Danthology

Writings from the Spring 2014 Danceaturgy Workshop
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I. Minding the Dance

Before walking into the audition to become the 4th member of the dance company 4JUNE, I became so hesitant that I wanted to turn right around. My thoughts: “What if I get chosen? It’ll be more work on top of my last semester of school. I don’t want anything to get in the way of graduating.” … “I wonder what the other girls look like and dance like. Do I compare to any of them? Will I be good enough? Will I fit in?” … “I hope I do well. I’m just going to try my best. Okay, just get out of the car and walk in. Be brave.” I guess that was my progressive pep talk to myself. That is exactly what goes on in my mind before I am about to audition for something. First, the “what if’s,” then the “am I good enough’s,” then the “just do it, this is what you love.” During the audition, my nerves calmed down and my mind stopped racing. I didn’t need to pep talk myself anymore because I had made the scariest move of the night, which was simply entering the situation. Now I really just had to let my talent carry me through. Auditions really feel easier when I let go of my thoughts and just go with the motions/let my heart guide me/let fate work its magic. Easing your mind as a dancer is an acquired skill that comes with experience and comfort, in my opinion. But it wouldn’t be long until my thought process was kick started again. This time, in a less worried/frantic manner, and instead in more of an intelligent/composed/all-seeing manner. When we started dancing, my ‘dancer brain’ turned on. I began to observe…as dancers, we must focus our tunnel vision on so many things at once. There are several tunnels being opened; we observe the teacher/choreographer so we can memorize and try to perfect the choreography, we observe the dancers around us so we can scope out our competition, we observe the judges and how they observe all of us dancers in the room. All of this observing and analyzing happens as our bodies sync with our hard-working brains and multitask away. It’s really such a complex thing to ask how a dancer’s mind works. As each singular dancer processes and thinks differently, there will always be new answers deriving from this question. Factors such as the setting, the mood, the surrounding dancers, the surrounding viewers, the music, the silence, the noise, the distractions, etc. are taken into account. For me, in this particular situation, my mind was loud at first. Then it realized that it didn’t need to be, because my talent and fate would take it from there. The third stage of my thought process was collected as I was quietly feeling out energy of the dancers and watching how well/not well they were dancing, making observations and decisions as I moved. Lastly, when we were finished dancing, I was back to the thought of letting fate work its magic. All of that happened over the course of 2.5 hours. – Felicia

I was in the front of the studio watching another group of dancers perform an adagio in ballet class. From my angle in the corner, it looked quite beautiful when the adagio first began. There was such power in the unity of the dancers. The movement was simple but had an impact because of the large number of dancers moving as one. As it progressed the dancers began to move on different counts. The same effect it once had was then gone. However, I felt blessed to see the beginning of it. There is a true beauty in the simplest of movements if done with intent. Also when I stood there watching, I thought wow this movement looks difficult, and then I realized wait a minute I am about to do the same thing. It made me think what does a non-dancer think when they see dancers performing on stage? I have a feeling they are either blown away or could care less. – Kim
When a dancer finds his or her way of synching the mind and body, he or she will discover the most successful pathway through a life of dance. As a perpetually analytical dancer, you could say that this is what makes me “mindful”, yet time and time again I have been told to get out of my head. At this level of dancing, my success does not lie in intrinsically perfecting the steps, but instead expending explosions of energy and revitalizing risk-taking movements. My progress has stemmed from not being as mindful as one might think; instead of dwelling on the exactness of perfection, it’s about getting lost in the movement. Therefore, my “mindful” dance moment of this week occurred when in ballet class I realized that if I simply let my mind wander, while relying on my technique, I could appreciate the combinations more. In my modern class later the same day, as my mind was once again preoccupied with tangential thoughts, this multi-tasking actually enabled me to once again revel in my own dancing, as opposed to mindfully agonizing and antagonizing. - Heather

On most weekends I try to take dance classes in New York City. Broadway Dance Center offers a wide range of classes and attracts many dancers from all over the world. I was taking a ballet class with a teacher who I have never had before. In the class, there was a group of young girls who travelled to the city from Brazil. They could not speak English. Only one of the girls was able to understand the teacher, and she then had to translate and relay information back to her friends. I even noticed the difference in their pronunciation of French vocabulary for ballet terms. Once the teacher demonstrated the exercises, the language barrier did not seem to matter. Everyone was able to grasp the material easily. I found it fascinating that despite the cultural differences amongst our class, there was not much that separated us as dancers. I came to realize that no matter where you go or who you have trained with, dance will always be a familiar and beneficial experience. Movement is a language that is universal. – Jennifer

The most memorable experience I had this week occurred in choreography. This is my second semester taking choreography, an art form I have much difficulty with. In class we discussed self-doubt and I realized that most of the struggle I experience happens inside my own mind. As I try to create movement there is a constant stream of thoughts that run through my mind, “How can other people think of things that are so cool? Why can I make anything interesting?” and with that kind of inspiration of course nothing wonderful can be produced. Throughout this process I have had moments when I was able to attempt to step outside of my comfort zone but the constant concern with what others are thinking is so permanently stamped on my mind and ultimately restricts me. I believe that this comes from the way that I was brought up in my dance life. There is such a concern with one’s outer appearance in dance, it is after all a performance art. I am always considering what I look like to the outside world, and the inability to release this way of thinking restricts my creative potential. So, I continue on with the battle to release myself from the obstruction of my own mind. – Emma

My most recent dance experience that has left a mark on me is my chance to have been able to work with Douglas Dunn and his dancers. This choreographer is different than some choreographers I have worked with before. Douglas’s style is very influenced by ballet, there is also a huge focus on a rounded lower back. He is very inventive and relaxed. Being in Aubade, you would think I should know exactly what it is about, but, I think Douglas purposely did not tell us what he created this work based off of. All I know is what I have read and what I feel when I am dancing in Aubade. I have never performed a style of dance like Douglas’s. I have
had to really keep focus on rounding my lower back when all I’ve been trained to do is keep it straight through most of my technical movement. I love to be challenged against what I have always been trained to do, I feel that I am really learning to use my body in different ways. Having this experience has really forced me to relax when performing. The movement he gives does not work for me if I do not relax. Watching the company dance and just having the chance to perform with them has been an experience all in itself, I love being around people that I would like to be like one day very soon. I have learned many things within this experience some I truly do not think I can bring into words. – Genna

For my first journal I am going to write about my experience taking class with dancers from Andrea Miller’s company Gallim Dance. I am fortunate enough to be in Miller’s piece, Wonderland that was staged by company members Dan and Fran. When the two came one week for rehearsal they gave us a class before the rehearsal started. The class they taught was an unbelievable experience for me. The way Andrea Miller’s dancers move is marvelous to me so to have the chance to dance around the space with them in a class while they taught was amazing. They told us to stand away from the mirror and to worry about no one but ourselves. For most of the class they told us to keep our eyes shut and just move the way we felt was right. It was as if I went into a whole other world during this class. I felt free and secure and no judgment. I listened to Dan’s voice and I moved in the way he described and I just let myself go. My mind wasn’t wandering or thinking about what I was having for breakfast the next day, it was just living in the moment. I didn’t care how I looked because moving around, in the way that they told us too, felt incredible. It was as if I was a new dancer with an open mind to move in a different way that had no restrictions, no one correcting you, and no insecurities. – Megan

It’s not that I hadn’t thought about the choreography for Spent Days Out Yonder over the break – I had. I just hadn’t practiced it “full-out,” as we dancers say. It was more of a mental rehearsal whenever I recalled the movement: I would see the image of myself doing the movement, in my mind. I didn’t have to assume the posture of a dancer to practice; in fact, I could do so while being sedentary. Multitasker that I like to be, this was especially convenient during car rides, at the restaurant where I work, while brushing my teeth, etc. I used to do this sort of mental rehearsal all the time to practice the tap solos I had as a young dancer at a competition studio, especially during the car rides on the way to my private lessons where I’d rehearse the piece with my coach. The envisagement for Spent Days Out Yonder had proved not to be as fruitful as I’d hoped or expected, however. I’d gotten stuck in many places – i.e., I couldn’t remember what movement followed. The choreography – 10 minutes of seamlessly transitioning movement – is like a long ribbon, in that sense; but my ribbon had had multiple kinks. When we ran the piece as a group on Friday, I understood why my mental rehearsal hadn’t worked like a charm. Spent Days is one of those dance works that is not supposed to be (only) thought about; it is meant to be done. It was created in such a way that every bodily action elicits a reaction – not necessarily an equal and opposite one, as Sir Isaac might look or call for…but a reaction nevertheless. For example (and this one, Newton would appreciate), a backwards swinging arm causes a leg to swing forward and up into attitude position. In this piece, Bill T. Jones gives us the pleasure of listening to our bodies. Thus, dancing in rehearsal on Friday, it felt natural, and I was able to keep going through most all of those places where I’d gotten stuck previously, without a hitch. The ribbon was restored! - Kelly
This week in Ballet class I discovered that I need to think a little less. I know it sounds silly but it's true. After my teacher demonstrates a combination and then sends us across the floor to execute it, I spend an abundant amount of time ripping apart the entire combination in pieces pulling out the parts of the combination that I feel are the most challenging. That very second I tell myself I can't do it, but it's not a matter of not being able to do it but wanting to do it perfectly. Already knowing that there is no such thing as perfect I still tell myself I can't. Throughout the entire class there is an ongoing fight between my thoughts of doubt and my thoughts of just having the courage to go out there, do my absolute best, and as a result leave the class knowing that I gave it my all. My teacher made a general comment to the class saying "this is dance so dance and stop thinking so much". As a dancer we are always constantly thinking, but when I think too much I hold myself back from growth and I hinder myself from fully moving the way I know I can. Instead my mind is in constant motion but my physical self is frozen. - Mecca

II. Anticipating the dance

Anticipation of dance can be linked to rising levels of anxiety; thoughts rush through the dancers’ head in preparation of what’s to come. Anticipation turns to anxiety when the dancer knows that he or she has not yet prepared well enough, or at least doubts having done so sufficiently. Therefore, the root of anticipating the dance lies in one’s level of preparation. Walking into the studio, dancers take with them their cumulative trials of past classes and experiences, which accumulate to create their long term dance memory. The short term then results from the prior prep leading up to the impending dance experience, such as stretching, working out and eating right. Waiting for the dance depends on the situation for which the dancer is entering, but the common thread among any dance situation is that the less prepared the dancer is, the more anxious he or she will be in anticipation of the class, rehearsal, or audition. There’s nothing worse than walking into an audition without knowing in the least what you’re in for. It can result in embarrassment and potentially doom the dancer to have an image of unprofessionalism. The fact is that when a dancer is well prepared, he or she can anticipate the best outcome of the experience, sans anxiety and apprehension. - Heather

There is nothing quite like the feeling of dancing on stage. The preparations I make the day of a performance are in some ways just as important as the decisions I make once I get on the stage. These “preparations” can help promote the freedom of my dancing or hinder the confidence I feel onstage. The day of a show consists of my planning exactly the right meals to fuel by body without upsetting my stomach or overstuffing myself. Finding that perfect balance makes all the difference. I find that putting on stage makeup is a tricky task, and I tend to prefer to get it on early so that I don’t have to rush and worry about making mistake that could take my focus from mentally preparing to dance. Once I have this settled I am faced with the imperative task of warming up. Throughout warmup I aim to prepare every muscle to perform at its maximum potential but I am also consistently weighing my energy level and telling myself, “conserve here”, while also emphasizing movements that will benefit my performance, “this will help me find my center”. But preparations for the stage ultimately begin long before the day of the performance, in rehearsals I am constantly thinking about how each moment will feel once I am under the stage lights, and I try to emulate the unique sensation of performing on a stage. – Emma
“Whoa! I’m up next, what happens if I mess up? “What if they don’t like the way I dance? “OK Mecca it’s time, you’re up next…Go out there and give it your all and do your absolute best.” These are some of the thoughts that are going through my head as I wait for the dance to take place. I give myself a little pep talk. I try to eliminate any negative thoughts that may distract me and cause me to forget the choreography. There are also times when in my head all I’m thinking about is the counts. For instance, last semester I was in Tyler Gilstrap’s: The Collective. The entire dance was in a 6 count, it was insanely fast and it was very specific. Right before going on stage my every thought became 1 2 3 4 5 6. At this point all I knew how to do was count to 6. After getting out of my own head I would huddle up with the rest of the girls that were in the dance. Together we would hype each other up and go over any last minute reminders. Lastly, we all grabbed hands said a prayer and at that very moment every thought of doubt or nervousness was gone and I was ready to perform. - Mecca

My thoughts before dancing vary from focused nervousness to relaxed detachment. This depends on my confidence level with the material that I am about to perform and the space I am about to dance in. Assuming that I am well rehearsed and confident in the movement, I usually try to set up an atmosphere for myself before I dance. It could probably be compared to actors getting themselves “in character” before walking on stage. While an actor may imagine what their character had for breakfast or where they are entering from offstage I try to find the emotional tone of the piece and imagine what the landscape might be on stage. I like to consider motives for moving, which are usually emotional not “task based”. I’m not sure if this is more or less effective than task based motives but is naturally how I prepare myself to perform. When I feel the most successful in improvisation I usually have found strong, or specific, emotional motivations to explore through movement. - Haley

Anticipation can influence a dancer in an abundance of ways. It can cause anxiety, motivation, timidity, excitement, etc. My favorite type of anticipation is the kind that causes me to strive to be better. Yesterday, we were watching videos of various ballet pieces in Dance History. I was watching these beautiful dancers in awe, thinking, “I want to dance like that.” The thought made my heartbeat pep up a little bit, and I realized then how much I was anticipating ballet (which was my next class). This force drove me into class with a can-do attitude and a smile on my face. My movement felt richer and more expressive, all because of the inspiration that came from watching these videos before class. To spin off of last week's discussion...some anticipation can influence many thoughts and questions to bounce around in our minds, such as my nervous self-talk before an audition two weeks ago. Instead, this time I felt the anticipation in my chest, more specifically in my heart. It was the kind that gave me butterflies and a sparkle in my eyes. It helped me 'let go' of extra thoughts and 'just dance' and 'go with it.' - Felicia

Breathe. You took off your earrings. Just have fun. You have enough make up on. You know exactly what you are doing. You are allowed to make mistakes. These are some things I think about just before stepping on stage. It is my way of harnessing my nervous energy in order to stop myself from letting my false expectation of my individual perfection get in the way of giving my whole self to the audience. I had a
My mind before a performance is a calm whirlwind of thoughts. I am prepared with the choreography for the performance. However, everything that goes into getting ready backstage passes through my mind. I have a checklist I mentally go through before stepping onto the stage. I tell myself to use the restroom even if I do not have to use it. I would rather be safe than sorry. I reapply my deodorant. I touch up my makeup because it can never be truly done. I always seem to find a hair out of place that needs fixing. I get paranoid that my hair will fall out during a performance. Then right before I go onto the stage I try to find a quiet space by myself so I can simply pray. This prayer helps me be the performer I want to be. As soon as the piece I am in starts my nerves slowly dissipate and I am left dancing in the moment.  - Kim

Anticipation is something that I find exciting as a dancer. Whether it is being at an audition waiting to execute a movement phrase, or even those final moments before walking onto the stage, anticipation is what makes dance rewarding. Specifically before performing on stage, the nerves set in, but also a confidence in knowing that you must go out there and that your body knows what it is about to do. I do not rely on muscle memory, but there is definitely a mind and body separation and syncronization going on simultaneously. That may sound contradictory, but when I am on the side of the stage, my mind is racing through movement phrases trying to review as much as possible, while my body is completely calm in preparation for the full body engagement on stage. Then, once the lights come up and I begin dancing, the reverse happens. My mind becomes completely focused and task oriented, while my body is dancing full out without my mind telling it where to be. Though my mind and body seem split in a sense, they sync up also while on stage. The mind and body have to be in each moment together, but not focused on the same task. Personally, I believe that you can tell when a dancer is 'in the moment', it changes a dance. The dancer's mind and body is a powerful tool, and when a dancer completely and wholly turns themselves over to this 'in the moment' mentality, an outer body experience happens for both dancer and audience. – Julie

My anticipating the dance is much the same pre-performance and pre-execution of a movement phrase in class or rehearsal, because I like to treat class or rehearsal as performance. The hair, makeup, costume, etc. of “real” performance takes the excitement (as opposed to fear or anxiety, one hopes) up a notch, certainly; but my body and mind are generally in the same state in both contexts. “Performing” – whether under the hot spotlights of a theater, or in the natural light entering through studio windows – is placing oneself wholeheartedly into the choreographer’s “vision” – which is, of course, “perfection” in that choreographer’s mind. Dancers are always striving to achieve perfection, from the minute they rotate their legs out to first position for the initial barre exercise in the morning’s ballet class. But “perfect” is unattainable, and no matter the degree to which a dancer is a perfectionist, at a certain point before the curtain goes up, so to speak, he or she is only thinking about doing one’s personal best. For me, all doubts from the past and fears for the imminent future – including the compulsory one that I might not be “on my
leg” – must subside, and I must push them down if they refuse to settle, so as to not “psyche myself out.” In regards to the temporal aspect of pre-performance moments, I usually experience a phenomenon for which I will take description from Tacey A. Rosolowski’s article, “Dessert Time” (which, yes, was about how eating dessert is so blissful that perceptions bend during the indulgence): “the rhythm of time slows and the ‘now’ dilates” (196). It’s showtime. - Kelly

When we first created this duet for Approaching Silence, I liked it, I thought it was interesting and I liked having the chance to turn my choreography into a duet with someone else’s choreography. I did not realize how nervous I would be to balance like that until I had to do it in front of an audience. I kept thinking “don’t fall,” “Just stay,” “I’ll be disappointed in myself if I fall.” In “Approaching Silence” by Rebecca Stenn last year I had to balance on one leg in a fondu attitude. AJ would pick me up turn me around the put me back down then he would let go and I would have to stay there for a little bit on my own in the silence. I remember the first time doing this in front of an audience and it becoming very hard. I would get annoyed at myself because when I was just doing this for Rebecca I would stay every time, I would not even shake. This got me to realize that this entire problem was completely in my head. Every time I would perform that piece I got really nervous right before I would go on to do that section. So, I created a ritual I would do, I would hug Mirella, then hug AJ, then I would say just do it. Every night I did it I was less nervous then the night before. By the end I had finally convinced myself to just relax, well, relax as much as I could considering I was still on stage. This experience taught me a lot. Through my work in technique class my body knows what to do, I just need to let it. I remember talking about this with my old dance teacher and she was able to relate because she has had to go on stage and balance many times. Something she said stuck out to me, “if someone told me to go stand outside on one leg and the other in attitude, I could easily do it. So why does the stage have to be so different?” The answer is, the pressure to be perfect. - Genna

Take a deep breath, focus on the task at hand, and show the audience what you love to do. These are the things that go through my mind before I step onto the stage to perform. The second I overthink the choreography or practice excessively right before I go on, I get nauseatingly nervous and think I am going to forget the movement. The less I think about it right before it starts, the better I perform. I have rehearsed for months, I know the movement and I just have to tell myself the performance is a rehearsal with an audience. While I wait in the dressing room is when I am the most nervous because I just want to be on stage dancing already. The anticipation I feel an hour before performing is usually way more nerve-racking then seconds before the curtain comes up. I think I feel this way because hours before a performance, you still have time to make changes or perfect a certain move but seconds before the piece begins you have no time to fix anything, you just have to dance it to your greatest capability and hope for the best. - Megan

Preparation is the one word that comes to mind when reflecting on the experience prior to a rehearsal or class. The mindset of a dancer is very particular and comes into play during this preparation. Not only are we expected to be fully committed in class - to give into the moment - but we also want to be committed for ourselves. Personally, giving into the moment of movement is why I dance. It is allows me to be in and out of my body. It allows me to “find and
lose myself at the same time”. I feel as though I get the most out of class when I prepare and get into the mindset. I am more aware, I am more alive. I am focused, determined, and am reminded why I am not somewhere else doing something else with my time. It becomes an experience I enjoy and therefore can look back on and remember. - Crystal

III. Remembering the Dance

On some days I have to take more than one ballet class to account for a scheduling conflict. This could be seen as a burden but I find it refreshing and an opportunity to really work. By the time we reach the center in the second class I am extremely warmed up and prepared to perform. This week after many cancelled classes due to weather I was particularly excited for my back to back classes, finally a chance to dance! After the second class the feeling of exhaustion overcame me, but more than this superficial feeling was the sense of accomplishment and satisfaction. I didn’t let myself down, I gave my all for three hours and had a spectacular time dancing. Somehow even the soreness I felt the next day wasn’t a nuisance but it was a reminder of the physical limitations I overcame and the happiness I experienced. Dancing is a challenge, but somehow it also gives me such great satisfaction that the challenge is no longer an issue or a concern, it only adds to the gratification. – Emma


He doesn't care if we make a mistake. What he cares about is our intention behind our actions; our motivation.

Are we going to put our full concentration and effort into our movements to try and succeed? Or are we going to give up on ourselves and not even try?

Tough love. He is not afraid to show us he really cares by "grilling" us.

Open doors. By the end he said it wasn't about an opportunity knocking on our door or not.. It's about are we ready?

Am I ready?

Am I going to let myself be ready? - Crystal

For the last four years I have attended the Rockette Summer Intensive. The past two years I have been a part of the invitation only intensive which was a hand-picked group of 70 very talented girls all with dreams of being a Rockette. The first year of the invitational week was physically and mentally one of the hardest weeks of my life. At the intensive we learn three different dances all consisting of Rockette choreography. The second day of the intensive we learned a tremendous amount of movement in about six hours. Right when we finished I walked back to
my hotel room and wanted to cry. The amount of choreography they taught was almost unbearable. I was thinking to myself, there is no way I am going to remember all of this movement and also execute it perfectly. This exact day was when I questioned whether or not dance was what I truly wanted to be doing for the rest of my life. I was so over-whelmed I thought, I can't do this I'm not good enough. I had to let myself calm down and then I finally got my thoughts together and began to practice what I had learned. I sold myself short because I did remember the choreography and it wasn’t as bad as I originally thought. I needed to give myself more credit and more time to process what I learned before jumping to conclusions. No matter how difficult the choreography was or how quickly it was taught I was able to figure it out. I realized what I needed to do was to tell myself I am good enough. - Megan

My Mom is always fascinated when she watches me dance. Part of the reason is the actual dancing itself and the other part of it is how I remember all the choreography. This was especially true when I was in high school and would be in eight different dances in one show. I never really thought it was that big of a deal until I saw non dancers take a dance class. They usually have the hardest time picking up combinations. The continued practice of dance enables me to be able to pick movement up relatively quick. Now how is this so? I am not entirely sure. However, when it comes to transition steps I either like to count how many steps it is or is it the upstage or downstage leg for example. I give myself cues in my head like after the “hit yourself in the head, roll like a log.” These cues gradually go away when my body gets more muscle memory of the movement. Then I barely have to think so analytically. The movement becomes natural. However, I still have to think about the qualities and different images I might have in my head in regards to the movement. It is a very complex thing to think about dance. – Kim

When learning a dance, my level of focus is extremely important. A wandering mind can be quite a distraction during a dance class or rehearsal. I try clear my mind of task-unrelated thoughts that might hinder me from giving my full attention and effort. As a dancer, I depend on my receptiveness to observe, memorize, and execute movement. During this process, I begin to visualize the trajectory of the movement and it eventually becomes mapped in my brain. I find that visualization is very effective in aiding my memory of choreography. Remembering the dance afterward is easy as long as my body and mind are actively engaged in the process. Ultimately, this will lessen my levels of anxiety and uncertainty when it comes to a stage performance. – Jennifer

At the beginning of this school year we had the Wonderland audition before school had even started. During the audition process none of us were sure what was really going to happen. We didn’t know if they were going to cut anyone at all. But, the last audition day they finally said, “we really wish we could work with all of you but we just cannot, the list will be posted before our next rehearsal.” I remember thinking, “okay, so they are cutting.” Walking out of the studio that day I could not stop thinking about how these past rehearsals/audition days had gone. I kept thinking through everything I thought was important and what I thought I did well and what I thought I did not do well in. I was thinking about the other people auditioning and how everyone was truly doing a great job, who they would keep and who they would not was very hard to guess. I started thinking about if I thought I deserved to be in the piece at all, if I am what they are looking for. Then it hit me, who knows what they are looking for? I am not them, and they did not specify the kind of dancer they were looking for within this piece. They were just giving
us information about how to dance the movement we were given and there was some talk about the intent of the piece. But, they never said what kind of dancer they were looking for. I remember thinking, “no matter what dancer they were looking for, all I could have done is show the best version of myself and if I’m not that dancer for them, it was not meant to be.” – Genna

Some days, a dancer’s mind and body need an extra boost of energy and strength. The other day, my muscles were indescribably sore and all I wanted to do was give up in class and just rest. When I walked into modern I stood in the back of the room, anticipating my horrible performance in class, until Mr. Mosley gave us all a talk about self-motivation. His words lit a fire underneath me and I began feeling more and more confident and renewed as the class went on. Once class was over, my body was still feeling the soreness and exhaustion, but because I put mind over matter I was ready to finish off the day with a successful rehearsal later on.

Straight after modern, I remembered the feeling of passion for this art, the reason we do what we do. That fire that struck me, has without a doubt, struck every dancer in this room at least once in his/her life. And being able to grab hold of that powerful feeling that drives us on some of our hardest days is a vital skill to own. I walked away from that particular class feeling victorious with enlightenment against myself. – Felicia

Sometimes the best thing I can do when “remembering the dance” is not doing so at all. I complete the ballet class by thanking the teacher and accompanist, taking a gulp of water, letting out a groan, and then shifting my mind back to the start for the next class. The same process then occurs after modern. If it was a successful class, great! I might turn to a friend and gloat about the triple pirouette I landed that one time or how I was so on my balance for that lateral-T; contrarily, if the class wasn’t as effective, I might complain about how sore I was feeling and other grumblings. If it were a rehearsal, on the other hand, in which new material was taught and required reviewing, I would revisit the new information later on. Otherwise, the most beneficial choice I make is to think about anything other than dance. In order to prevent myself from overthinking before and during the dance, the same goes for afterward: I have to simply let it go. I allow my mind take a break and either refocus if it happened to be a particularly distressing day, or revel in the bodily response of an exhilarating discovery. - Heather

At the end of a good dance class, I feel fulfilled. I am aware of the exchange that just took place over the last hour and a half – one that is reciprocal and yields only a win-win situation. In terms of commitment and willingness to engage, if the teacher gives all of him- or herself to the class, and students do the same, the physical energy present and the “love in the air” for the art of dance is truly remarkable. The “thank you [for class],” a departing message typically verbalized to the teacher, is said not only because it belongs to the social mores of dance culture but because there is true gratitude. Back where our bags and coats lie, we chit-chat a bit as we gather our things. Our bodies still alive with the movement of the class, we might say, “That ab combination was killer,” or “I’ll be feeling it tomorrow,” but most always, we say these things, we anticipate our soreness, with a smile. I sometimes jot down a few notes from class, as quickly as possible, lest I forget them. These notes are usually personally-appealing sensory or imagerial words or concepts that were articulated by the teacher in describing movement – i.e., Christian
von Howard’s “viscous” to describe how he intended his “around the world” combination, from the class he gave this week, to look and feel. I like to record things that are creative, profound, and even funny – not after a technique class but rather after Dance History once, I made sure to write a note about Lori’s calling the human body a “fleshy spaceship…”  – Kelly

IV. The Challenges of Dance Collage

The biggest challenge I am facing during the performance run of Dance Collage is trying to find pride in my work. There were many obstacles we encountered during the process of creating the piece but the finished product is what I am struggling with most. Being onstage is my most favorite place in the world, but when I am unprepared I cannot find the same comfort from the bright lights and audience as I usually do. The process necessary for me to perform at my best comes from learning the material, practicing it, and having the chance to make it into my own personal style. The choreographer for this piece took some extra time to develop her ideas, so naturally with the time used for the creation process there was less time for rehearsing and less time to become comfortable in the work. During the performance of the piece I entered the stage with determination and dedication to my choreographer, wanting to showcase her talents as much as my own. However as the dance carried on the pride that I have for my work did not race through me, instead I was struck with panic and confusion as our “togetherness” started to dwindle. I have been told that the audience always remembers the last thing they see, but I know for certain that this is even more true for the dancer, the last moments onstage are the first that run through my mind on a never ending loop. Although my performance started out with the feeling of exuberance that I know and live for onstage, I was left only with the disappointment that I was unhappy with my work. – Emma

They say that audiences remember what they last saw the most. This doesn’t represent choice as much as it proves a fact of cognitive psychology. Thus, a minor internal struggle arose: in the studio working on the ending of my solo for Dance Collage, I was hard to please. I wasn’t sure if I wanted the final moment to be a dynamic shocker – followed by a piercing blackout – or a slowly developing or unfolding idea – with a gradual fading of the lights. Somewhere in the process, I choreographed a sudden half-turn, away from my supposed destination, leading into a fall to the floor. However, it didn’t feel right, and I conjured perhaps the most important (or cliché) word known to every choreographer – intent – to help me out. To me, my piece was about a journey, part for self-discovery, part for becoming connected with the Divine. I wanted to convey a lack of ability to achieve what I desired, but I didn’t want to cut off my four minutes with a dynamic move like the fall. I wanted to be continuing my journey – but with a hindrance. I settled on a unique stance in which I stood on my right leg and twisted my left leg around it in a spiral. Lifting my heel over and again looked reminiscent of walking, and I swung my arms gently, as if they belonged to a slow pedestrian gait. My focus gave away the belief that I was finally, successfully, heading toward my goal. The audience, however, seeing the full-body picture that involved a tangled, twisted handicap of the limbs in my lower half, would be able to realize that I wasn’t going anywhere, and to feel empowered or sorry – or a little bit of both – with this knowledge, as the lights faded.  – Kelly
In preparation for Dance Collage, I found that the ending stages of choreographing were difficult for me. In the past, I have also had to choreograph "studies" for choreography classes, which never go over a minute. But to extend a study from 1 minute to 5 minutes posed to be a challenge for me. My solo, 'Inhibition', originated from my choreography 3 prop study. I chose lipstick as the prop, because not only could I investigate my physical partnership with the lipstick itself, but also the marks it leaves behind. When creating the study, I felt there were so many things I could do with it, so I explored as much as I felt needed for the length of the study. After my solo was accepted into collage, I began to realize how much I was struggling to develop a cohesive, inventive piece. I wanted to meet the intensity of the music, as well as do my concept justice, but I had trouble picking the proper moments to leave/use the lipstick music and how to make the piece climax and not become stagnant. In the end, there is no right or wrong decision in choreographing, but I would say my final stages of choreographing and finalizing my piece were my most difficult. - Julie

All in all I have had an amazing experience being a part of dance collage. I am in Jake Deibert's piece for the show and it has been a very fun and interesting process. He was a very professional choreographer and treated us like professional dancers and not just as his friends. I would have to say the most difficult part for me during this process was developing my character for the piece. In the work, we are resembling prostitutes and for more than half of the dance we are wearing lingerie. It's already difficult dancing in front of an audience in a very revealing and sensual costume but finding a personality that relates to a prostitute was even more difficult to figure out. I found inspiration from the main character, Nancy Botwin, in the tv show, Weeds. She is a strong, powerful and beautiful woman who deals marijuana to keep her family alive. She does whatever it takes to get her money and that includes using her body. I related that to the prostitutes selling themselves for money that they need to live off of and found myself a character to show in this piece. – Megan

At the beginning of this past summer I had the idea that I wanted to choreograph a solo for dance collage this year. I've never looked at myself as a choreographer but I really wanted to try to give myself this opportunity to perform. I listened to many different songs and just could not figure out what I wanted to do. It wasn't until the day that the proposal was due that I found the perfect song with the perfect idea all I needed was a dance. I had some choreography already in my head that I wanted to try out. Long story short I gave it a try. And everyday I suffer with if it is creative enough and the fact that it is on stage now is exciting and intimidating all in one. I do not like to tell a personal story on stage but I felt for me to dance the way I wanted to I had to face my fears and do it. It has been a great experience for me and a learning experience. I have learned a lot more about myself than I thought I would. This has encouraged me yo continue to take bigger risks within my dance career. – Genna

The most challenging part of preparing for Dance Collage was having to conform my vision to what the faculty desired to see. I was asked to change my music three times, which I ended up benefiting from choreographically, but towards the end I felt like I was being sucked dry of all
the passion that fired me to create my solo because of all of the changes I was asked to make. I learned that half of the time cooperating and restarting could be an amazing blessing in disguise, but the other half of the time it’s best to go with what your gut is inspiring you to do. By the end of the process, I told myself it was fine to say no to the changes I didn’t want to make and ended up regaining passion for my personal artwork, and its helped me reveal my heart on stage every time I dance it. – Felicia

I believe that the hardest part of preparing for dance collage was wondering if I was going to be completely capable of dancing exactly the way the choreographer wanted me to. Throughout the entire process I wondered if I was doing the movements correct and if I was doing what the choreographer had envisioned while they were putting the piece together. For dance collage one of the goals is to showcase the choreographers’ gifts and talents but at the same time you want to showcase your own talents as well. There are often times when the choreographer may decide to change the choreography or even the music, for reasons only they know. This makes it 10 times harder to do the piece with confidence. I thought to myself…what if I forget the new choreography or mess up the counts?? Now as the show is approaching you have to just trust that you know what you’re doing and have faith that the choreographer’s method of choreographing was their own way of creating a piece that they can look back and truly say mission accomplished. - Mecca

V. The Informance – March 25, 2014

INTRODUCTION/WELCOME - Haley

I’d like to welcome you all to the 2014 Informance. As the name implies, this is an “informal performance” and talk back, aimed at sharing and discussing the repertory material in Danceworks before it is performed in April. You will be watching excepts from each piece in the program -- introduced by your classmates in the Danceaturgy Workshop. These dancers have researched the historical context of each piece and experienced the work in rehearsal. The Danceturgs are sharing these findings and reflections with you to offer a deeper understanding of the pieces that have been rehearsed for countless hours this year so that they will “come alive” at Montclair State. Now it looks effortless -- but we are all aware of the hard and relentless work that has gone into these pieces.

This informance is a unique program that is meant to inspire you to question what it means to dance, to rehearse, to choreograph and to observe as an audience member. Afterward we will have a discussion of the pieces, which is a chance to ask questions and to please share some of your own thoughts that came up while watching.

I would like to take a moment to introduce the Danceaturgs and explain what we have been up to in class this semester. The Danceaturgs are (….). Please stand as I read your name but let’s hold applause till I have introduced everybody. Every Friday morning from 9-10 am we meet for class with Professor Neil Baldwin to talk about dance. We have written reflections prompted by Neil, focused on the experiences of dancing, something most of us do for hours each and every day. It is also a chance to investigate the history behind the work being brought to MSU. We also spend time discussing the theme of Danceworks, which is “Minding the Dance”. This is the thread connecting the diverse program you are about to see. What does this mean? Minding the Dance. The dual meaning of “mind” offers a lot of room for interpretation. “To attend to” is one use of
the word, such as “minding your own business”. The other definition is along the lines of thinking, wondering, analyzing. So while watching the Informance, be mindful, find the connections between Andrea Miller’s dark, theatrical Wonderland and Claire Porter’s zany humorous Sentenced to Sentences. How does Bill T. Jones’ tranquil Spent Days Out Yonder relate to the two? There are obviously no “right” or “wrong” ways to interpret this over-arching theme, so we encourage all of you to find your own questions and answers and meaning for “Minding the Dance”. Thank you and enjoy the Informance!

SPATIAL DIALOGUES - Emma

Spatial Dialogues explores human emotion while incorporating an abstract architectural design and video projection. On stage the dancers must interact with one another as well as with a large metal structure. Throughout the almost 20 minutes of dancing we see dancers climbing onto the top of the structure, hanging from it and latching onto it from various different angles at sometimes alarming speeds. As the piece progresses the dancers move the structure around the stage while depicting different emotional scenarios as well as taking visual cues from the video projection. Nancy Lushington has explored many spatial elements within her choreography, the sense of claustrophobia, the freedom of being alone in a space, the passageways or doorways into another space and other scenarios that may arise. The dancers portray feelings of cheer, frustration, balance and mystery.

When starting this work Nancy met with the set designer and simply requested a structure that the dancers would be able to interact with and that would support their weight. The set designer took this idea and ran with it, wanting to really define and dissect the space with the structure. The result was quite a definitive structure which gave Nancy even more choreographic opportunities to explore both interior and exterior space in this heightened sense. As for the video projection, the visual effect allows for another layer of defined space. There are moments where the dancers interact with the video as if it were a solid object, while at other times the dancers can move through the projections as if they are no more than what they are, light upon the stage. After viewing Spatial Dialogues one can see more clearly how there are infinite possibilities within our space.

Due to the size of the structure and the time it takes to build the set we will be showing a video of Spatial Dialogues today.

OH MY LOVE – Megan and Felicia

Oh My Love is a new work created by Earl Mosley. It has been selected to represent the Northeast Region at the National American College Dance Festival at the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C. June 5-7. Mr. Mosley set the choreography to four different songs by artist Cyndi Lauper. When I asked Mr. Mosley where he found his inspiration for this piece all he said was, “I just love this music.” He wanted to see how these songs could help create relationships within movement. The choreography is emotional and meaningful and every step has a reason and feeling behind it. Because there is so much expressiveness found in this piece, Mr. Mosley tells his dancers to not forget about their technique. He wants to see the drama of the piece without the loss of technique for the sake of performing.
I was lucky enough to be in *Oh My Love* this year, so I had to the opportunity to feel the emotion behind the piece first hand. The dance has a lot of partnering work and that calls for trust. Trust was needed from the beginning because there was no way you would be able to successfully accomplish the lifts Mr. Mosley was looking for if you did not trust your partner. Once you created that trust and relationship with your partner the dance became more real. When I perform this piece I feel like I am showing the emotional and physical connection I have with my partner and with all the other dancers around me in the piece. I am able to portray the relationships Cyndi Lauper is singing about as well as showing my technical abilities. Inside my body I feel a sensation of trust, bonding, and strength within myself and my partner. It is an amazing feeling to dance on stage with seven other performers that love this piece and this art form as much as I do. We found connections with each other, the music, and our choreographer and created a dance that we hope will always be cherished.

Our individual energies must sync before we perform because we have to be so mindful of one another as we dance. “Oh My Love” shows obvious connections, being that there isn’t one moment that we aren’t dancing a duet, as an ensemble, or even giving our attention and hearts to a soloist. But these connections wouldn’t have such an impact if we didn’t acknowledge one another with our energy and with our eye contact. We all must stay mindful that we are dancing this piece as a unit of beings that care for each other. In order for this to ‘read’ to the audience, Mr. Mosley directed us to portray drama and emotions with dynamic technique, while giving us liberty to fulfill sets of movement inside a certain amount of music. So, as you all watch this excerpt, try to see the emotion behind a beautiful arabesque or the orb of energy that we’re dancing in. Allow us dancers pull you into our minds as you see this piece with new eyes.

**STRICT LOVE – Kelly and Mecca**

We have had the privilege of working with Doug Varone and Dancers company member, Eddie Taketa, in learning and rehearsing *Strict Love*. Together with Eddie, we have decided to hold off saying a few things about the history of the piece until after the showing, during the Q&A. We want to allow you to develop your own ideas about the piece, as far as the meeting of music and movement, and overall impressions, are concerned, before we place the work in context. We will tell you now that you’re about to see an excerpt of the piece. *Strict Love* is movement to a collection of four and a half songs, and the dancers will be performing to the third and fourth songs.

Much of the movement in this piece is performed in unison; however, we do not come across as one moving body. Maintaining individuality is important for the dancers in this work. Throughout the rehearsal process, Eddie did not give us specific intent. He left us with the freedom to develop our own intent, to make the movement our own. After all, the original seven dancers of *Strict Love* were a very motley crew, ranging from the very short, probably-under-5-feet-tall Nancy Bannon to the tall 6’ tall, “barrel-chested” Larry Hahn.

We encourage you to pay attention to the sense of volume we aim to evoke as we dance. Eddie emphasized the importance of being precise but also reveling in moving energy through the expansive space all around us, whether through curving, carving, whacking, etc. Thus, there are both angular and staccato elements as well as breath- and weight-filled elements to the
choreography. Imagining the movement as conversation has helped us to embody it, to really feel comfortable and confident while performing it. That said, we now invite you to enter into our various conversations, by listening to what we have to say – or, in other words, by watching us dance.

Later:

Strict Love was created in 1994 by Doug Varone while in residence at Virginia Commonwealth University. It was originally called Peak Sacred, as its original score was “Symphony No. 2,” or “The Peak of the Sacred,” by composer Glenn Branca. Varone felt that something wasn’t working, however, and tried to find new music. He was inclined one day to record CBSFM as it played a program of the Top 100 songs of 1970, and he ended up using this recording as the new score. Three Motown songs are featured: “ABC” and “I Want You Back” by the Jackson 5 and “Ain’t No Mountain High Enough” by Diana Ross. The decision to use new music was a surprise to the company, who had only about one week to rework it with the music before performing it. The choreography stayed almost entirely the same; but the music change was drastic. The task for the dancers was then to prevent giving in to the music entirely but rather staying with the mindset and movement quality they’d had for the original dance, Peak Sacred. The formal opening of this new – and, everyone hoped, improved – Strict Love was at Playhouse 91 in New York City.

The juxtaposition of the radio broadcast of Motown or pop songs of the day with the energy given off by the dancers provides an uncanny contrast. Faces are rather expressionless, even stoic; costumes give a boxy shape to the bodies; and movement is sometimes erratic, involving thrashing and throwing and – we’re sure you didn’t miss it – butt-slapping. It is this zany, quirky-but-cool nature of the work that makes it memorable. Recall how you felt about it, as you watched. Were you amused? Uncomfortable? Perplexed? All of the above?

Perhaps this can be a real question posed to the audience, used to garner some initial audience participation for this piece?

SPENT DAYS OUT YONDER – Crystal and Kelly

Choreographed by Bill T. Jones in the year 2000, Spent Days Out Yonder is an excerpt from a larger work called You Walk? – a piece inspired by the Portuguese voyages and encounters during the Age of Discovery. Mozart’s String Quartet No. 23 serves as the score and the underlying thread that ties it all together. Although the movement does not parallel the style of the classical era, the piece in its entirety reflects nobility and a sense of promise that speaks to each individual dancer, to the other dancers around them, and to their shared movement experience.

As regal as the piece appears, there is also a pronounced matter-of-factness to it. Ayo Jackson, the former Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Dance Company member who set the piece, emphasized the importance of being precise. One continuous phrase is danced center-stage throughout the ten minute piece; connecting the first note of the score to the very last. But, like a painter, Bill T.
Jones would not have forgotten about having foreground and background in his ‘dancescape.’ While the phrase is danced, a downstage or upstage “train” travels from stage right to stage left - the dancers sauntering along, freezing in stillness, and playing with improvisation.

When dancers leave the improvisation “trains,” they come center-stage to join in dancing the choreographed phrase, and vice versa: when dancers stop dancing the phrase, they join the improvisation “train” that is happening either downstage or upstage. Of course, it can’t be that easy; there is a rule that must be followed. No more than four dancers can be dancing the phrase for the greater part of the piece. It is not until the very end that this number limit is broken and everyone jumps into the phrasework from the improvisation train, to finally dance together, in unison.

Each dancer will likely join, rejoin, and leave the phrase work to become so-called passengers on the “train” in any given order. Thus, the dance will be different every time it is performed. We are mindful to ask ourselves the same questions we asked in Jones’s piece, Continuous Replay, last year: What does the group need? What can I do to help the group? A great challenge is presented: the mind must work on two different tracks, with heightened consciousness about both the improvisation and the phrase.

In sharing the space in this way, individuality and community are simultaneously manifested. Imagine a diverse group of people at a picnic, Ayo would say. Picture watercolors. The mood is cool and easy, like a sea breeze. A kinesthetic awareness, a receptiveness to listening to one’s body, and also the courage to take risks is crucial to making the movement its most honest. The phrase was created in such a way that almost every bodily action elicits a reaction. For example, a backwards swinging arm causes a leg to swing forward and up into a front attitude position.

We encourage you to look for these “sympathetic reactions” as you watch the piece. See, also, if you can identify the section of the piece named “Honey,” or, what we have decided to call “Salted Caramel Love Letter,” for its sensual and super indulgent phrasing. By the end, all the dancers are performing the key phrase. We sense an existential togetherness; it feels as though we are moving as one because we believe in the same thing. We proceed to exit together - the dull thumping of our own footsteps in unison - into the wings off stage left like a group that’s sure of where it’s going but in no hurry to get there.

**SENTENCED TO SENTENCES – Suki and Kim**

We are sorry to announce that the actors in Sentenced to Sentences are unable to attend the Informance this afternoon so we will not be able to present an excerpt from the work. However, we are going to give you our introduction, and we look forward to discussing with you all during the Q&A session.

*Sentenced to Sentences* was commissioned through the Department of Theatre & Dance New Works Initiative supported by Holly and Bob Gregory. Claire Porter is the mastermind behind the piece. She brought together a group of dancers and actors to create a piece simply on the concept of sentences. During the audition for the dancers back in September, she really wanted the dancers to be able to look directly at her while performing and talking during the given phrase. You could tell that she was looking for “characters”, people who weren’t afraid to be silly and at the same time fully commit to both movement and the practically impossible task
of speaking and dancing simultaneously. From there, the chosen dancers and actors were placed in rehearsal together. Claire expressed how she was fascinated by words, how they are used and put together to create sentences. She was interested in exploring the question, “What is a sentence?” and the dual meaning of this word. Claire was very interested in word play throughout, which is how I [we?] think she has been able to keep the piece fresh and consistently funny. Early rehearsals were a time to experiment and see what worked and what clearly did not. A lot of material we worked on did not end up in the final product. During the first few rehearsals we learned a phrase taught by Claire. From there we were broken up into duets and worked on manipulating the phrase. Then we were put into trios and did the same thing. We also had a jumping phrase with groups. There was even a systematically “train-like” line we tried to do, but it failed almost every time. The actors and dancers were unsure of where the piece was heading. Claire had us all write down our favorite sentences we have ever heard and our least favorite sentences ever heard. At one point she even remarked that she was not even sure where she wanted the piece to go, however, she was able to continue to get inspiration from us. All of a sudden at one rehearsal Claire brought in a script and had a relatively clear order of what she wanted. That is when the piece really took shape. Before that it was just a scrambled mess of parts. Every rehearsal after that there was a definite structure and there seemed to be little tweaks in the spoken lines or the movement slightly. Even after it had been performed numerous times, Claire changed people’s lines including [our?] my own. She was never afraid to step back, analyze her work and change it to make it better.

Performing in the piece feels slightly different every time. I think the reason for this is the dancers and actors switch up the tone in their voice when they say their lines. Also, I know that one of the actors improvises some of his lines. During a show you can find me laughing in the wings while other performers are on stage. I still laugh because of these subtle differences. The piece is new every time. Minding the dance was not as important as minding the words. The pronunciation and tone of the words we speak adds to the comedy of the piece. If there is no laughter in the audience, the piece has failed in my opinion. A receptive audience adds to the whole experience. After performing this piece many times, we find that elementary school kids tend to be the best audience. They can find humor where many adults do not. As you all watch the piece next week during Danceworks, pretend you are back in grade school. Discover the humor in sentences. It is a piece that questions what is a sentence. Try to see if you can find the answer to the question. Is there even an answer?

WONDERLAND – Julie and Genna

Wonderland starts off happy. But then, slowly people start to realize this war and the pack mentality are slowly starting to kill us. It is easy to see the “pack mentality” within the piece and how one person (Megan) starts to try to warn everyone before it’s too late.
I watched an interview with Andrea Miller and she talked about the installation art work that inspired her to create the piece. Chinese-born artist Cai Guo-Qiang’s [pronounce - KAI GWO KYANG’s] Head On inspired Andrea Miller with the symbolic idea of wolves. It is a frightening image of 99 stuffed wolves running and charging at a glass wall which is the same length and width as the Berlin Wall – and crumbling to the ground. Andrea says that she saw it as a way of showing how the pack mentality has dancers just follow the person in front of them and also that the most dangerous kind of wall is glass -- because you can see right through it: [QUOTE] “This invisible wall where fear can take you, where persuasion can take you.” She also talks about
primitive movement and how within primitive movement there is an animal like feel, a non-traditional mood.

When running the piece in rehearsal there is a constant mental fight to keep going full out. The movement is very tiring and requires a lot of energy physically and mentally. I think the quote, “your mind will give up before your body does” fits into my experience with this piece very well.

Throughout the rehearsal process of Wonderland, we were lucky enough to have learned from and worked with Miller’s associate director and current company member, Francesca Romo and current company member, Dan Walczak. Both Gallim dancers constantly provided us with images and meanings behind the movement, such as ‘sunbursts’, ‘creases’, ‘prowl’ and ‘surrender’, which helped us get into a mindset that is required for this work. Wonderland uses imagery from war, sports, and communication to investigate the potentially dangerous yet inherently human pack mentality. Miller’s work has been described as “simultaneously kinetic and intimate expressions of the self and its dialogue with identity, sensuality, and search for meaning; Wonderland is hailed for its quick wit, morphing physical quality, and technical virtuosity”. When performing this piece, the most challenging but also most wonderful aspect of the piece, is the emotional commitment to every single detail in the dance. Each dancer interacts so genuinely and uniquely with each other that they transcend choreography to an actual profound dance experience. The theatrical images that are created within the extreme physical steps are thrilling, exciting, and most importantly bring intention behind the demands put on the body. The entire cast has brought an emotional abandonment to the piece. We are all involved in everything that is going on, even in moments when we are being perfectly still. There is an intimacy that lingers on stage, which is both a beautiful and haunting at the same time. This type of art that stirs emotions in your mind, and makes you question your reality is real artwork.

As the Village Voice said recently -- “Wonderland is astonishing...The performers attack the killer movement with devastating power, all refinement eroded by the lemming mentality.”

Q&A - Heather

Our repertory theme of “Minding the Dance” has two major connotations: the internal versus the external. Although these two are contrastingly counterparts, they are truly each other’s compliment. The internal aspect of “Minding the Dance” indicates the balance between a dancer’s physical and intellectual entities; the intrinsic translation of technique and conscientiousness. The external side of “Minding the Dance” references a dancer’s responsibility in paying reverence to Dance’s cultural legacy. Being that Dance, within the world of art, is a culture of its own, we are, in an important way, “taking care” of the history that came before us by performing works conceived by our ancestors and predecessors. “Minding the Dance” in its external form specifies the past, and in its internal form brings that past forth to be alive through each dancer here presently.

When we first addressed the idea of “Minding the Dance” in our Danceaturgy workshops, the central concept revolved around a dancer’s ability to multitask by using his or her mind while not becoming entrapped within it. Dancers often hear from their teachers to “get out of their heads.” This pervading idea continues through anticipating and remembering the dance. These two other aspects of “Minding the Dance” are inclusive of the preparation and recollection of the performance, the audition and the typical technique class. The common thread sewn through these different checkpoints in the timeline of dance is shown to be that when a dancer is overly
self-conscious, he or she can become obsessive over perfection, rather than getting lost in the art of movement and performance. Technique becomes the dancer’s founding base on which they quite literally stand, and so there comes a time when he or she has to release any preoccupations and self-doubt when “anticipating the dance,” and likewise to disengage from any overtly detrimental self-criticisms when later “remembering the dance,” in order to guarantee success.

A common thread among the pieces you have just seen is the drastic importance of community. Being that these are all group pieces, they reflect several dynamics of the effects one can have on the group, as well as the effect that a group can have on an individual. Spatial Dialogues references the interactions of individuals with one another, as does Oh My Love which explores trusting bonds among several relationships; both of these pieces address the emotionality of the movement itself. Demonstrating individuality within a large group can be seen as a leading concept in Strict Love. Spent Days Out Yonder, classic to a Bill T. Jonesism, places importance on assisting the rest of the group and enhancing the dancescape. Sentenced to Sentences demonstrates the humor in expressing one’s self in groups which vary in numerous ways. In dramatic contrast, Wonderland sarcastically portrays a slightly sadistic expression of pack mentality, and the brutal consequences of allowing the group to lead one’s ideals blindly. These pieces demonstrate a spectrum of group work from simple existence, to following without thinking critically. The importance of the “unit” is clearly a crucial theme among these dances, and even this informance itself. As a department, each of us has a responsibility to always help the group without losing a sense of one’s individuality, so that you are enriching the cohesion of these dances while minding, as in taking care, of yourself.

**CONCLUSION/GOODBYE - Jennifer**

This concludes our Informance discussion. We all hope you found today’s performance and in-depth Danceaturgy discussion to be enjoyable and informative. To go along with our theme of “Minding the Dance”, it’s important to reflect one more time upon this idea of mindfulness. The involvement of the mind and body is a powerful combination that can help bring meaning and intent to movement, which is something we always strive for as dancers. We encourage each of you to investigate the thoughts that enter your mind when dancing or when creating dances. By actively bringing into focus your own thoughts and ideas during technique class, rehearsal, or a performance, you will come away with overall a much deeper awareness and a richer experience.

It is truly amazing to see the level of dedication and hard work that has gone into developing the material in the Danceworks 2014 Repertory by our dance faculty, guest choreographers and student dancers. From the rehearsal process to the stage, there is so much that goes on behind the curtains, which often goes unnoticed, and is never actually shared with the audience. An important aspect as to why we’re here today is to offer new insight and perspective, something we can all treasure. To be able to hear dancers share their innermost thoughts, personal experiences, and the discoveries they’ve made along the way is a rare occurrence. But I believe it has given the rest of us a better understanding and stronger appreciation for the work. We can now look forward to seeing each piece presented at the upcoming Danceworks performance in April here at Montclair State.

I want to thank Neil Baldwin, Maxine Steinman, and all of my fellow Danceaturgy Workshop members for their efforts in preparing today’s presentation.
And thank you to all of the students and the wonderful faculty of the Dance Department for attending the Informance.

Let’s have a final round of applause from all of you – for all of you!

VI. Thinking the Dance – 4/11/14

Danceaturgy Workshop Seminar - In-class writing 4/11/14

**Prompt:** We have written about minding, anticipating, remembering, and critiquing the dance. Now we are crossing the mental threshold, and descending deeper, into the actual process of *thinking while dancing.*

What thoughts do you have in real time while you are dancing?
What are the actual words – or could/would/can you describe the thoughts in some other way?
If you presented/performed in a specific piece in *Danceworks* I would like you to write about it. Otherwise, you may choose the dance.

You have twenty minutes. - NB

*Strict Love*

While dancing in Doug Varone’s *Strict Love,* the first thing that popped into my head was “I really hope that I am standing in the right place and not in Hannah’s spot.” The minute the lights come up I tell myself “Mecca this is it be heavy.” At times I would sing the lyrics of the songs in my head to keep calm but most of the time Eddie’s voice is all that I would hear. I would hear the funny sounds he used in rehearsal to make us understand the movement as well as the amount of effort that it would take to perform. By the end I’m saying to myself, “We did it” and there are times when during the dance I am letting myself just shut up and dance. - Mecca

*Strict Love*

Okay, the music has started. I still have some time to chill out, though. There goes Crystal...okay, where’s she standing? That piece of tape is my mark. It’s so dark I wish I could see it better. All right, I’ve stepped out onto the stage. The audience has seen me and there’s no turning back. Step on mark, listen for “Broadway” in the radio broadcast and Julie’s voice. Turn to face front. This is hard. I am not supposed to smile but I can’t look completely zoned-out either, because I am performing, after all. Let me just focus on that light at the back of the theatre and think about something. My vision is starting to blur or something. I need a fresh point of focus – where should I look? Young Michael Jackson has started wailing. That means my “AND” is coming up. Eddie told me in rehearsal for this to come out so loud and manly, for it to be so riveting, that pubic hairs would stand up. I still think that’s a wierd image or analogy, but here goes: “AND!!” Whew, I made it in time. I was afraid I would be late, ‘cause I kept trying to swallow to clear my throat. I wonder what the audience thinks of all this so far. It’s alright if the people don’t like it. What’s important right now is that I’m enjoying myself, and you know what, I am. Just hope I don’t have too many bruises tomorrow. - Kelly
Wonderland
On nights when Cast “B” performs, I am in Oh My Love and Wonderland one right after another. I quickly change costumes and fix my hair, shaking from nervousness and excitement for Wonderland. I sit on stage and wait for the curtain to come praying my stamina will keep up and get me through this piece. As soon as the lights come up, I pretend I am the happiest person on earth. I get to my duet with Malcolm when everyone shoots us and we fall to the floor. I’m thinking, Thank God I can rest for these next 10 seconds. We finish out the first section and run to our spots for the second one and I crouch down and close my eyes for a second to control my breathing and pray I get through this section. It comes to the circle lift and I know what’s coming next. I take a deep breath and start my solo. I make eye contact with the dancers walking around me, trying to calm myself from my ridiculously heavy breathing. We get to the box and I’m jumping in front of people and finally look at Julie and I find the little bit of energy left in me to get through the phrase we do together. I feel her energy and it helps me to keep going. I then start jumping and falling to the floor, feeling like I’m being ripped apart or being punched in the stomach, then side, then back. I make grunts and noises trying to find any way possible to find more energy to do my big walks across the stage. I jump into both Malcolms and I hear one of them say, “You got this” and I push myself up to standing. My chest is killing me. I’m dripping sweat and I’m doing everything I can to calm my breathing. We continue with the section and it gets a little easier. We get to the third section and I finally have time to be still. I control my breathing and continue through the movement of this last section. My body is exhausted but I tell myself I can’t give up and I give 100% until the last kick moving downstage. The lights fade out and I have a strong feeling of relief knowing I made it through and I know I can relax and go watch the rest of the show. - Megan

Wonderland
The first thing I do on stage while performing Wonderland is sing. While I stand and sing I can’t help but wonder what my face must look like while I’m singing. I remind myself to keep singing as loud and as crazy as I can. I wonder what I would sound like if I was doing this solo? As I start to dance being overly happy seems really easy for me to do and the sounds just come when they need to. All I keep thinking is “Well this is fun.” As we start the second section I am already really tired and I still have a lot to go. As I move through different parts of this section I keep thinking about the people on stage with me and occasionally I remember that I can’t breathe. We’ve come to the circle with Jake in the middle. I keep saying, “You have the 20 count phrase left, give it all you can.” We bow and I make contact with Ariel like every other time and I’m off. Right here before I do this phrase without fail I think of The Hunger Games. As I am about to slap my chest and pull forward, I imagine running into the beginning of The Hunger Games and how no matter how tired I would be if that were the case I would definitely give it everything I could. Before I know it I am battementing downstage and the whole third part went by so fast. As I am battementing, I am thinking about staying on top of my standing leg and making sure my arms and face look relaxed. - Genna
**Sentenced to Sentences**

Is my costume set up for the quick change? I hope my partner is here. Ooooo we are starting. Oh good my partner is here. OK time to run out soon. Where is Noah? I am after him. Why are we never organized for the line, like ever? Oooh time to go. Weeee! I like being on stage just standing here. Mmmh how’s the audience tonight? OK, time to stare someone down in the audience while I reach. Good bye as I walk off. Time to go over lines with Misha. Nailed it. Noah walks funny. Oh Megan, she’s so cute. Where is Kelly? There she is. OK y’all. “A beginning, a middle, an end.” Where’s the second wing? Found it! I’m gonna just keep talking about this phrase. OK let’s do this crossover without tripping. Success. Oh my goodness Imani and Michael be killing it. CHAIN TIME! Crazy faces is a go. OK but this song needs to end. Is it always this long? Can we go back to the short version? Music just ended. Haha found my spot. Let’s sing. Lalalala. Wait what are my lines. Just look at Ivy and Kelly like you’re confused while going over lines. My turn. I don’t think much now. I just do. Done with that. Gotta live right now while Malcolm “punishes” us all. Get up! Get up Kim! Get closer to Malcolm. Oh yeah boy! Yeah! I’m gonna break up. “U” time. Almost home free. Must intensify growl. Rooaar! I’m gonna walk off as fierce as I can. Girl power. Let’s get that bow. Wow that was fun. Holy crap. Nancy’s piece! RUNNNNN! - **Kim**

**Spatial Dialogues**

While performing usually I am very relaxed and able to calm any nerves I have. However during Danceworks, the work I was in, Spatial Dialogues, made me beyond nervous. I felt as though both my mind and body were going a hundred miles a minute. This crazy marathon in my head begins during the bow of Sentenced to Sentences, the piece immediately before Spatial Dialogues, which I am also in. As the curtain is descending I am thinking, the moment they can no longer see your arms you are untying this dress! The moment the curtain closes I am tearing off the dress tossing it on the floor. Rachael is shoving my Spatial Dialogues shirt over my head and I am hoping it isn’t inside out. After I am dressed the structure is still being set up. I am checking things off in my head: “Are your shoes tied? The pins are facing down?” The piece begins and we are off! It is like a marathon, my mind is racing as is my body. I find myself saying reassuring things in my head: “Eric won’t drop you. The lift will be perfect. I won’t slip and fall.” Everything is a whirlwind of action and I am racing through to the finish. – **Suki**

**Spent Days Out Yonder**

Yes to being cast in another Bill T. Jones piece! Although I’ve never heard of Spent Days Out Yonder. Just come in with an open mind like you usually do. Who is this woman? (speaking of Ayo). I wonder how she got into the company. Did she like it? I wonder how she tolerated those repetitive rehearsals for this piece. I can’t believe how task-oriented all this movement is. It really is like a chain reaction moving through the body. I really think we should be focusing upon “perfecting” the phrase. Starting from the beginning is always a good place, but maybe we should take it from the middle and clarify that. Crap, what were those counts?! Okay, I get why she wants us to sing but it really is kind of impossible. I love the time we could take in the beginning of rehearsal to lay down calmly and listen to soak in the music. [After winter break:] I really need to go over the specifics. What initiates that leg again? I’m confusing the counts. Why are we improvising to a Beyonce song when we should be working on the phrase and improvisation within the context of the piece? Maybe some people find it
beneficial to “cut loose.” Either way, we’ve worked on improvisation enough times to add it to the piece already. Wow, after all I do feel confident in performing this piece. We all stepped it up, helped one another, and brought it all together. I do feel a sense of pride with and for my colleagues. I can’t believe this is my very last dance as a senior! It’s gone full circle! - Crystal

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“Landed: Kathleen Kelley’s piece in Works-a-Foot”
I’m entering, taking three steps, trying to stay as balanced as possible. Waiting for my cue entering from the wing. Hop up into a balance, holding, holding and spiraling out. Too much momentum for a second turn – a recovery. Repeat this movement, facing the audience this time. Very still balance then spiral out. Get your bearings, walk toward the wing, begin the phrase. Much less thinking and a lot more feeling. This is muscle memory, not improv. Feeling the unison of the movement with the dancer behind me and at my side. Moving my body in a familiar pathway I already know, well down into my legs and then up to standing. A quicker phrase is coming that I will have to fling myself through. I am somewhat mistrustful of myself to remember it. But when the time comes it is there and the phrase passes in a flash. Fling myself onto the floor, bounding back up and moving on. – [Notes: Vague detail – very focused on the present – moving in blocks of thought – not willing to own up to “not owning it” – about 45/60 seconds of thought] - Haley

Ballet class
Plie and stretch, plie and stretch…follow my hand with my head. Let’s see how much my back hurts today. Yep, definitely not feeling too loose. I need to stop sinking so much, try to be longer, can I even find those muscles today? Oh, OK, there they are, cool. I’m supposed to hold these the whole time? Yikes, this is going to be a long class. Let’s see if I can finally make this left foot look any better…hmmm, not really. I wonder if it’ll stay like that forever? Have I been holding my arms perfectly? Probably not, let’s check, nope, definitely droopy elbows today. Another fix that will probably never happen. Finally time for center! Wish I weren’t so unstable today. OK find those abdominals again, wait, wasn’t I supposed to be holding those the whole time? Why is that so hard for me to remember? Try to play with the musicality, now, don’t just want to float through, I can hold this balance a little longer, right? Ah yes, that felt fun. Try it again, whoops, not so much that time. Yay, I love jumping…well, when it doesn’t hurt, maybe it will magically feel better if I plie more? Wishful thinking. Wait, it’s time to finish already? Where did all the time go? - Emma

A dance class in the Ballery
I don’t think I know this choreography well enough…We have done this phrase for three weeks now at least. Why can’t I remember it? How does it start again? I’ll watch the first group do it so I can refresh my memory. OK…I think I got it…5,6,7,8, go! Oh, I must have turned the wrong way unless I was right and the person in front of me was wrong…These direction changes are confusing me…Don’t hit the pole! I should move out of the way before we get to this next part. I wish we did this in smaller groups so we’d have more space to dance in. I hate having to mark the movement, but I don’t have enough room between me and the wall. Oh well - - I will start further down stage next run-through. – Jennifer

When I am dancing…
...I find myself thinking in phrases, almost reminders throughout the piece. Sometimes I pose
demands on myself when I deem it necessary. My senses are drastically heightened, while at the
same time they are muted. Because of this heightened sense of awareness, you push yourself
harder than ever, so while performing I constantly tell myself to keep going harder. A common
mindset that I tend to enter when performing is “make the audience remember you.” I don’t
change choreography or timing for this to occur. What I try to do when I tell myself this is to
embody the person, the character and the dance in every way possible. I also find that when
dancing on stage with people I know very well, I remind myself that they are there with me. In
Danceworks, the show did not ask so much for a personal experience, as much as a community
experiencing something together. So with that, I tell myself, “They are in the same boat, feel
what they feel.” Or react to others, “respond honestly to what you see.” [Notes: “I tell myself to
be vulnerable.” “Feel the people around you.” “Make eye contact and create relationships.”
“Breathe.” “Pace yourself.” “Make them remember you.” “Respond honestly.”] - Julie

Observations on Dance thinking
Technique, Corrections, Images, Points of Initiation
Ballet – pull up, abdominals in, push under the floor, lighten up face, get it right, dance it,
breathe
Modern – pull out, release, see something, stabilize, dance it, phrase, transitions, breathe
Improv – move through space, using [body part], draw on the floor and the ceiling, make shapes,
write your name, be creative, move
Detrimental thoughts – self-destruct
Positive thoughts – self-efface
- Heather

VII. “Make it your own” 4/25/14 In-class writing

Prompt: In the process of learning a new dance, you are often urged to “make it your own,”
and then praised when you have “made it your own.” I am interested in your definitions of, and
responses to, this powerful imperative/phrase. For example: - Do you think this means the same
thing to the choreographer/instructor/repetiteur as it does to you? - How do you think they
know when you have “made it your own”? - Is there a certain specific moment when you cross over
the divide into the territory of “making it your own”? In which case, what space or style are you
crossing over from…? -- NB

I believe “making it your own” is something almost every choreographer tells their dancers. I
find that this phrase can be defined as an ‘experience.’ This ‘experience’ is in any context that
works for the dancer, but should also apply to the intent of the piece. I feel that when dancers are
told to ‘make it their own’ the choreographer is searching for a deeper connection between the
dancer, the movement, and the story that is presented. I don’t that a choreographer or audience
member would enjoy watching a dancer who mimics the movement with nothing else to offer.
‘Making it your own’ is letting go of the counts and choreography at times, and finding a sense
of vulnerability in those moments will lead to emotions and sensations that are a true and honest
experience. I believe that choreographers can tell when their dancers are ‘letting’ it be their own
and having the connection happen naturally, rather than forcefully ‘making’ it your own. - Julie
Making something your own can mean becoming confident and comfortable enough in the movement so that you become free and are no longer bound by the specifics of the steps. You can interpret the music and find time to indulge in various moments. You are able to find moments to accentuate that maybe the choreographer didn’t emphasize in the same way. There is, however, a difference between making something your own and disregarding how the choreographer asked you to execute the movement. The choreographer can give you images and ideas to help create the effect that they are looking for, but performing the movement with confidence and in a way that the movement becomes second nature adds a sense of yourself to the dance. An audience can easily see when someone has made the dance their own: the movement won’t seem put on, but rather it should seem as if the dancer was born doing the movement; it will radiate throughout their entire body and shine out of their fingers and toes. I really believe confidence is the key and you cross the divide into making it your own when you no longer have to worry about the steps or your emotional expression and you can naturally portray the dance to the audience. - Emma

Towards the beginning of a rehearsal process a lot of new material is thrown at you to pick up quickly. The goal is usually to get as much choreography done as possible. Since there is a lot of material, “making it your own” does not tend to come right away. However in an auditorium setting, you better make it your own right away to get noticed. After the dancer has had time to go over all the choreography and all the transitions is when making it your own should start to take shape and become more evident. Making it your own is not straightforward. There is no exact way of going about this. Making it your own could mean playing with the timing but still being on the counts. Focus could be played with further. A big one is intent. This can be especially hard if the choreography has no intent. It is then the dancer’s job to find meaning where there is supposedly none to be found. If a dancer takes the making it your own concept too far, the choreographer will step in and tone it down. It is best to take a risk in rehearsal, than to not even be noticed. A good rule of thumb to know when movement has become a “making it your own” movement is simply when the dancer is comfortable with the movement. This does not mean to be complacent. A dancer should continue to take risks and push the boundaries. Each dancer is unique and has their own special voice. Every dancer in a piece may make it their own, but they all come together to make one body of work, which is really the choreographer making it his or her own. – Kim

I have heard this phrase “making it your own” from many different choreographers. And what I have taken from it is the fact that they want to see who we are through the movement…what we can express. Not all choreographers want you to actually change what they have given, they just want to see what you can bring forward through their choreography. No one person has the same personality as the person next to them. How well can we use that is our ability to separate ourselves from the rest, and get someone’s attention through the movement we are given. I believe making confident choices is a big part of this. Lynne has been telling us this in ballet recently, explaining how we have a lot more choices even in ballet class than we think we do to “make it our own.” - Genna

Making a dance “one’s own” is not a matter of possession like how a product on store shelves is made “one’s own” by simply buying it. There is no greed involved here. However, there is self-satisfaction to be had and there is also much work to be done. For both the choreographer of the
piece and each dancer in that piece, it is important for the dancers to “make it their own.” Each
individual dancer investigates the movement, indeed by doing the movement over and over, to
see how it feels on his/her body, and brings him/herself to make it feel less foreign and more
comfortable, natural, most of the time. Choreographers are happy to see individual personalities
coming out through the movement, because each dancer works with and understands the
phrasing differently, if only slightly. Collectively, the group of dancers has in the end made it
their own, for they are a new cast of performers, new faces, with different ways of moving and
thinking. Relationships with one another have likely been formed in or through the movement.
The product of the performances is unique. Like any sort of combination, when piece changes,
so, too, does the overall thing. Thus, each individual dancer is crucial in a group’s “own” piece—
Kelly

I don’t think making a choreographer’s work your own, as a dancer, means to change it in any
way. I believe it means that one has really embraced the choreography and become comfortable
with it, so much so that it becomes natural to their bodies and on their bodies. At this point a
dancer can add more emotion and intent and feeling to the dancing and take musical and physical
risks. To me, “making it your own” means to keep the movement the same, but to add layers on
it such as movement quality and rhythm. I think a choreographer can see when a dancer has
made a movement their own by noticing that the dancer gives themselves fully to the movement
(and music) and takes risks. - Suki

I think right when you learn a new piece of repertory you have started the process of making it
your own. There is no way I will look like the company member who originally performed my
part because we are two completely different people and dancers. When I learned my solo phrase
for Wonderland from Fran, I knew I wasn’t dancing exactly like she was — but she liked it. I
think a choreographer knows when you have made it your own when you are mentally,
physically and emotionally involved with the work. It is not just physical. When I learn a part I
try and find something that I have experienced before, that would help me create the emotional
connection and physicality I need for that specific part. A lot of choreographers want you to do
the correct steps and counts but they don’t want their dancers to look like cookie-cutter robots.
They want, or at least I think they want, the dancers to stay together on counts when they need to
but they don’t want everybody to look the same (specifically modern dance – it could be
different for other styles.) They want your own interpretation of the outline of a dance they have
given you. - Megan

When a dancer takes movement and “makes it their own” I think it means they are adding
something new to what already exists. I think there are thousands of different ways to do this.
When a dancer can offer a new perspective or a phrase or bring life into a gesture they have
made a dance their own. I find the concept of “making it your own” even more interesting when
applied to task-based movement: when simple or pedestrian actions are given new intention and
significance. To make a dance their own I believe the movement must have some significance to
the dancer; it must be done with intention. As a choreographer, I think the dancer’s personal style
and intention are what makes the dance successful. Dancers “making it their own” is the most
exciting part because you see movement that meant something to you interpreted by someone
else. – Haley
Making a dance “your own” is very subjective. It can be applied in the classroom or on the stage. Making a dance or variation or phrase your own means that you find a way to express yourself, or the dynamics, in a way that is true to your dancing. That can mean filling the musical transitions and playing with rhythm. It is a game to play with yourself, to move in a way that is the most physical in filling the phrase’s in-betweens, while stuck within the confines of the choreographer’s instructions and intent. A choreographer’s intentionality is like a writer’s. Once the piece is written, once the phrase is given, the intent is second to the reader’s and dancer’s imagination. Of course there are revisions conducted in a rehearsal, but the end product is no longer married to the writer/choreographer’s mind. Making a dance your own can also refer to expressivity. That calls for facial expression, focus of the eyes, and emotion expressed through technique. Another way is ornamentation, as in adding small (or large) movements to what is originally given. Making a dance or phrase your own comes at an advanced level when one can rely on technique as the foundation and expand on the artistry of dance. - Heather

I believe that the phrase “make it your own” means exactly what it says. Often times the choreographer would say you know the choreography, it is in your body, now go ahead and dance it. By this point the dance feels natural and you are doing it in a way where you feel comfortable and the choreographer is pleased. You “make it your own” by bringing your own style to it. I look at it also as taking the intent and comparing it to a personal experience and using that as a guide to help you better portray what the choreographer is asking you to convey. – Mecca

To make a dance your own, you must feel comfortable and have a strong sense of certainty in the movement. It is about looking and feeling natural. This is especially true when you have to perform someone else’s choreography, as no two people think or move totally alike. A dancer can only interpret what they were taught, and a choreographer can either work with their dancer’s interpretation, or correct and help them fix the movement until it is what they intended it to be. Every choreographer is different in that one might encourage dancers to express themselves freely in the movement, yet other choreographers might be more strict about doing a dance “correctly,” or how they want it to be. It is the dancer’s job to respect this, but only to the extent they are capable of. With practice, executing the movement will come easier and feel like second nature, and that is when they will feel they have made it their own. – Jennifer


Prompt: You are sitting in the 10th row of the Orchestra watching yourself perform. Who is she? What does she look like? How does she command your attention (or not)? What is her style? What are her assets and defects? How does she seem to fit in with the others in the ensemble? This description must be objectively written in the third person (“She”). - NB

She’s tall and lean with her hair pulled back in a tight French twist. She looks happy. She comes out on the stage with determination and a smile on her face. She’s standing in the front so you can see her clearly, although all of the other girls have the same look: hair up, black leo, black skirt, tan tights and character heels. She’s precise and clean in her movement while she continues to keep an excited expression on her face. Halfway through the dance, she looks a little tired.
She’s going to have to pick it up if she wants to get through this dance. She’s breathing heavier, and she’s trying the best she can to not show her fatigue through her expression…Here it comes, the end of the dance. How does she get her leg up that high?... - Megan

The first dance of the night had just started and there she stood stage left looking like a chef in her green buttoned down shirt and black pants. She stood there without moving an inch for the first minute of the piece. You could see in her face that she was both excited and nervous at the same time. It also looked like she was trying to fight the urge to smile while a group of her friends made silly gestures up in the balcony. Her short but strong body managed to perform the piece in its entirety while staying in sync with the group. By the end of the piece you could see that she was proud of what she had just done. As the makeup dripped down her cheeks and her face was a blur she knew the piece was a success. - Mecca

She first draws your eye with her blonde hair, then once the movement and music alter her body she is clearly present in the moment. On stage, she has a sense of awareness, not only of her own presence, but of the presence of her fellow dancers as well. She strives not to stand out and be different from the group, nor get lost and looked over – she contributes herself to the group with precision, clarity and passion. Her attention to music allows her to make dynamic choices with movement, as well as to perform and embody the intent of the choreography. Her commitment to the music and to herself is honest and endearing. - Julie

She has fire red hair and skin so pale the lights illuminate a translucence of her image. She constantly carves and slashes the space leaving trails behind her of her body parts’ energy. Her essence looks familiar but altogether unique. It has a freshness about it that is seen through her explosive spirit, and with eye contact she relates to each dancer, eye to eye, heart to heart, soul to soul. It appears that she knows where everyone else is in space and understands what they are doing at a particular time. She keeps herself with them but like fire sparks throughout the show which led my eyes to her. - Crystal

As the lights come up I see her begin to move, the muscles in her back more defined than I expect. Some moments seem perfectly natural while others seem to stop before they are completed. The music flows through her until suddenly I can see that she is getting nervous and slightly anticipates the music. Sitting in my seat I try to fight against her early steps and get her back on the music. Whether from my efforts in the audience or from her own knowing she does it. When her face meets the audience I find myself wishing she had made some sort of expression with it because I can see that there is something building inside that can’t quite get out yet. With her arms I can see that she has put more intention behind the journey; they do not have the same awkward reaction to the rest of her body that they usually do. Overall I am impressed and I did not expect what I saw, a slightly more developed confidence and commitment to her movement. After all, I know how far she has come. - Emma

The last piece of the night has begun and I can make out the silhouette of her tiny body against the floor. She is right in the front and her timing is good. The white costume she is wearing isn’t the most flattering. She is darting around people then using her tiny arms to help her climb. She looks connected to the people around her and she looks fearless. The dance continues and she is just one of many sprinting across the stage. Yes - tilt! She only commands the space when she is
connected with someone. She was way too fluid with her movement. Where was her sharpness and connection to her body? - Suki

Wow - she is small. How old is she? Old enough to be in college? Nice costume. I think the dress is from American Apparel. She seems calm and happy to be up there. She could relax a little bit but it might make the dance bigger. I wonder what the title, “This,” means. She seems to have some sort of story she is letting out. The music got louder and more up-beat and her movement picked up. I think the dance is almost over. She had a nice style. She could use some more confidence though. - Genna

She is a soloist and I can tell she is able to hold her own with the amount of independence her energy gives off. She is not wearing any form fitting clothes, rather I see flowing sheer material in blue purple and red draped over her body suit. She is more than just a human being, and this flowing material symbolizes that she has more to offer than just dancing. This material acts as some kind of extremity, some kind of energy, something not tangible. She commands my attention with this sense of mystery. Her style is dynamic and musical, as if she were playing the arms and the guitar with her body. She contrasts the dynamics with extended, sustained movement, so I never know what she’s going to do next. I see her focus being her asset, as she peers into my eyes as if she were trying to figure me out. But her defects are her inability to use her back space and also the length and strength of her legs. The solo appears as an ensemble piece as if she leads them on and calls them with her dancing. The ensemble comes in and joins, giving off the same energy as she did. - Felicia

What is she doing? OK that had nice flow and continuity. Point your foot! Damn it point your foot! This girl doesn’t have the same attack as the other. Wow boobs. I wish she would have held that longer. It really would have suited the movement better. She’s very on her leg but she should just go for it more. – Heather

She is strong and grounded in her movement. She seems to be in a world of her own when she performs. She grasps my attention by the energy of her presence, direct focus, and natural ability. Her style is uniquely her own. Strong – but never overbearing. She has powerful jumps. She is highly aware of the space surrounding her, and is able to travel far and fast. - Jennifer

The curtain rose at Danceworks 2013 at the Kasser Theatre. There among the dancers for Powers of Ten was Kim Kafka. She blended in with the other dancers. Then all of a sudden she burst out into a straddle as a unit with the others. Her feet may not have been Anna Pavlova’s but her strong intent was convincing. As the dance progressed, it became clear that her hands were fitting for the May O’Donnell style. Her fingers were touching one another to create one strong beautiful line. Along with her hands was her eye contact. Her focus was so clear. She managed to stay with the group even though she was on a platform in front. She was confident and allowed herself to maintain her focus. Most of the dancers remained on the floor of the platform so when Kim stood up it was nice to see her true size, about 5/6” but she looks much taller. The articulation in her back was mesmerizing. The strong control back down to the ground kept my attention. Her face was pleasant without being overdone which was fitting for the piece. I would tell her to continue to find the expansiveness of her body. She is a wonderful dancer who deserves to be on stage. – Kim
She steps out from the upstage right wing and travels on the diagonal toward the downstage left wing. She has long arms and long brown hair. She speaks as she moves. I like the movement— not too fancy, kind of subtle. I try to understand what she is verbally conveying. Her line is, “Our sentences are so…sensible, so…when they are.” She repeats it, just replacing the adjective. The sentences seem a little nonsensical to me. I’m sure that if I just watch this dancer I’ll understand her lines and the whole piece more. But although she is graceful and seemingly confident about how she is moving and what she is saying, she doesn’t really help me. In her diagonal pathway, she comes across as a little seductive, a bit witty, even a tad arrogant. (She did walk right through that trio of dancers center-stage after all.) Later, she reappears as a sort of wannabe ballerina, with two other dancers refusing to walk normally—only on tiptoe—across the stage, and after that, as a sort of lawyer figure hoisted up by one of the men. At which point she argues that “we must make sense.” But wait a minute—wasn’t she speaking nonsensically just 10 minutes prior? You would think that spoken word, in dance, would make the intent behind the dance phrase clear. Does this dancer understand her character? Isn’t her job to make me understand her character? - Kelly