realization that the “authentic self” may not be fully understood. When discussing what it means to be human, the dancers agreed that humans are representative of individual imperfection and continual growth. One of the dancers noted that the difference between humans and other living things is that humans knowingly place themselves in vulnerable situations, for example, this research process. For other living creatures, the instinctual inclination is to flee from vulnerable situations. I think that the experience of vulnerability is unique to being human because it is within vulnerable instances, such as the experience of this research process, that people can learn the most about themselves and get a little closer to discover the authentic self.

**Culmination of the Concert**

Since the concert included recordings of the dancers’ streams of consciousness entries and previously recorded videos for projection, I think the dancers were able to focus on movement creation as a means of reliving past stream of consciousness memories and
intertwining past selves with their current states. By including the recorded streams of consciousness, the dancers were once again open to the possibility of vulnerability because their thoughts were heard by an audience. I think the process of being comfortable enough to allow their thoughts to be heard by strangers was an important stepping stone in accepting their authentic selves. In connection to the trust and discomfort of first sharing their thoughts with the other dancers, they were challenged by presenting their inner-most thoughts and simultaneously revealing their physical, moving bodies in dance improvisation.

The dancers’ movement choices grew vastly in comparison to the first improvisation sessions we had and the outcome of the performance. The dancers confirmed they felt increased comfort and confidence in their movement choices while listening to their inner thoughts. I think the structure of the concert, which included some composed movement, improvised solos, and some open ensemble improvisation sections, provided a platform for the dancers to continue exploring choice in a changing environment. As a structured improvisation, the performance embodied the idea that our authentic selves are always changing and shifting, yet we attend to and identify these shifting selves as our own being. The audience interactivity, which included the drawing of circles on the paper stage and the selection of stream of consciousness recordings, provided a shifting environment for the dancers to interact with, which I think parallels the ebb and flow of daily life experiences.

For all of the dancers, this concert was the first performance experience in which they dealt with such an influential scenic element as dirt. The dancers developed a unique relationship with this element because their interactions would vastly change the placement of the dirt. Particles would float up into the air as soon as the dirt was touched or moved. As the dancers
rolled around on the stage, the boundary between the dirt and themselves was blurred. There was no longer a space between the dancers and the dirt as they became completely consumed by it. As they moved within the middle of the space, dust would float off of them which altered the visual perception of the environment. I found that the symbolism of the dirt was also representative of their journey towards self-acceptance. The dirt begins in small mounds on the paper stage, untouched and seemingly insignificant. As the dancers approached the dirt by spreading handfuls of it for the audience to see, they eventually spread it over the stage and into the air for the audience to witness among their moving bodies.

For the composed movement sections, each dancer utilized a foundational movement phrase that became a representation of their “authentic self.” The dancers created a phrase from a single statement: “Improvise a movement solo that shows us who you are, but you cannot dance.” These movement phrases were meant to be a microscopic examination of the dancers’ habits and natural tendencies. The dancers talked about how they initially struggled to create a movement phrase that consisted of uninteresting, gestural, pedestrian movement. I found this interesting to note because the dancers had previously considered the idea of social norms and constructions making up our perception of what is good, which correlated to the feeling that pedestrian habits were not considered “dance.” The development of this prompt was unique in that the dancers were able to recognize aspects of each other in these simple phrases that could be identified with the creator.

The dancers crafted their simple movement phrases into more robust, dynamic excerpts by using written stream of consciousness entries to influence their movement. These developed phrases were considered each dancers “first solo,” and the dancers then created “second solos”
out of a mix and match of everyone's phrases. These “second solos” were meant to encapsulate pieces of all the dancers’ identities into one movement phrase. The dancers used their first and second solos throughout the video projection recordings and the live show as inspiration for movement during the improvised sections. I think the use of foundational movement created motifs and recurring ideas that were then morphed and crafted differently by each dancer. In essence, their authentic choices were constantly shifting throughout each show, but they were still engaging with the physical and mental memories of their past selves in movement, thought, and video, which developed the shifting and evolving present selves that the audience observed.
“She improvises. She starts in the middle, in the event of creative stutter to grow an experience of the incommunicable, to perform the rush of a singular coming-to-consciousness as it fields the qualitative relations that emerge with it. One feels the rhythm of the interval, the proximity between the phonemes, syllables, words; feels distance between the digit, finger, arm, mouth, eyes, camera lens, table leg, book spine. She percolates as she heats up.”

Sher Doruff referencing Jeanine Durning

New Discoveries

As I reflect on the culmination of my research, I am deeply moved by the value of the work we produced and the influence it had on the dancers’ well-being. I had set out with the goal of developing a structure for a dance improvisation practice grounded in the stream of consciousness technique. However, it became far more significant than simply finding the “authentic self” by means of the practice. Surprisingly, an unforeseen purpose was realized: healing through self discovery. I discovered many raw emotions and connections to this experience as a participant and it helped me realize how these feelings connected to my personal values. I didn’t realize the breadth of these implications until I had the final discussion with my dancers. They confirmed that the experience of self-healing and self-love was integral to their personal growth and healing.

This work only touches upon a brief investigation on the stream of consciousness and dance improvisation. The dancers agreed that the journey of this process was short in comparison to the deeper level of self-understanding that could be achieved if they continued with the work. The dancers said the work felt therapeutic and promoted self-healing in ways that they did not expect. One of the dancers talked about how the combined writing and movement research helped her access emotions and experiences she had been suppressing. The dancers were
surprised by the content of their writing because it revealed true experiences and feelings that they were neglecting to cope with, including animosity, guilt, or general unhappiness towards someone or themselves. The revelations, although sometimes connected to current experiences, were also tied to past feelings that had been buried, such as pent up grief and anger over a previous family divorce or the depression and sadness of someone who had passed away.

The dancers confirmed that the vocalization, writing, and movement improvisation provided an opportunity for releasing traumatic experiences and attempting to understand their thoughts and feelings that they otherwise ignored. One of the dancers agreed that understanding herself through writing served as a coping mechanism for gathering her thoughts and recognizing the complexity of her emotions. The dancers agreed that the work was exceedingly beneficial and became a part of their life outside the scope of the research. They wanted to continue writing on their own time. Their grief was acknowledged in their journal entries and they could respond to the entries during movement prompts that utilized their writings.

**Expanding the Work**

I think the positive self-care and reflection that occurred during the process would be beneficial to other populations, perhaps for dancers and non-dancers alike. I think non-dancers could benefit from the practice because the dancers who participated not only experienced growth as dance improvisors, but increased personal growth as people. For example, a dancer talked about how her loved ones noticed a shift in her physical and emotional state after participating in the research. Her friends and family noticed the return of her true self, who was transformed from the low-energy, sad, and depressed spirit she was struggling with, into the confident, alive, and content person she is at her core. With transformations such as these, I think
the practice can serve as a crucial grounding process of self-discovery and healing that can be easily transferred to non-dancers.

In order to maintain a non-dancer friendly approach, I would shift the focus of the initial prompts to be movement-oriented so that they have the opportunity to become familiar and comfortable with moving and dancing in this type of environment. To promote feelings of safety and trust, I would implement more group ensemble improvisation prompts so that the non-dancer participants wouldn’t be limited by being soloists in the beginning of the process. I also think that including partnered discussions of their written journal entries would ease them into conversing with larger groups. In this way, I think the participants would be able to build mini relationships with each person in the group during shifting partner discussions which would then transfer to larger, open group discussions about the content and meaning of their thoughts and choices.

I believe the work can develop a deeper connection with the spiritual aspects of the self by including other disciplines, such as meditation. I would suggest that this practice become broadened and improved by focusing on positive affirmation meditation. I briefly utilized affirmational statements from Sherrie Dillard’s book, *Discover Your Authentic Self*, for a movement prompt during the research process. The prompt was simple, encouraging the dancers to listen to the affirmational statements and respond to them with movement (Appendix B.7). When I read these statements and the others in Dillard’s book, I noticed the deep connection the words had in creating a visual image in my mind. I think this could be included as both an active speaking practice and an active listening or writing practice. The participants could create their own affirmational statements, for example, I would use “I can float between peace and
contentment.” Statements such as these can then be utilized as impetus for movement improvisation, words they chant out loud and focus on through meditation, or prompts for guiding their stream of consciousness journal entries. Each statement can be powerfully connected to the self and the mind, guiding the listener to explore their inner perspectives and imagination.

**Limitations and Further Considerations**

I have also considered a few of the limitations of the work and how it can be strengthened for future continuation. The first consideration is the amount of time I had to work with the dancers. I suggest that the process be expanded over a longer period of time in order to lengthen the time for journaling and experiencing movement prompts. Often times we had discussions that lasted for one hour out of the two-hour block we had, leaving a shorter amount of time for movement exploration and writing. It is also significant to note the limitation of writing and observing simultaneously. When the dancers were asked to observe movement improvisations and journal at the same time, I realized that it was not possible to do both. It may be beneficial to utilize a laptop in the future for speed and accuracy in writing down the stream of consciousness.

In addition, I also think the limitation of starting with a mixed group of dancers who did not necessarily know each other contributed to the slower progress at the start of the research. If I did this research again, I would include more opportunities for creating a communal dynamic sooner in the process. After introducing the practice of journal writing and improvisation prompts, I would utilize the community-building aspects found in ensemble improvisation. I think the dancers would benefit from experiencing group improvisation prompts that guide them as an ensemble rather than soloists. For example, the dancers could be asked to move through the
space by simply trying to make eye contact with others. For each person they see who initiates a smile or other form of acknowledgement towards them, they then approach the other person and mutually decide to form some type of relationship, either through gesture, tactile touch, or vocal cues. An ensemble structure such as this might help build a greater sense of community through active partnerships and moving conversations.

**Influence on Personal Practice and Perspective**

As I continue my journey as a creative artist in the dance community, I look forward to utilizing this research experience to develop my teaching pedagogy and creative process. This work has reinforced some of my artistic values, such as the importance of community and caring for the well-being of others. As a teacher, I recognize the importance of checking in with students and serving as a mentor for them to speak to about issues they might be struggling with. I think student health is an important aspect of being a teacher, as someone who guides them and provides a space for them to learn and grow. I intend to utilize my developing practice of dance improvisation and stream of consciousness writing in my own teaching. I hope to create my own improvisation course based on this research to teach within a university setting in which the dancers are the creators of the work that occurs, both through their improvisational choices and stream of consciousness writing. I greatly appreciate the power of the creative voice and I believe that dancers have more opportunities to explore who they are when the creative work is based on their personal choices.

The culmination of the research and performances revealed both a sense of fulfillment as well as an unfinished journey for my work. I think the dancers ultimately discovered aspects of themselves that they were able to recognize and appreciate as a part of their growing identities.
The dancers confirmed that they felt closer to finding their authentic selves, but realized that their authentic selves are ever-evolving as they continue to grow and learn throughout the human lifespan. I think this research uncovered the uncomfortable, yet acceptable, realization that you may sometimes struggle with being happy with yourself and acknowledging the self as good. However, as Simone Forti says in Kent De Spain’s book about the forms of “good” in improvisation: there is “the magic you and the audience feel when everything is creative and flowing” and then “there is the humanity apparent when you struggle but successfully negotiate the times when that magic is missing” (76). My research and the concert encapsulated the comfort of knowing and appreciating the value of the authentic self, a representation of our identities that may shift and flow with struggle and time, but will remain with us throughout our lives.


Rychlak, Joseph F. “The Stream of Consciousness: Implications for a Humanistic Psychological


Topography of Ideas: This is an early map that I drew to look at intersecting lines of connection between the literature I read. This map was a preliminary tool used to examine the existing literature as a web and discover where the overlaps and disagreements occurred.
APPENDIX B: MOVEMENT AND JOURNAL PROMPTS

1. 10-Minute Movement Improvisation:
   a. Think about your awareness/consciousness of the right now. Where are you? Is it an emotion, a feeling, a flowing state, a metaphor, more than one thing?
   b. How can this feed your improvisation as a source?
      i. 10 minutes for movement exploration
         1. Write down anything that happened, recall the experience.
            a. Discussion - What happened?

2. 15-Minute Movement Improvisation:
   a. How can you acknowledge your state of being?
      i. You can be, are being, and becoming.
   b. You exist in the now, and the now, and the now, but how you emerge in the now is “from within the flow and context of what has already occurred” (De Spain 45).
      i. Question for movement: What does my body want?
         1. Vocal response: “Okay, I’m listening”
            a. 15 minutes for movement exploration

3. Journal Affirmational Statement:
   a. I can be in love with my inner topography.

4. Journal Open-Ended Question:
   a. What would you do, if you could…?

5. Sounding Out with Movement:
   a. Utilize vocal sounds (not words) as a narration of your movement
   b. Does it feel purposeful or naturally arising? Is there a difference? How does it correspond to the stream of consciousness?
   c. Verbal awareness→ sounding out your movement improvisation
      i. Example: “Ohheee, ahhh, pft, zzooah”

6. Inner Topographies of the Authentic Self:
   a. Movement Affirmation: I can be in love with my inner topography.
   b. What does your inner topography look like right now? Hills and valleys? Grassy? Under water? What does each curve and crest represent?
      i. Solo movement improvisation time: Enter the space when you feel inclined, gently embrace the person before you, and then they will exit.
         1. Awareness: When does the space invite you?

7. Sensation of Affirmation:
   a. How can these affirmations guide or influence your improvisation?
      i. Ensemble movement improvisation while listening to affirmations from Sherrie Dillard’s book read out loud
1. I am ready for the adventure of knowing me
2. I slow down and take it easy
3. I enjoy my freedom to be me
4. I can declutter and more clearly see who I am
5. I plant a flower and blossom
6. I am rooted within
7. I can feel my light

8. Images of Sensations:
   a. What do you remember and recall? Allow these statements to manifest in your improvisation:
      i. Floating along the surface, what do you see?
      ii. Crisp morning air, fresh but stinging when inhaled
      iii. Warm cup of coffee or tea, that first sip touching your mouth
      iv. Uncontrollable laughter your belly aches and your cheeks are sore from smiling
      v. Grass beneath your bare foot, gently poking your sole

9. Dig, Keep Digging:
   a. Utilize only these words or sentences, explore within the limitations of the words to discover what else might be there (can be done with words, sentences, or stream of consciousness entries)
      i. Modified stream of consciousness entry: write words that hold meaning to you
         1. Listen to these words and allow them to guide your movement
            a. What else is there?

10. Falling In: Streaming Soloist:
    a. Soloist begins to speak their stream of consciousness while dancing
       i. Dancers observe while in a small circle around the soloist
       ii. When ready, observers take turns falling into the middle as the soloist falls into the observer
           1. What happens with trust and vulnerability?

11. Solo movement score:
    a. Improvise a movement solo that shows us who you are, but you cannot dance.

12. Hello, Okay, I’m Here (modified version of Appendix B.10):
    a. Begin a solo improvisation in the center of the circle
    b. Outer dancers may enter the space and approach the soloist
       i. First dancer enters and says vocal cue: “Hello”
          1. Soloist trust falls into the first dancer
       ii. Second dancer enters and says vocal cue: “Okay”
          1. Soloist trust falls into the second dancer and they are lowered to the ground
iii. Third dancer enters and says vocal cue: “I’m here”
   1. Soloist and the third dancer create a mini contact improvisation duet
   c. There is circularity and fluidity in the cycle

13. Movement and Journal Question:
   a. What do you believe in? Can you believe in it with all you have?

14. Journal Statement and Question:
   a. Fear, fearful, fear not. If fear had a name, what would you whisper out loud?

15. Journal Question:
   a. What’s in the middle?

16. Journal Question:
   a. Why words? Because meaning.

17. Journal Statement:
   a. Think about a thought...but don’t think too hard.

18. Journal Question:
   a. What is human?

19. Journal Question:
   a. What is good?
APPENDIX C: PERFORMANCE SPACE

Performance Space: This is a birds-eye-view drawing that I created to map out the performance space. It includes the square, 21’x21’ butcher paper stage in the center of the space. The audience floor seating is set in a round with additional risers and seating at the edges of the space. There are notes for projection screen placement, backstage areas, and the tech table.