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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA SAN DIEGO

The Underground

A Thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree
Master of Fine Arts

in

Theatre and Dance (Dance Theatre)

by

Marcos Antonio Duran

Committee in Charge:

Yolande Snaith, Chair
Eric Geiger
Liam Clancy

2020

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The thesis of Marcos Antonio Duran is approved and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication on microfilm and electronically:

Chair

University of California San Diego

2020

DEDICATION

for Gabe, Sofi, Criss, and Andrew

May your educational journeys thrive.

EPIGRAPH

In artistic practice and thinking, extensive and profound *inclusion* helps considerably: the more that is included in a phenomenon, the more diverse it appears, the more it appears as a phenomenon, and the more inviting it is to the practitioner.

Juha Varto

Thought in movement desires nothing more than to lock itself within a form, for, once arrested, the illusion of that finality whose search is our perpetual torment is born.

René Crevel

For her alone these orange boughs lifted, these long shadows became a brightness rising. It looked like the inside of joy, if a person could see that. A valley of lights, an ethereal wind.

Barbara Kingsolver

The journey I'm taking is inside me. Just like blood travels down veins, what I'm seeing is my inner self, and what seems threatening is just the echo of fear in my own heart. The spiderweb stretched taut there is the spiderweb inside me. The birds calling out overhead are birds I've fostered in my mind. Like I'm being shoved from behind by some huge heartbeat, I continue on and on through the forest.

Haruki Murakami

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I am indebted to Lily-Rose Medofer and Gabby Nathanson, two undergraduate dancers who were by my side during my entire experience of graduate dancemaking. Their contributions to *Heel, Skull* (60 min., 2018), *The Rules of the Game* (25 min., 2019), and *The Underground* (95 min., 2020) allowed me to evolve profoundly as a teacher, researcher, and dancemaker. Nothing brought me more fulfillment than to watch Gabby and Lily bring these performative worlds to life time and time again. I am their biggest fan, and without their friendship, enthusiasm, trust, and unwavering support, this work would not exist.

In particular, I'd like to thank *The Underground* collaborators: stage manager Jacob Halpern-Weitzman and composer Alex Stephenson, for their dedication from the start of our first year at UCSD; costume designer Natalie Barshow for her year long commitment, extensive research, and consistently meeting me in my imagination; lighting designer Justin Beets for transporting me into wondrous worlds; scenic designer Miranda Friel for stepping in to deliver

mathematical precision and environmental expansion; sound designer MaeAnn Ross and assistant sound designer Carlos-Rios Dominguez, for their excellence of intuition and sonic grace; projection designer John Burnett for his ghostly execution; performer Katie Melby for her professionalism and abilities as a shapeshifter; performer Astrid Espita for her unique presence and commitment to the work; and stilt performer Alex Gruenenfelder for always wanting to give more. I will always be grateful for the opportunity to step into our production as it's director and performer with complete trust in our process and the worlds that we brought to life more and more each day. I will look back on these memories with utmost pride and awe.

Above all, I must acknowledge the support of my partner, Derek Weiler. I would not be the artist I am today without the previous 7 years of his encouragement, critique, and appreciation for the ever present quest of self inquiry that we have been on together, side by side. Furthermore, his expertise in art history has allowed for the specialized evolution of this research and its questions about the Surrealist movement.

VITA

- 2006 Bachelor of Fine Arts, Dance, University of California Santa Barbara
- 2012 600 Hour Contemporary Pilates Apparatus and Mat Certification
The Lab, Brooklyn, New York
- 2012-2017 Director of Marcos Duran Performance Group, Brooklyn, New York
- 2015-2017 CranioSacral Therapy and SomatoEmotional Release Training
Upledger Institute, Palm Beach Gardens, Florida
- 2019 Graduate Student Researcher, University of California San Diego
- 2018-2020 Teaching Assistant, University of California San Diego
- 2020 Master of Fine Arts, Dance, University of California San Diego

ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

The Underground

by

Marcos Antonio Duran

Master of Fine Arts in Theatre and Dance (Dance Theatre)

University of California San Diego, 2020

Professor Yolande Snaith, Chair

This document traces my imaginative and physical journey through *The Underground*, a dancemaking process and evening length experimental dance production. It stands as a selected compilation of research between June 2019 and January 2020. In it, I explore acts of self examination, becoming, artmaking in our current age of anxiety, political reflection, Surrealism, and transdisciplinary practice for non-hierarchical dance collaborations between myself and the production ensemble. As the co-creator and director of this theatrical presentation, I facilitate a world in which we are all allowed to exist poetically, transformatively, and responsively to one another and the present moment. The result is a 95 minute performance collage of abstracted physical “short stories” at the Sheila and Hughes Potiker Theater at UC San Diego.

The Walk that Led to Max Ernst

Wandering cities by foot has always felt like an adventure to me. In June 2019, I got the chance to venture as a pedestrian on a hot and sunny day in my hometown of San Jose, California. My brother Andrew had given me a ride to the neighborhood of Willow Glen so that I could have some time to myself and freely roam.¹ I planned to devote my imagination to thinking about *The Underground*, my dancemaking process and performance thesis due to premier in January 2020.

After a yoga class with Kent Bond, I stopped at Peet's Coffee to indulge in an iced beverage, write in my journal, and read a chapter of Haruki Murakami's *Kafka On The Shore*. My attention was absorbed in the words, "Nakata was a very self-disciplined child and good at hiding his fear. But there'd be the occasional involuntary flinch, ever so slight, that he couldn't cover up. I knew that something violent had taken place in his home."² I was so engrossed in this passage and its ability to aptly describe gestures indicative of trauma that I carefully copied it down into my journal as a way to deepen the experience. I contemplated some of my body's own involuntary tremors and efforts throughout my life to understand the effects of trauma through dance and artmaking.

After my last sip of iced green tea, I felt ready to dive into a brainstorm by way of ambulation. I packed up my bag and ventured out into the heat. With The Alameda as a probable destination in mind, I headed north across scorching, concrete sidewalks for nearly two miles. Finally, I arrived at the shade of tree-lined streets.

¹ Willow Glen is a neighborhood of San Jose, California. It has walkable tree-lined streets, diverse architecture, specialty shops, and independent businesses.

² Murakami, Haruki. *Kafka On The Shore*. New York: First Vintage International Edition, 2006. Pages 102-103.



Figure 1. Approaching The Alameda in West San Jose, California

Arriving on the historic avenue, I made a left and stopped in front of a place I had never noticed before. I took a step back in order to survey the entire front of Recycle Bookstore.³ I was surprised to find such an aged and unassuming shop still in existence in today's Silicon Valley. After walking not two steps into the entrance, a book directly to my left caught my eye. Sitting on a pile of unrelated publications, just below the height of my waist, *Une semaine de bonté* (*A week of kindness*), *A Surrealistic Novel in Collage* by Max Ernst was labeled with a modest, yellow price sticker. At \$1.99, I felt that I had found treasure hidden in plain sight.⁴

³ Recycle Bookstore is a San Jose institution beginning in 1967.

⁴ *Une semaine de bonté*. New York: Dover Publications, 1976.

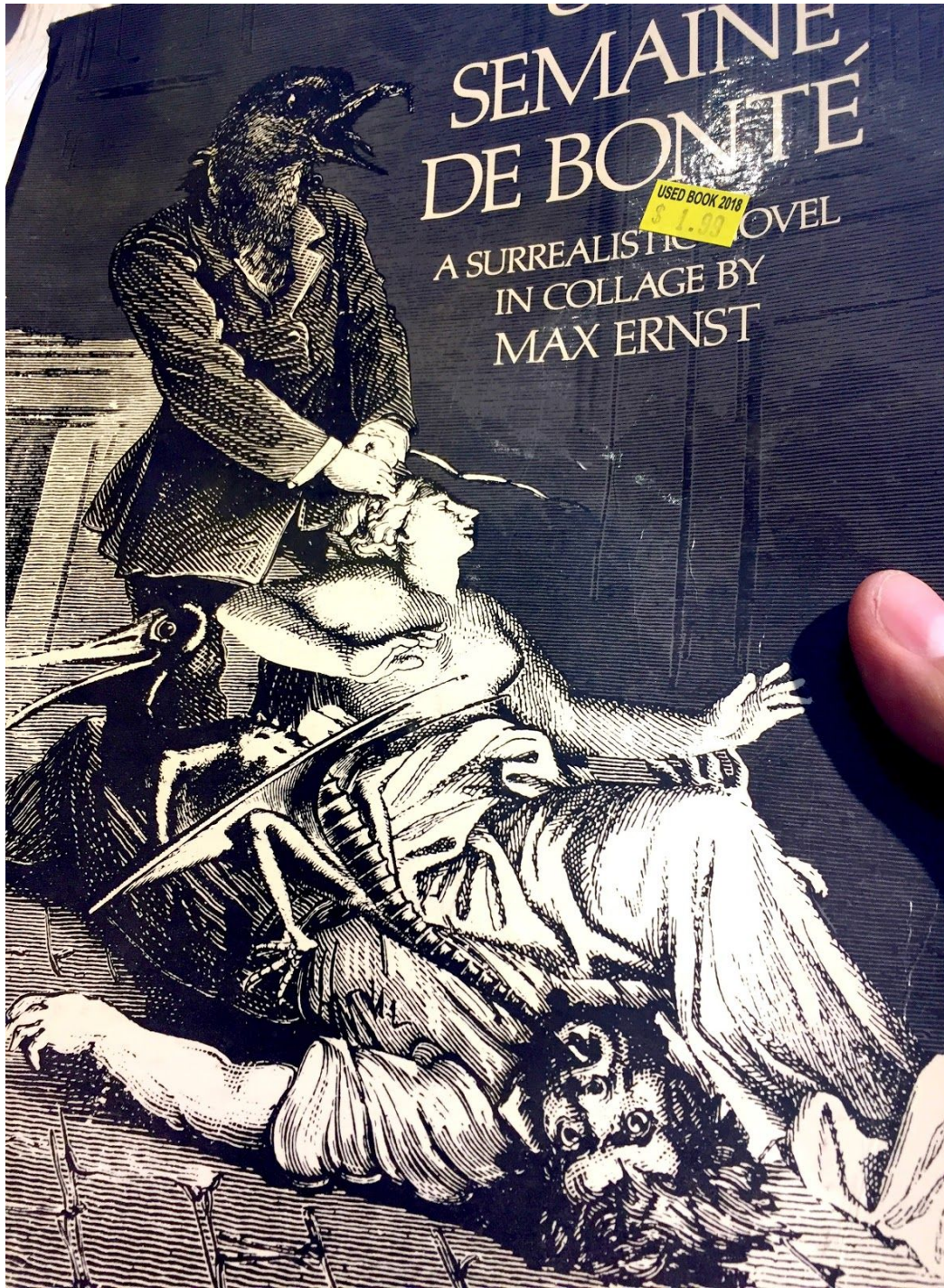


Figure 2. Encountering *Une semaine de bonté* at Recycle Bookstore



Figure 3. Collage by Max Ernst

My intuition was confirmed upon opening the book to its first pages. Figure 3 was a potent image that immediately expanded my imagination in regard to design and dramaturgical possibilities for my thesis. Reading the publisher’s note validated my career long strategy of “collaging” embodied ideas, tasks, and images as a dancemaking method.

Oneiric visions and erotic fantasies were the stock in trade of the Surrealists. For artists concerned with the free association of images, with the meaningful reassemblage of disparate objects, and with the play element in art, collage was the quintessentially appropriate technique... collage reached its height among the Surrealists (many of whom had been Dadaists earlier), and Max Ernst is generally

recognized as its greatest exponent... In his individual collages Ernst used paint and the most diverse materials, and the act of pasting was not always a part of the creation, but in these publications he relied solely on cutting and pasting pictures from old books and catalogues. The printing process concealed the joins completely, and the results are incredibly effective. *Une semaine de bonté* was finished in three weeks during the artist's visit with friends in Italy in 1933. The fateful events of that year in Ernst's homeland, including the Nazis' condemnation of his work, may account for the mood of catastrophe that pervades this collage "novel."⁵

Encountering this book aligned with my research on the 1939 French cinematic classic *La Règle du Jeu (The Rules of the Game)*, which commented on the frivolity of high French society while the country was on the brink of entering World War II. I began to note parallels between the socio-political commentary of these examples of pre-war European art, and today's rise in fascist ideology and authoritarianism in global politics. As a dancemaker in the United States, where democracy is crumbling under the 45th president and complicit Republican Senate majority leadership, I asked myself, "how must I performatively comment on today's socio-political traumas in a manner akin to these artists of the 1930's?"

I also noted that the neighborhood in which I was standing is a stronghold of the California Democratic Party, and is located within California's 19th Congressional district. It is represented by Democrat Zoe Lofgren, who would soon be in the national limelight as an impeachment manager during the Donald J. Trump impeachment proceedings in January 2020, ironically when I would be in production for *The Underground*.⁶

⁵ "Publishers Note," in *Une Semaine De Bonté*, v. New York: Dover Publications, 1976.

⁶ Shear, Michael D., "Zoe Lofgren: Impeachment Manager Is a Veteran of Two Impeachment Inquiries", *nytimes.com*, NY Times, January 15, 2020.
<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/01/15/us/politics/who-is-zoe-lofgren.html>

Researching My Shadow/ Marcos on the Shore

Four days later, I visited my sister Valarie at her residence on the south shore of Alameda, California.⁷ (At the time I did not realize the coincidence between where she lives and the names of her city, the avenue in San Jose I explored, and the book I was reading.) Due to stay for a few nights on her couch, I had time to continue reading Murakami's novel. One quote in particular caught my attention, "Your problem is that your shadow is a bit - how should I put it? Faint. I thought this the first time I laid eyes on you, that the shadow you cast on the ground is only half as dark as that of ordinary people... What I think is this: You should give up looking for lost cats and start searching for the other half of your shadow."⁸

Heeding this character's advice, I ventured out on a night walk, and said hello to me.

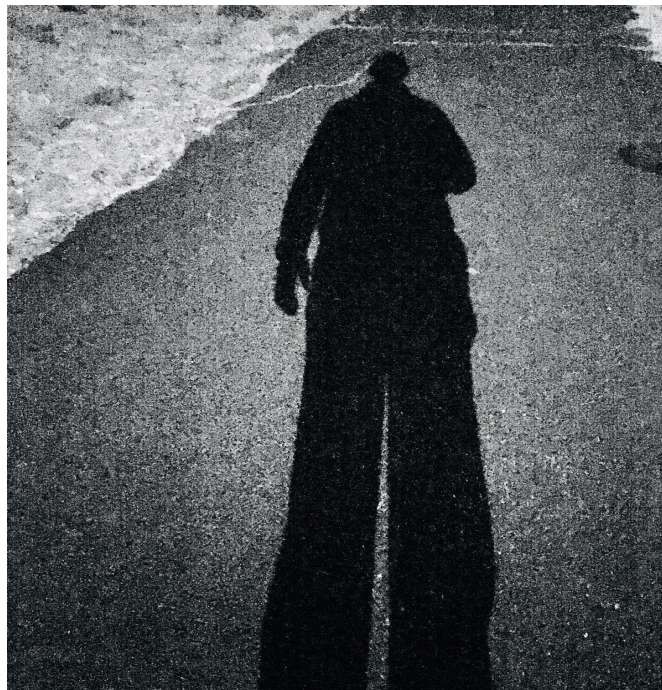


Figure 4. On the shore, greeting my shadow

⁷ Alameda is adjacently south of Oakland and east of San Francisco. Much of it was low-lying and marshy.

⁸ Murakami, Haruki. *Kafka On The Shore*. New York: First Vintage International Edition, 2006. p. 51-52.



Figure 5. Interacting with my shadow (1)



Figure 6. Interacting with my shadow (2)

Political Brainstorms

La Jolla, Ca

July 2019

Blue States

A 2020 Thesis

Imagine a general election where every state turns blue.

#kamalaharris #AOC #GreenNewDeal #Elizabeth Warren

Actors vocal casting the election as every state turns blue- OMG!

My solo begins with me canvassing for the Matthew Shepard Act in 2009.

That's how far we've come in 10 years.

THE PRESIDENT IS NOT WELCOME
BLACK NIGHT IS CALLING
THERE WAS SOMETHING MISSING IN MY EDUCATION
CONGRESS REALLY IS LIKE THE UPSIDE DOWN
CAN I SEE A FUTURE? I CAN'T SEE THE FUTURE BECAUSE I'M
THE UPSIDE DOWN
UNDERGROUND
POOLING, & SAVING THE UNIVERSE

Sketches

Seattle, Washington

July 25-26, 2019

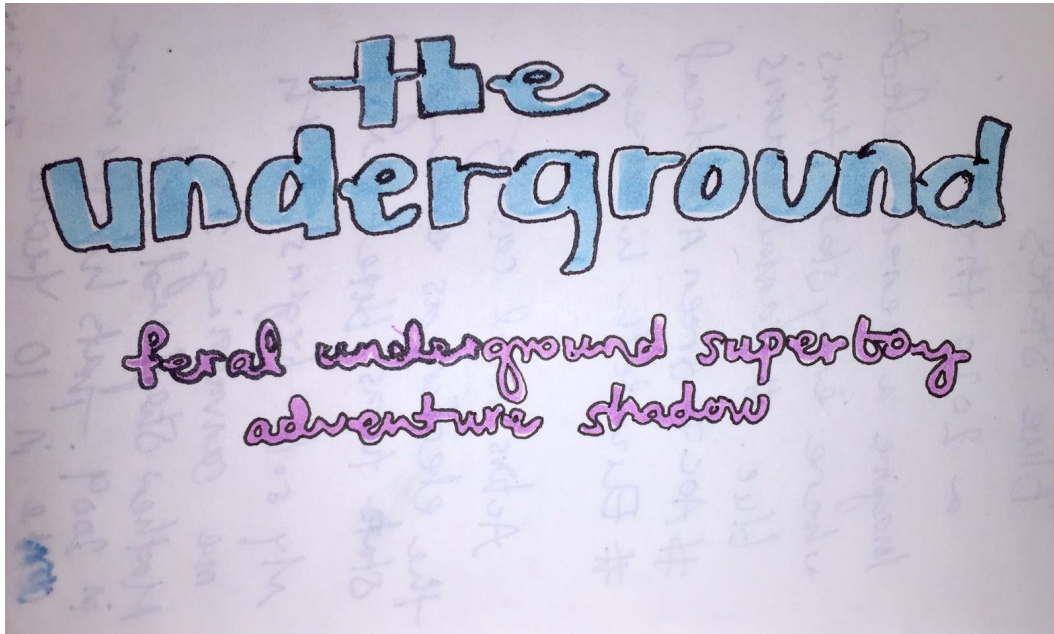


Figure 7. *The Underground* title sketch (1), ink and highlighter

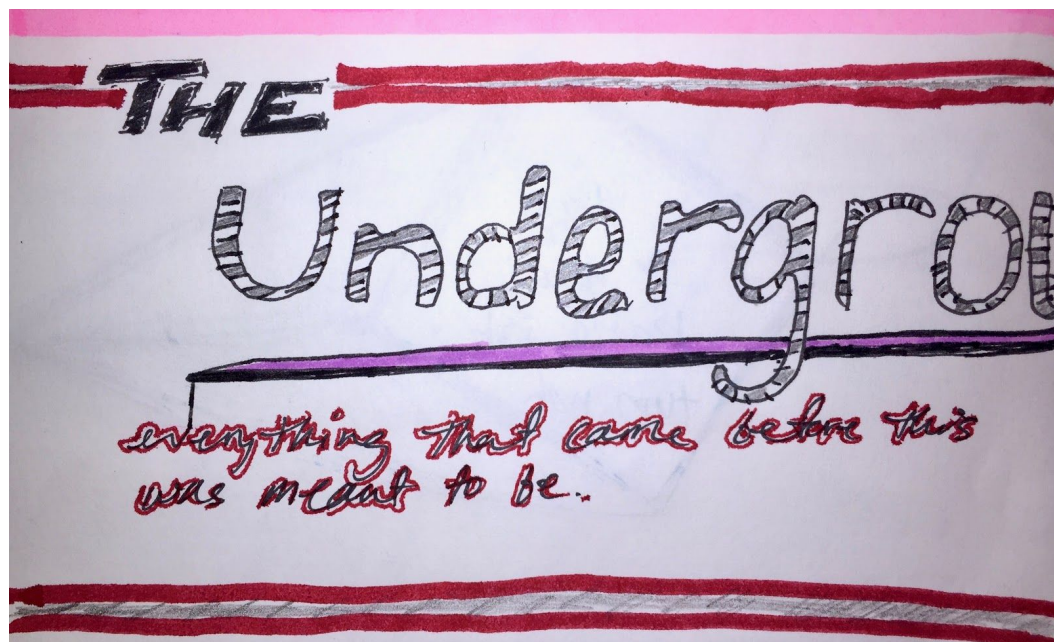


Figure 8. *The Underground* title sketch (2), ink and highlighter

Publicity Brainstorms

Seattle, Washington

July 25-29, 2019

The Underground / Blue States. Everything that came before this was meant to be. feral supergirls and superboys. Shadows out of reach labyrinths, falling off the deep end. Adventure. Imagine a general election where every state turns blue. Self-disciplined child, good @ hiding fear, Abstract pictures. The Orders of the Night : Nowhere but not nothing : Oneiric Underground : Future Underground : Adroit Manipulation : Phantasmagoric : Surrealist : The Underground is a is and adventure journey in physical physical theatre adventure. that have you ever felt like you are exactly where you are meant to be? Don't The Underground is a performance by director choreographer Marcos Duran. A perpetual adventure, he searches for the edge of the world where unicorns, dragons, and portals to other dimensions exist.

The Underground - a surrealist adventure inspired by novelist Haruki Murakami and collage artist Max Ernst. adventure, ghosts, superboys and girls, shadows BLUE STATES raw emotion, labyrinth, collage, the edge of the world, chasing the light, my body is a house, incarcerated breathless, piñata, unicorn, Abstract Pictures (Gerhard Richter) MOUTHGAURDS

Poster idea : Unicorn Piñata : Edge of the World : Orders of the Night : The Underground : The Rules of the Game : Heel, Skull : My Body, My Self : Worlds & Plateaus : Around The Fortress : Underearth : Under the Earth : On the earth, standing still : Kafka on the Shore : Hard-Boiled Wonderland & The End of the World

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 1:00am NOTHING or N/A 2:00am 3:00am The Underground 4:00am NOTHING or N/A 5:00am NOTHING or N/A 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12

Underground Unicorn : Unicorn Underground : Order of the Unicorn : Orders of the Nighttime Unicorn : Underground : Under your spell : The Underground

N/A's (eventually Blur) : A DANCE SHOW JAN 24-26 POTIKER THEATRE

Director/ Choreographer Marcos Duran continues his ~~search for~~ adventure through oneric worlds in "The Underground". Dreams will meet reality. Time will stop. The people will rise up. Marching will prevail. Our shadows will be claimed. Unicorn skulls will tell us the secrets of the past a and lead us to the future.

Director Marcos Duran will present a culmination of 2 years of artistic research in The Underground, an evening length dance theatre performance. ~~Foregoing extreme trials of self examination, he has~~ The performance will be inspired by feral Superwomxn & Supermen. Max Ernst

Overwhelmed by Art
Seattle Art Museum
July 27, 2019



Figure 9. "Becoming" *The Orders of the Night* by Anselm Kiefer, photo by passerby

What Is My “Underground”?

Berlin, Germany

August 12, 2019

Hiding in the bathroom at the AirBnB. It’s my underground. My dreams showed me the immaturity of my true nature. Eli would _____ if she could. My cousins - Kristen... were the first people I choreographed on. Although I don’t count class assignments in high school first choreographies or the incident with Carly and Paulina my freshman year of college.

A truer nature to hunt for a _____ with _____. Some kind of game I _____ on to win. The elder knows that with _____ you win - but the joy is not in winning, the joy is in seeing your _____.

Papi told me I’m the “shyest boy”. What’s my path?

I really need to harness my career. I should have said hello to Catherine Gaudet.

I need to be able to take care of myself. It’s getting hot in this bathroom. Under the table as if under a coffin.

Billionaires, they laugh at the rest of us dying underground. Pain, but no longer despair. What is my legacy?

Marcos Antonio Duran is dead. His thoughts took him to a new place on Aug 12, 2019 between 3:05 am to 4:16 am while on a research trip in Berlin, Germany with his partner Derek Weiler. After two hours sleep he retreated to the bathroom with his pens and notebook and phone so that he may have light to record his “underground” thoughts without disturbing Derek. (It didn’t really work, as Derek woke and started to sniffle and toss and turn upon Marcos switching on the bathroom light for the brief moment that the door was still ajar. Damn the light!) (He also began texting too soon and lost his dreams before actually uncapping his pen.)

This was a new reincarnation of Marcos as he sat there on a multi folded sheet atop the ledge of the bathtub. A new man of 35 who suddenly realized he didn’t have to lie there alone and quiet and polite in “do not disturb Derek” mode in the dark for lawd knows how many hours.

The old Marcos is dead. Now he can start the path to self actualization! It starts by rolling his lumbar spine forward and back as he inquires into its newfound ledge after a fifth Rolwing session that completely rebirthed his psoas and pectineus muscles.

Derek was awake when I went back to bed at 4:41 am. We talked.

6:14 am still awake. A pond drops down a well. At the bottom of the well the pond disburse. The many directions of the disbursement become separate bolts of lightning. The lightning becomes Maleficent, becomes my mother’s face, becomes a Native American landscape adobe heat Tucson Arizona cactus.

I've migrated to the kitchen floor and here I sit in an open butterfly position atop a small duvet comforter with my notebook and pencil/ pen case between my legs. The floor is white around me and an ironing board stands back beside and behind my right shoulder. My phone lays outside my left shin small purple notebook and plane ticket stubs right shin outside pencil mechanical outside right knee pen cap directly in front of right testical below this very notebook. This is my time now as my right ankle extends involuntarily, now consciously engaging and circling my left ankle. Wind through the birches and poplars.



Figure 10. Making space on the kitchen floor of the AirBnB

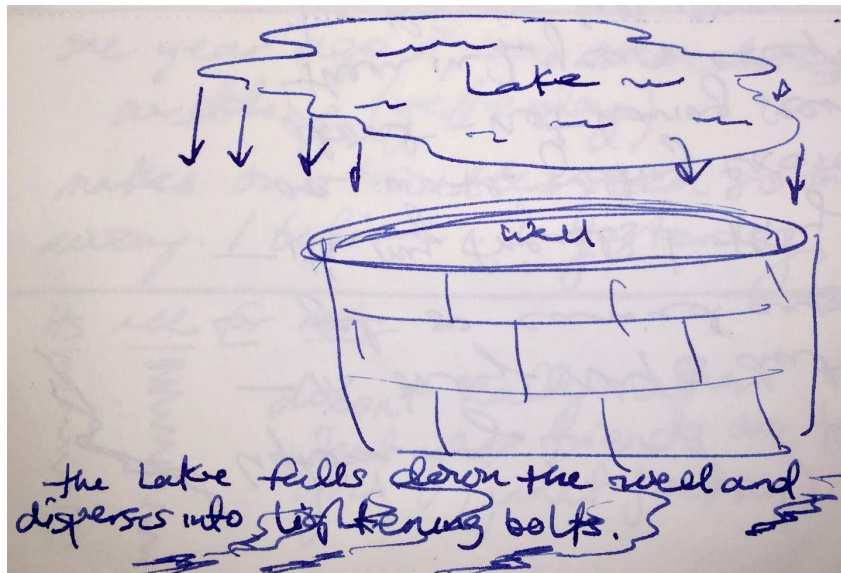


Figure 11. The lake falls down the well, ink

Fly Marcos, Fly

Pergamon and Neues Museums, Berlin

Later on Aug 12, 2019

Fly Marcos, fly. "Let's go see Marcos' thesis performance." Listened to *Heel, Skull 2x* while meandering through the artifacts of ancient Mesopotamia dating back 4,000 BC- Wow! Ashur, UR, Babylon. So much expression in the hands. Culmination. Do I need to find religion? What balms me? He was outta here so fast. I gotta go. Can you bring at least 5 or 10 of your family and friends? Portals to more and more dimensions.

Me > OA > Islamic Art > The Phallic and the Fallopien

So fucking exhausted. I'm a mad fucking idiot for not sleeping last night goddamn compulsive tendencies.

Berlin 1920 2019 > Marcos Antonio Duran

Placing myself in a constellation of references.

The Underground, Journey of Ideas and Concepts

Influence - who hasn't influenced me? I'm going for the MFA

Shared Traditions of Narrations/ Comparison of Motives/ Ancient Tales

Drawing to wake up. 2 hours sleep. Jet lag. Monday in Berlin. What else can be determined? Drawing would go quicker with pencil. How is my jaw? What can become of my solo? This is my desk for today. Took a selfie for my thesis. "My lumbar spine" after looking at my hand. Watching the movement of people. These are my observation notes. Holding her belly for a brief moment. Open hands, closed hands.



Figure 12. Mesopotamian funerary figures, Pergamon Museum



Figure 13. Mesopotamian funerary figure, Pergamon Museum



Figure 14. Selfie at the Neues Museum

I embodied Mesopotamian funerary figures while surveying the vast amount of indoor space. I thought directly about the size of the Potiker Theater at UC San Diego and how my dancemaking might inhabit that space in January 2020.

The Underground Mindmaps

Berlin, Germany / La Jolla, California

August 2019

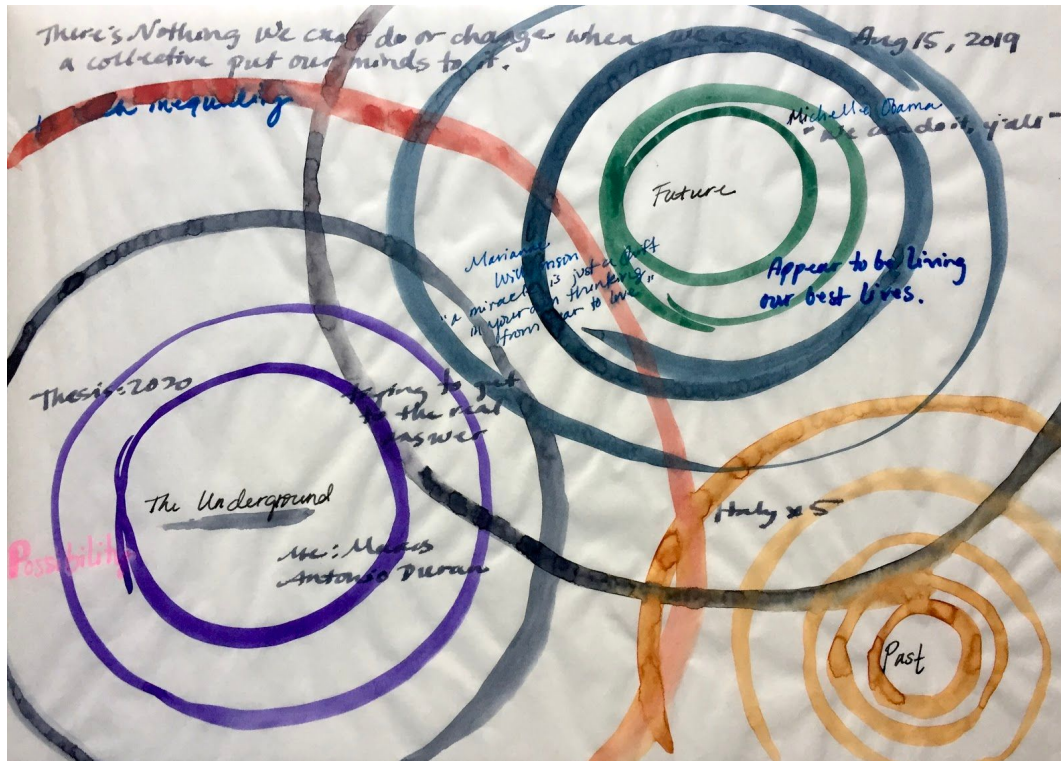


Figure 15. The Underground mindmap (1)

There's nothing we can't do or change when we as a collective put our minds to it; Too much inequality; Future; Appear to be living our best lives. "We can do it, y'all." - Michelle Obama on YouTube; "A miracle is just a shift in your own thinking from fear to love." - Marianne Williamson on YouTube; The Underground; Thesis 2020; Possibility; Me: Marcos Antonio Duran; trying to get to the real answer; Past; Italy x5

Figure 16. *The Underground* mindmap (2)

Spark; underground/ underground; When you know a connection should be put on pause
maybe it was always on pause he was such a dick; Potential; Hilltops; It's time for us to stop
hurting each other; I'll pick up some cherries and chips maybe what else do I want to eat today?
Maybe forgiveness is underground my father is so depressing this man is the explanation of my
being; Do you ever catch yourself riding your thoughts? The power of your imagination; I really
could just keep riding my thoughts this is my show; All I wanted was to not be like him; And then
we can all fly away very far away from here we should watch Forrest Gump. Run Forrest. Run;
Data on the orient; Understand; Time to paint; Perspectives; Your imagination can reach very far;
Me



For Love of Choreography

Berlin, Germany

August 15, 2019

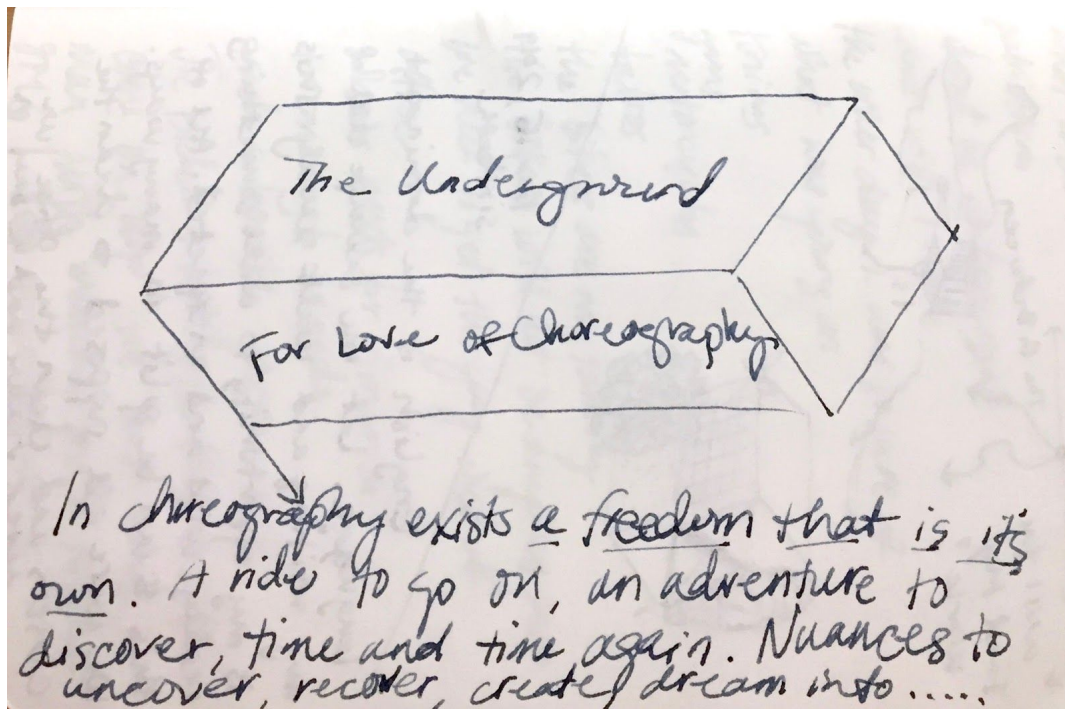


Figure 17. For Love of Choreography, ink

What do I need to do to keep my spirit from dying? Never could say goodbye to choreography. The most magical thing in my life is choreography. The roller coaster of choreography. What else do I want to achieve? I do want to choreograph endlessly. Never could say goodbye.

Chronologically - the beginning.

The Underground

For Love of Choreography

In choreography exists a freedom that is its own. A ride to go on, an adventure to discover, time and time again. Nuances to uncover, recover, create, dream into...

Labyrinth In Flight

On the way back to San Diego from Berlin, I had the in flight opportunity to watch Nicole Kidman’s transformative performance as Detective Erin Bell in the film *Destroyer*. After her poignant delivery of the words, “I know what it’s like to grow up mad... I’m mad. I’m still fuckin’ mad. It’s burned a circuit in my brain. But it’s... it’s... it’s just an excuse,” the shot pulled back to reveal a labyrinth that befitted my mindmaps and brainstorm for design and choreographic possibilities.⁹



Figure 18. In flight shot of the labyrinth in the film *Destroyer*

Identifying with the film’s narrative of a lifelong quest for peace, I reflected on my own anger and desire for fulfillment, and how I might channel these feelings through the dancemaking and performance of my thesis. I also considered how I might performatively shapeshift throughout the process of directing an evening length collaborative production.

⁹ *Destroyer*. Screenplay by Phil Hay, Matt Manfredi. Production Design by Kay Lee. Art Direction by Eric Jihwan Jeon. Dir. Karyn Kusama. Perf. Nicole Kidman. Annapurna Pictures, 2018. Film.

After the film, I sat examining my hands and my potential for creativity with many more hours of traveling to go. I then logged a few thoughts into my journal.



Figure 19. Examining my creative potential with “nowhere to go”



Figure 20. Looking into the camera

Don't you worry too much about it, hun. Labyrinth, shadow, reach, truth, refusing unnecessary aid. It's told like a time labyrinth. We aren't quite sure what's the past and what's the future and sure enough at the end of the film we find that the present was in fact the past, and the entire time redemption had already been achieved. What an intensely psychological movie. A thriller based on the pathetic details of the wounded who walk around as the living dead. Waiting for their turn to die.

Haiku Practice

Or: How to create something out of the everyday object

Or: Adequately creative for the day

La Jolla, California

Aug 27, 2019

Black wire Ray-Ban
I wonder what the P stands for
Playful, gently folded

Tiny white letter
You decorate the right frame
Mostly Unnoticed

Black gray brown or green
What color are these lenses?
Some kind of rainbow

Invitation to New York City

In late July while I was in Seattle, I received an invitation from my colleague and good friend, Emily Vetsch. She emailed me to let me know that Crystal Field, the founder of Theater for the New City in New York, New York, had appointed her as programming director for three weeks in the Cino Theater in November 2019. Emily thought it would be a “crazy idea” for me to come and share my work for one of those weeks. At first, I have to admit, I dismissed the opportunity as impossible for a number of reasons.

Then, I let the idea sink in. This was an opportunity to say yes, to “switch my thinking from fear to love”, as Marianne Williamson would say. I realized that traveling to New York would be a great opportunity for me to workshop “Heel, Skull,” the major solo excerpt of my upcoming thesis. I also became aware of the possibility of receiving support from UC San Diego to cover the costs of the trip.

By mid August, I began the work of applying for two separate travel grants. Shortly thereafter by September 1, I received a \$300 travel grant from the Humanities Division, and I was on my way toward applying for the Graduate Student Association (GSA) Travel Grant for \$500 which was due in October. As head of graduate dance, Eric Geiger willingly provided support on the application, for which I was grateful.

Figure 21 depicts an excerpt from my sketch book on how on the 4th of September I used watercolor and ink to meditate on the following phrases:

Time to resist. Can't continue. No longer afraid of my shadow. Shadow.
Any anxious moment will transmit. My soul is balmed when I'm adequately
creative. Following my body's impulse. The truth of the body. Here we go again
and again and again. My artist's life will no longer be taken for granted.

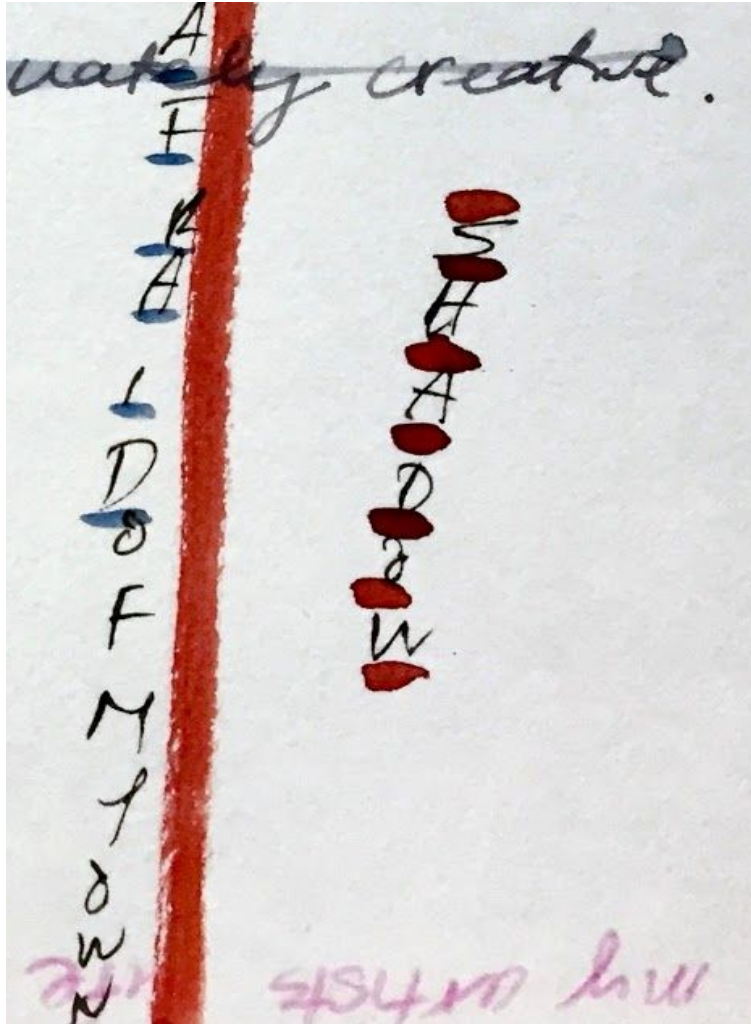


Figure 21. No longer afraid of my own shadow, watercolor and ink

By September 7, I was researching “The Age of Anxiety” as it related to my performance and dancemaking. For the GSA application, I drafted the following abstract of my work:

My work examines the truth of the body’s expression as bystander to current local and global crises. In September 2019, Newsweek published, “...the American Psychiatric Association reported that for the second year in a row, two out of three Americans say they are ‘extremely or somewhat anxious’ about their health, paying bills and keeping themselves and their family safe. The problem is most pronounced for younger adults—70 percent of those between 18 and 34... College graduates are the most anxious of all, surveys suggest.”¹⁰ Primarily, I have been studying how my anxiety in response to collective inquietude can converse with dancemaking and performance. My research has focused on

¹⁰ Piore, Adam, “Scientists Understanding of Anxiety is Radically Evolving” newsweek.com, *Newsweek*. Sep 5, 2019.

transforming my body's worry into carefully crafted dance performance with a message and mission of collective healing.

To attend as a performing artist at Emily Vetsch's *We Are All Starz Festival* was important to my professional development as a graduate student, I went on to explain:

Entering my 3rd year of graduate education, I would welcome my first opportunity to travel out of state to attend a professional level conference for the purpose of sharing and broadening the scope of my performative and written research in the Department of Theatre and Dance. I am currently the director of a team of collaborators and a cast of dance performers who are in a rehearsal process for my MFA performance thesis, *The Underground*. As a participant in the *We Are All Starz Festival*, I will be able to share excerpts from *The Underground* with a network of diverse teaching performing artists from across the nation. Their critical feedback during my subsequent talkbacks would be immeasurably beneficial to the advancement of my understanding of dance performance in response to anxiety, and I will acquire more confidence and new insights into my role as director and performer of this research. Completion of *The Underground* production will include three public performances in the Sheila and Hughes Potiker Theater at the La Jolla Playhouse in January 2020, and will allow me to advance to MFA candidacy here at UC San Diego. Furthermore, once I have advanced to candidacy, I will be able to gather data points from my speaking, teaching, and performative experiences in NYC and compare and contrast them to my experiences at UCSD within my written thesis that will earn me an MFA in Dance Making and Performance.

With my flight to New York City booked for November 12 through 17, I submitted the GSA Travel Grant application on September 19. In line with the research, I was already feeling anxious about developing a reimagined 20 minute solo version of *Heel, Skull*, (my 60 minute first year project) to share with all of my colleagues and friends on the east coast who I had not seen in over two years. As I knew that it would be an undertaking of the highest somatic attention, I developed a nightly meditation practice that helped me operate with more integrity of focus, self-awareness, self- acceptance, and self-compassion.

I Forgive Myself Meditation

September 10, 2019

12:00 AM - 12:30 AM: We have a short Ikea stool that we keep in the living room to use as a makeshift eating table, foot rest, and meditation seat. A folded gray and green yoga blanket usually rests on top of it.

Tonight, by pulling open the white, door-height, vertical blinds of our living room sliding door, I reveal the dark, grassy, outside courtyard that lays beneath our second floor balcony. Just beyond the grass there is another apartment building with a brightly lit cement stairway that leads to a second floor landing.

Facing this view, I sit down on the stool, set my Iphone timer for 30 minutes, toss it on the couch, and prepare to enter meditation with a series of micro fidgets. Eventually, my awareness settles on my breathing and I arrive into stillness.

Unexpectedly, I find that in my head I am repeating the phrase “I forgive myself” over and over again. I place the cork of a wine bottle (which is strategically resting within arms reach) vertically in my mouth between my front top and bottom teeth, like a doorstop to the entry way of my soul. I focus my attention on my neck and temporomandibular joint to try and let my lower jaw melt down and away from my upper jaw. When I sense enough of a release, I remove the cork and toss it on the couch in the vicinity of my phone.

I come back to my breathing and now my posture, although this time I engage a “mewing” position with my tongue, (which is to say that I place the front tip of my tongue directly behind my upper front teeth to gently stretch my maxilla forward). I then begin to press the rear of my tongue diagonally up and back against my upper palate. Suddenly, while directing my awareness to the vertebrae directly behind the mewing effort, space gives way, and I am able inhale more deeply into my nostrils and upper maxillary sinuses than before.

Immediately upon the revelatory inhale, a sudden electrical shooting sensation radiates from behind the right side of my face to the front of my right upper cervical vertebrae. It is dull and a bit wider than lightning, and if I have to give it a color it would be a dreary gray.

At some point, I realize that before I embark on this new and final chapter of my graduate career, I will need to cultivate a new relationship with myself. One of forgiveness for all of things I feel guilty about... forgiveness for the events I “should have” or “could have” handled differently... forgiveness for general dishonesty in my relationship to myself.

While softly vocalizing the words “I forgive myself”, I visualize small buckets of cool water washing over me, which I sense in the form of an energetic breeze that blows from above my head to down through my feet. My entire being is floating, rather than merely sitting.

I forgive myself. Mew. I forgive myself. Wow, I am giving birth to a new me! I forgive myself, and all the time I wasted was not wasted time at all. I

forgive myself. I am a beautiful person. I forgive myself. I see myself as I have always wanted to be. I forgive myself. This is the work of spiritual evolution.

I open my eyes, and I see the same bright fluorescent lights of the building across. I see the landing and elevator on the second level. I decide that these lights are too bright, and I swivel myself with my folded yoga blanket to face the inside of my darkened apartment.

I forgive myself, and I am finally myself again. I forgive myself, and I float above my own thoughts. This is metacognition. I am in a boat, and the words “I forgive myself” are floating beneath the surface of the water. I can see the shadowy silhouettes of the future.

I forgive myself, this is what Murakami meant by going down into the well. I forgive myself, this is what Yolande meant about going deep inside myself, about diving into the bottom of the pool.

I forgive myself, and I feel accomplished. The 30 minutes must nearly be over. I check my phone. 1:26, 1:25, 1:24, left to go. I toss it back on the couch. During this final minute I stretch my ear lobes down and out to the sides of the room. I also stretch the top of my ear cartilage up. The timer goes off after I forget that I am keeping time. I am done. Do I get to watch YouTube now? No. I decide to document this meditation first. I am tired.

Is my jaw clenching again? I forgive myself. I take a deep inhale as I type these words with my eyes closed. To be rid of jaw tension forever, what a new life that would be.

I Believe In Myself Meditation

September 11, 2019

12:00 AM -12:20 AM: This meditation proves more difficult. At one point I want to puke and shit diarrhea at the same time. Either my dinner was poisoned, or I really have subconscious issues with believing in myself. I think the latter. This makes me think really hard about why I find it difficult to believe in myself. I can consciously say I believe it and think I believe it. But, do I believe in my bones in my own abilities to succeed?

I suppose I lack direction and don't really know what to believe in. I have so many dreams. Tonight's visualizations are more erratic and darting, even though I sometimes do manage to float over them in a row boat while laying back to soak up the sun. I want to go in so many different directions. There are 10 different versions of myself and I don't know which one is going to win. I know at some point I will have to make a choice. Or I will make the choice to work really fucking hard to achieve the multitude of dreams that I have.

My mind keeps coming back to new and past choreography. Who will be in my cast for my thesis? What kind of choreography would engage undergraduate dancers who lack the sophistication to appreciate what I have to offer as a director?

Surrealist Influences

After an entire summer of allowing Max Ernst's collages to permeate my imagination, I visited Geisel Library on September 25 to learn more about Surrealism. I picked up writings by André Breton, the founder and leading theorist of the Surrealist movement. Right away, I identified with his statements,

... surrealism aims to reduce, and ultimately to resolve, the contradictions between sleeping and waking, dream and action, reason and madness, the conscious and the unconscious, the individual and society, the subjective and the objective. It aims to free the imagination from mechanisms of psychic and social repression, so that the inspiration and exaltation heretofore regarded as the exclusive domain of poets and artists will be acknowledged as the common property of all.¹¹

On the political plane, surrealism has defended consistently the perspectives of proletarian internationalism; it has combated every effort of capitalist recuperation, and it continues to propose and support the boldest revolutionary solutions to the problems posed by contemporary events. The movement has not pretended, however, to be a political party.¹²

What Breton writes in these passages could summarize my own career long mission as an inquiring artist and dancemaker who is ever committed to social justice and the emancipation of human imagination.

Yet, through more inquiry, I learned that one should think twice about idealizing the philosophy of Breton and most of his Surrealist contemporaries due to their blatant hypocritical stances, such as one against homosexuality, among others. In the late 1920's, Breton is quoted in a Surrealist magazine, stating, "I accuse homosexuals of confronting human tolerance with a

¹¹ Breton, André. *What is Surrealism?* Edited by Franklin Rosemont. Pathfinder Press, New York: 1978, p. 1.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 2.

mental and moral deficiency which tends to turn itself into a system and to paralyse every enterprise I respect.”¹³

Departing my enthusiasm for Breton, my excitement for Surrealism was salvaged upon learning about his one, openly queer contemporary, René Crevel.

If you look at the photograph of leading Surrealist artists and writers, taken in 1933 at Tristan Tzara’s, you will find René Crevel in the back row, and that is where he long remained. The others, including Andre Breton, Salvador Dali, and Paul Eluard, all seem to know what to do with their hands, whereas René Crevel is leaning forward, one hand placed for support on the shoulder of Max Ernst...¹⁴



Figure 22. The Surrealists
Front row: Tristan Tzara, Andre Breton, Salvador Dali, Max Ernst, Man Ray.
Back row: Paul Eluard, Hans Arp, Yves Tanguy, René Crevel, 1933.

With one of my own artistic hands placed on the collages of Max Ernst, I went back to Geisel Library on September 27 to pick up Crevel’s memoir, *Mon Corps et moi (My Body and I)* from 1925. The book jacket alone wasted no time in inspiring me, stating,

René Crevel attempts to trace with words the geography of a being. Exploring the tension between body and spirit, Crevel’s meditation is a vivid personal journey

¹³ Geerinck, Jan-Willem. “Breton’s Homophobia”. *Jahsonic*, blog.jahsonic.com, Feb 13, 2008.

¹⁴ Cooper, Dennis. “Spotlight On... René Crevel My Body and I (1925)”, *DC’s*, denniscooperblog.com. Nov 28, 2016

through illusion and disillusion, secret desire, memory, the possibility and impossibility of life, sensuality and sexuality, poetry, truth, and the wilderness of the imagination.¹⁵

In the weeks to come, I took refuge in his melodic prose about solitude, sexual and sensual exploration, and the wonder that is the everyday. For me, Crevel's words behaved as an imaginary friend, providing me with encouragement and validation on my own journey through the "geography" of my being and the "wilderness" of my imagination.

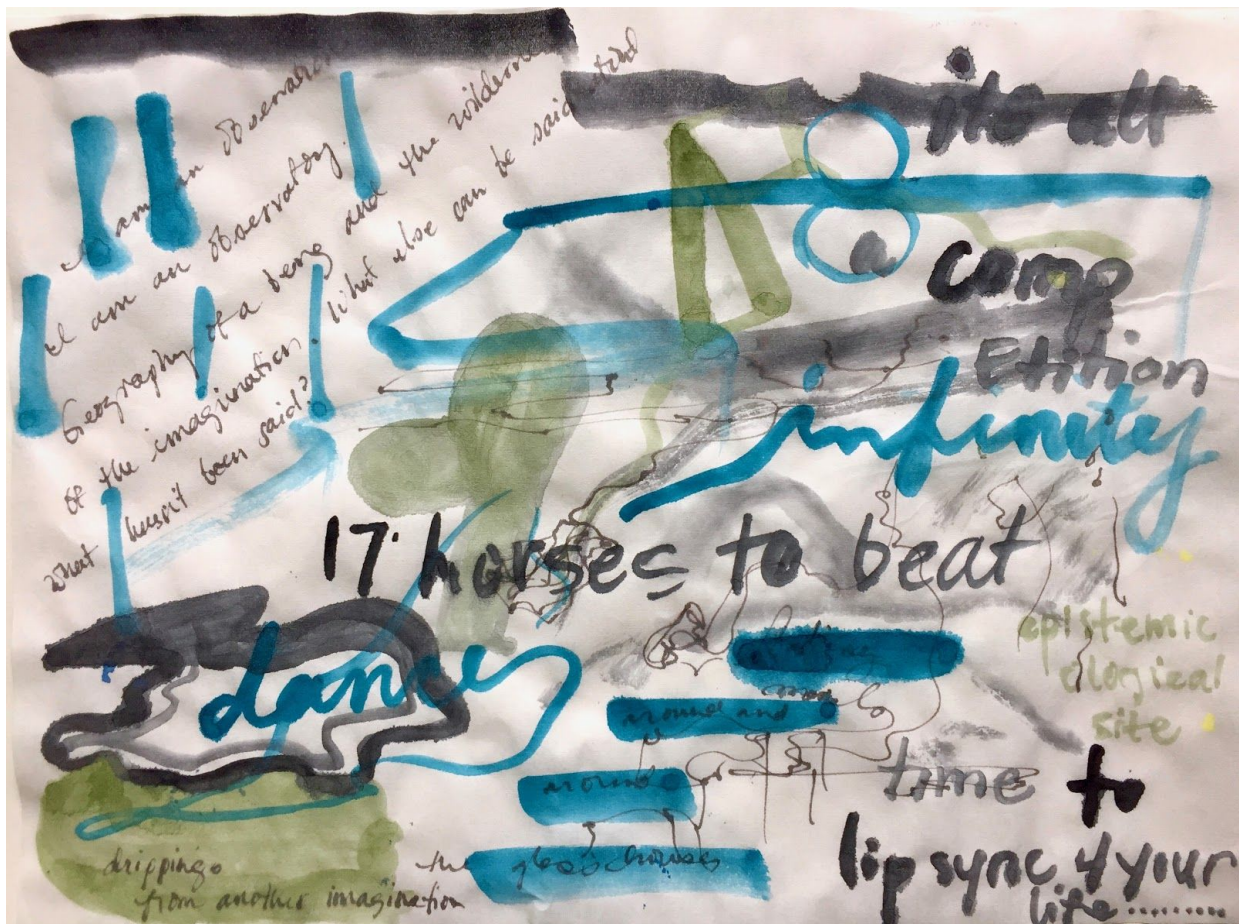


Figure 23. 17 horses to beat, watercolor and ink

¹⁵ Crevel, René. *My Body and I*. Brooklyn: Archipelago Books, 2005.

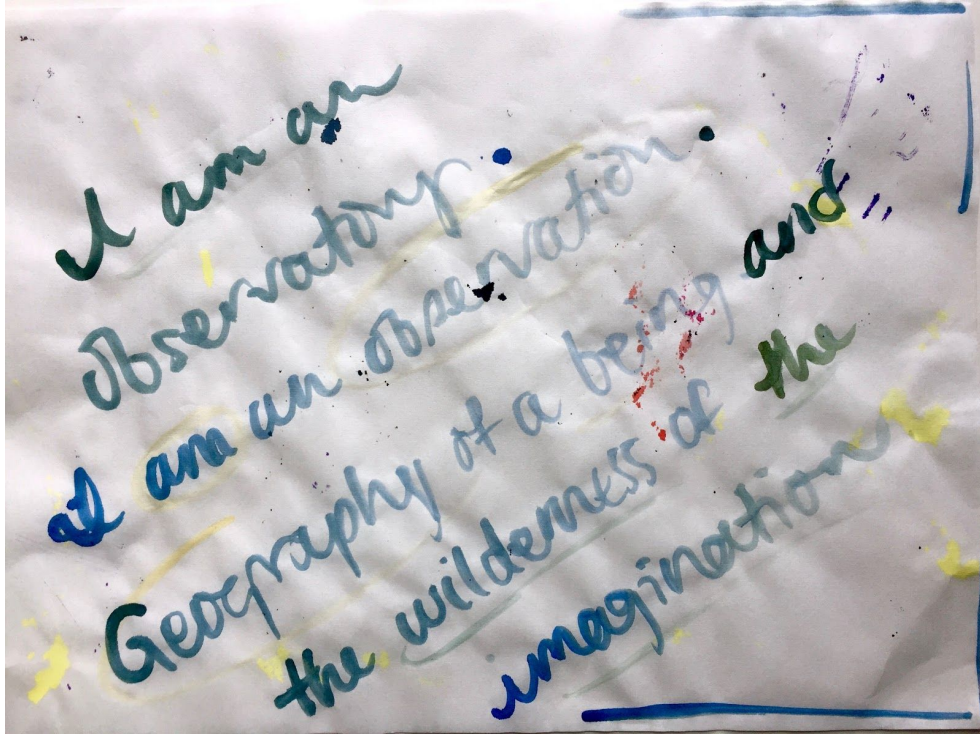


Figure 24. I am an observatory, watercolor

My meditations were my wilderness before the official start of *Underground* rehearsals.



Figure 25. Meditation meditation meditation, watercolor and ink

I Want To Be Closer To Myself Meditation

September 29 - 30, 2019

11:59 PM - 12:19 AM. I am sitting in the glow of white Christmas lights that we keep up all year to frame the kitchen and hallway entry ways. I close my eyes and immediately think about ... at least one version of my truest self.

I place my palms on my forehead so that the tips of my fingers round just beyond the center of my crown. I allow my hands to mold softly and perfectly to the curvature of my skull. This contact with myself comforts me. My palms feel somewhat cool, and my fingers, somewhat disconnected, take a few more moments to soften and mold. I keep this contact for a few dozen seconds before I let my hands slide down my face, smashing and pulling my eyes, nose, and cheeks down the front of my cranium.

My left hand descends completely while my right stays connected to the right side of my face. With my fingertips on my right forehead, the body of my fingers hover over my closed eye ball, and my palm inferior to my cheekbone. I push my face so that my head tips to the left, and I let my spine shift into a side curve while maintaining a gentle oppositional push into my hand. My cervical spine pops.

I want to be closer to myself. My lower cervical spine pops again as I go deeper into the curve. I let the front of my face drop forward just a little bit so that my anterior skull can sit in front of my neck, so my neck can be behind my anterior skull. Something behind my face, near my right ear canal cracks, as if some internal cartilage has released and my sinuses can now blossom open as they were intended to do. I roll my spine back to vertical, and indeed I do take a full deep breath into my nose.

I want to be closer to myself. Oh. My face feels open. My neck feels free. This is what it's like to be closer to me. And only a minute or two has gone by.

In the next 18 minutes or so, my mind wanders between teaching, my upcoming trip to New York City, and my placement in the room. I place my hands on various parts of my body and allow those parts to improvise and move freely with only the intention to explore. My left shoulder pops as I hold my collarbones and upper ribs with a palm over my heart.

I want to be closer to myself. Images of my father shooting me with a gun. My Nana is screaming from the front porch. I don't know what to do. There is nothing I can do. I should call tomorrow. Or later this week. Or later this month. God.

I want to be closer to myself.

My back is facing the open sliding door, and I wonder if my neighbors can see my seated silhouette writhing.

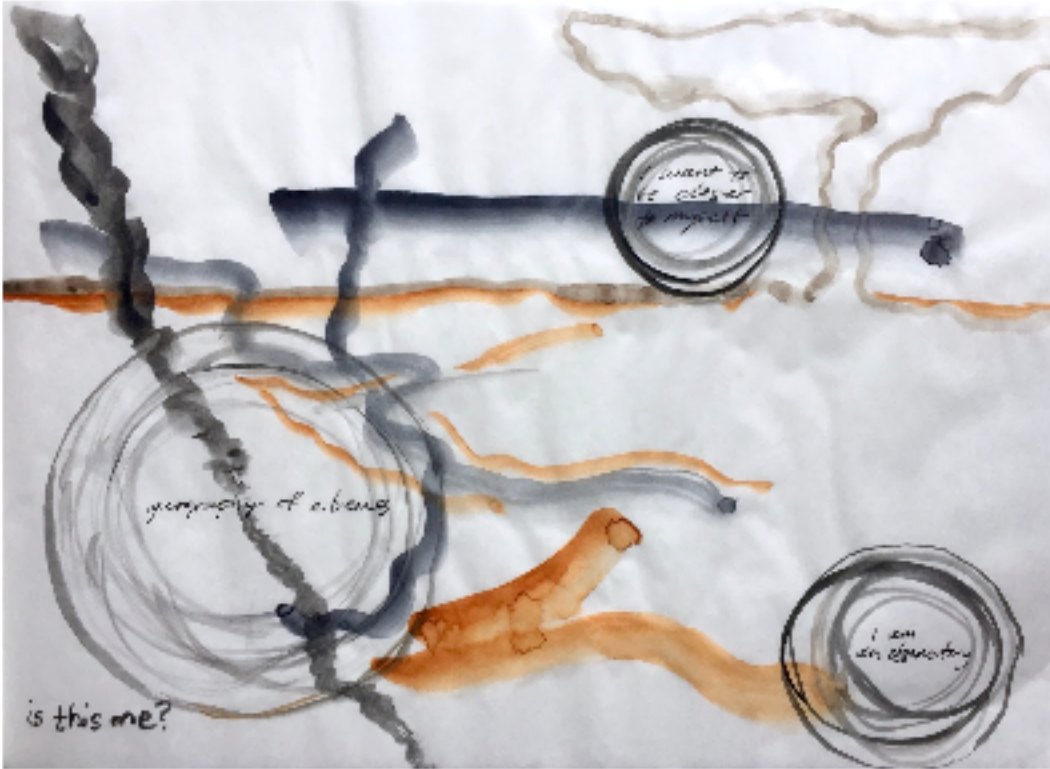


Figure 26. Meditation mindmap, watercolor and ink



Figure 27. My shadow in my shoes, holding "COMMUNICATION"

Unsent Letter To Marc Maron Regarding an Unexplored Movement Idea
September 2019

Dear Mr. Maron,

I know you are a busy guy, so I'll cut to the chase. I am writing to ask for permission to use parts of your podcast for my dance performance thesis at UC San Diego, where I am currently an MFA Dancemaking and Performance student in the Department of Theatre and Dance. The performances will take place January 24, 25, 26, for the academic community.

I am a huge fan of your podcast and have been listening to you for years now. Thank you for helping me to feel not so alone on my usually solo inquiry through art making, personal growth, and self care.

What I appreciate most is your ability to share your evolving truth with the world. I was recently inspired by your talk about your dad on episode 1037. It hit home for me because it has taken me four years to visit my permanently disabled father who suffers from drug addiction and mental illness. Not only did I identify with what you were saying about the importance of forgiveness, but I began to imagine how I might use this and other recordings of your podcast for a live physical theater show.

My work is called *The Underground*, and I can imagine dancing and reenacting parts of your stories and interviews as I perform onstage at the Sheila and Hughes Potiker Theatre (La Jolla Playhouse). My work attempts to embody political statements, as well as universal truths while suspending reality and diving into the possibilities of the imagination. I try to say yes to all of my creative ideas, which includes drafting you this letter.

While my thesis production is centered around the collaboration between graduate students, I can not offer to pay for any rights to your podcast. What I can offer is to promote your podcast to a new generation of audience, as these houses are usually filled with 18-21 year olds watching and studying theater and dance for the first time in their lives.

I don't know if I will hear from you, but...

The Audition Flyer
September 2019

AUDITION 6:30PM THU OCT 3, 2019
Wagner Dance Building Studio 2

Arrive by 6 to sign up / warm up

2 UCSD MFA DANCE PRODUCTIONS:

| | |
|--|--|
| <p>THE UNDERGROUND Directed by Marcos Duran Jan 14 - 25, 2020 Produced in the POTIKER Theatre</p> | <p>AN OBJECT, SCREAMING Directed by Paulina Colmenares Jan 28 - Feb 8, 2020 Produced in the SHANK Theatre</p> |
|--|--|

Poetic adventures for physical performers

Surrealistic
dramas
through
fragmented
fields

We
Are
Looking
For
Daring
Dancers
Who can act
Musicians
Who can move

Questions? Email:
mcduran@ucsd.edu

Wagner Dance Building Studio 2
6:30PM THU OCT 3, 2019 **AUDITION**

Figure 28. Audition flyer, image by Max Ernst with superimposed text

Approached By A Giant

I could never have predicted to work with a stilt performer for the first time in my thesis work. In response to the audition flyer, a first year undergraduate theater major sent me an email on Monday, September 23, 2019 at 2:12 PM:

Hello Marcos!

My name is Alex Gruenfelder, and I had some questions about the dance pieces. I'm a circus performer with extensive movement training, largely linked to my stilt performance. I do not have a lot of dancing experience, but am curious if there are any spaces to audition for someone who does different and unique movement work like me. "Poetic adventures for physical performers" definitely caught my eye.

Please let me know if there's any roles that you believe might work for this. I am happy to bring my stilts to an audition, and send you a resume and videos of my work. Thank you so much!

Best wishes,
Alex Gruenfelder

While hesitant, I felt open to the possibilities that this could bring to *The Underground*. I asked Alex to come to the audition with his stilts so that I could see what he could do in response to my prompts for movement exploration. I was intrigued, hopeful, unsure, and a little afraid.

Upon meeting him I was immediately struck by his presence of mind, ability to clearly state what he was thinking, and willingness to thoughtfully consider and physically execute my directions, both on and off the stilts. Saying "yes", I invited him to rehearsals. As he had limited dance specific experience, and I had no experience working with a stilt performer, we maintained an agreement to continue exploring collaboration for as long as it made sense for both of us. I could not have foreseen how appropriate this young man's presence and abilities would be in the dramaturgical and experimental contexts of *The Underground*. We made it work.

A Walk of Omens/ The Orders of My Night
Oct 2, 2019

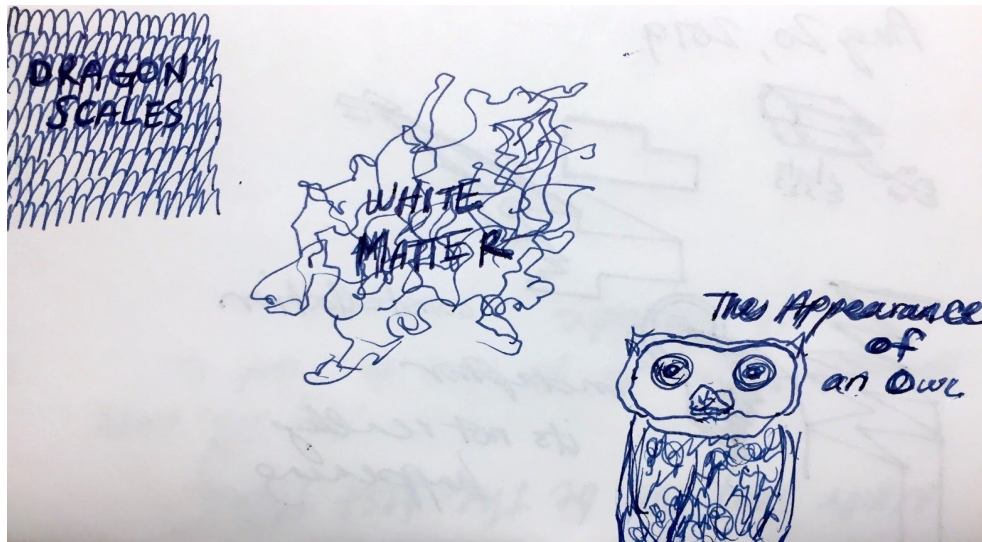


Figure 29. Omen sketch, ink

9:30PM. I embark on a night walk while listening to John Adams' *Harmonielehre: Part III - Meister Eckhardt and Quackie*. I cross the road on a left turn, when I notice an animal flying toward me overhead in the distance. A bat? Too big to be a bat. It shifts its course slightly right, and reflects light in a few different ways. A seagull? No, impossible. A white owl of utmost majesty soars above the upward expansion of my crown. I have never seen anything so beautifully noble. I have never come across such an encouraging and uncanny omen in all my life - an archetypal animal whose presence exists throughout so many fantasy tales suddenly appears while I listen to a composition in line with cinematic fantasy. I text my family, "Omg! The most beautiful white owl flew over and around me just now!" My sister Val replies, "Wow it's a sign of wisdom. White owl is the symbol of wisdom. The snowy owl is the symbol of endurance. It represents big dreams along with the ability to achieve them. It is the sign of new beginnings and moving forward with all might." With my thesis audition tomorrow, my sense of joy could not be more radiant. I continue on my walk and Adams' larger than life musical conclusion fades in my ears. Alex Stephenson's *Heel, Skull* begins just as I approach my own shadow. Okay universe. The beginning of my "Heel Skull" solo will have to include a massive silhouette that expands the entire length of the Potiker, my imagination continues. Perhaps 15 minutes later, I am nearly back home when I come across a scorpion on the sidewalk. After two and a half years in San Diego, this is the first scorpion I've encountered on the West Coast. My astrological chart indicates that my moon is in scaprio. The moon sign is apparently the sign one grows into being. Thank you, universe, for letting me know that I am finally coming home. Coming back not only to me, but to who I will be.

I Want To Know My Integrity Meditation

October 2, 2019

11:21PM - 11:43PM. I sit facing my darkened entryway. I want to know my integrity. After not even a minute or two, I notice that for the first time ever, I can feel my blood pumping through the bottoms of my feet. I can feel it pulsing in my throat and upper ribs too. Curious. Am I in contact with my craniosacral system? Yes. Maybe this pulse is the expansion and contraction of my craniosacral pulse. This is my integrity. My heart beat. My nervous system is beating. Inhale deeply and relax my tongue. I let it be a pool at the bottom of my mouth. I want to know my integrity. My stomach starts to gurgle, and I start to feel flush.

I want to know my integrity. I suddenly feel like I am clammy and on the verge of breaking a sweat. Derek said earlier that I must be nervous for holding my thesis audition tomorrow.

I want to know my integrity. Thoughts of New York City and staying with Meredith. My body walking the streets and avenues of Manhattan. Maybe I'll get to take a bath. I can see the beginning of my show in the Potiker in so many iterations. I can stand in my integrity. I check in with my spine as it stands up from my sitting pelvis. I fall into my imagination and I can see myself reenacting scenes from Baz Luhrmann's film *Moulin Rouge*. I can be Nicole Kidman. I see myself leading an audience through a cranio sacral integration warm up, and finishing the introduction to my thesis show with "And in the words of Marina Abramovic, now you are ready to witness the show." My memory of standing in her presence is very clear. That was a gift to my sense of integrity as a performer and audience.

I want to stand in my integrity. I wake up in my meditation. Oh that's right, I am in the middle of a 30 minute meditation, and there I was lost in my gift, in my integrity of imagination. I was watching my thesis before it even exists. To have these visions feels like my gift. I know how to bring performances to life. I know how to tell stories. I know how to communicate what is inside me.

I come back to tonight's mantra which has morphed into "I can live my integrity". Immediately, I start to feel hot again. My blood flow starts to increase, and I can feel it pumping through me. It is not a very comfortable feeling, and I find it curious. I already suspended all sense of reality in this meditation. I feel ready to be done. I lean very far left to peer around the wall so that I can see the stove's clock. Only 19 minutes have passed. Less than 11 minutes to go...

I turn around and face the sliding glass door. I can people-watch and call that meditation, which I do for a few minutes. Anthony is doing laundry. Neighbors are coming home from a long day of work. Other neighbors are silhouetted through their partially open blinds. No. I can't force myself to sit here when I can be writing. I am done. This feels done. A new sense of me has just begun.

Group Rehearsals Begin

On October 8, I began researching the possibility of light and shadow in studio 3 of the Molli and Arthur Wagner Dance Building with Lily-Rose Medofer, Gabby Nathanson, Alex Gruenenfelder, and Louis Zapien. I excavated a few mobile work lamps from the props closet that had the ability to cast our shadows magnificently across the room and against the high walls. We spent the better part of two hours investigating how to improvise and interact with smaller and larger versions of our shadows. Regrettably, I do not have any footage from this day. My notes merely state:

shadows, what did you notice?
you can change the size of your body
dialing it back from ~~with~~ your shadow
your shadows like your chilling
silhouetted bodies w shadows

let go of my body oggie, lose yourself to dance
I can't even hear myself think
I can't even choreograph anymore

The next day I wrote, "Why do I feel like I'm always standing on the edge of a cliff? So fucking exhausted from being on the edge". I was grappling with the distinct feeling of not knowing what to do as a choreographer. My creative mind was in a state of shock, as no dancers besides Lily and Gabby were able to commit to the process, and I was still unsure about Alex's stilt abilities in the context of the work's interest. My plans for working with 10-15 performers had evaporated, and I did not know what the solution would be.

At this crucial turning point, I was reading the *Manifestos of Surrealism* by Breton:

Where does it begin to turn bad, and where does the mind's stability cease? For the mind, is the possibility of erring not rather the contingency of

good? There remains madness, “the madness that one locks up,” as it has aptly been described.¹⁶

Our brains are dulled by the incurable mania of wanting to make the unknown known, classifiable.¹⁷

I now can reflect on how uncanny the timing of my reading was given the uncertainty of my process and my desire to manifest a “classifiable” dance as soon as possible. My brain certainly did feel “dull”, like I had completely forgotten how to begin crafting a repeatable form that was of any interest to me. However, I was able to fall back on my creative instincts, and “reassert” the will of my imagination’s extensive and continual process.

The imagination is perhaps on the point of reasserting itself, of reclaiming its rights. If the depths of our mind contain within it strange forces capable of augmenting those on the surface, or of waging a victorious battle against them, there is every reason to seize them - first to seize them, then, if need be, to submit them to the control of our reason.¹⁸

I knew that I could not “admit defeat”.

I believe in the pure Surrealist joy of the man who, forewarned that all others before him have failed, refuses to admit defeat, sets off from whatever point he chooses, along any other path save a reasonable one, and arrives wherever he can.¹⁹

I found a direct political reference in Breton’s “Speech to the Congress of Writers” in Paris in June 1935.

From where we stand, we maintain that the activity of interpreting the world must continue to be linked with the activity of changing the world. We maintain that it is the poet’s, the artist’s role to study the human problem in depth in all its forms, that it is precisely the unlimited advance of his mind in this direction that has a potential value for changing the world... It is not by stereotyped declarations against fascism and war that we will manage to liberate either the mind or man from the ancient chains that bind him and the new chains

¹⁶ Breton, Andrew. *Manifestos of Surrealism*. Translated from the French by Richard Seaver and Helen R. Lane. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1969, p. 5.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 46.

that threaten him. It is by the affirmation of our unshakeable fidelity to the powers of emancipation of the mind and of man that we have recognized one by one and that we will fight to cause to be recognized as such.²⁰

To me, what Breton suggests is that the work of the artist is to free the mind from societal expectations and pressures, a radical act in and of itself which undermines authoritarian strategies of suppressing the will and power of the people. I held onto these philosophical thoughts as points of inspiration, as I felt that I was working against the conventions of the greater San Diego dance community, and perhaps against the aesthetic preferences of some of my teachers.



Figure 30. Lily and Gabby explore various characters through costume

With our plan to rehearse, at the very least, as a trio every Tuesday and Thursday from 5:30 - 8:00 pm, I continued to search for a pathway to creative freedom the following day with Lily and Gabby. We spent the majority of our time exploring characters through random pieces of clothing that I pulled from the costume closet. This was a process of devising a gateway into a new and unknown world. (After conversations with collaborating costume designer, Natalie

²⁰ Ibid., p. 240-241.

Barshow, I knew that costumes in the work would behave as moving and interchangeable props. We still had not determined what that might look like, however.)

I laid the costumes randomly on the floor, and demonstrated an improvisation score of repeatedly walking upstage and downstage slowly and contemplatively. While picking up and dropping off garments as they were put on and taken off, the task was to allow the fabric to inspire the emergence of any type of movement quality or character. There was also the directive to embody a slinky and drapery quality through the arms and legs as a transitional state between wearing different costumes. After watching Gabby and Lily explore, I noted, “Lily - link > Gang > mabel; Gabby - old ninja man > angry little girl > middle aged beauty pageant mom.”

By way of a structure, something was developing. At the time I couldn't know that this was the beginning of the process of collaging seemingly unrelated behaviors as they unfolded from the subconscious.

Within the limits where they operate (or are thought to operate) dreams give every evidence of being continuous and show signs of organization. Memory alone arrogates to itself the right to excerpt from dreams, to ignore the transitions, and to depict for us rather a series of dreams than the *dream itself*.²¹

Despite the setbacks, I was certainly on my way to directing a “series of dreams”. The performing that we did for each other that night was in fact, a living dream. A chance to escape reality, or rather, create an ideal reality in which we were safe to explore becoming ideas that were not our routine methods of daily societal conduct. It was some kind of unseen protest that did not change the world by any means, but spliced open the minds and expressive potential of three movement artists.

²¹ Ibid., p. 11.

Preparations for New York City

On October 11, I had a solo rehearsal and private showing for Natalie. At this point, I was hoping that she could help me craft a costume for my impending New York City performances of *Heel, Skull*. Before she arrived, I noted the following ways that I was thinking about the work.

Heel, Skull

or

The Underground

1. Enter palm hand on forehead/ back of hip > tail is so close to fail
2. What is ritual? Raising the dead, conjuring the spirits
Warehouse- what's in mine?
Blind > looking internally > warzone > shrapnel > bullets > helicopter
Seeking compassion
1. Soldier fallen moaning, moaning, at attention, soldier of dance, salute
2. Scrim video back and forth ellipse

I performed an improvised version of *Heel, Skull* and a solo version of *Exit To Wonderland* back to back, as we were also meeting to discuss costume ideas for possible sections of the thesis evening. I noted her feedback, which highlighted the dichotomy of the two works:

The Underground

very masculine
soldier quality
pain/ ptsd painful
anger/ frustration as base qualities

Exit Wonderland

joy/ wonder/ happy
alice in wonderland
rabbit hole of craziness
rabbit hole world
beauty
traditional movement



Figure 31. Truth of the body, watercolor and ink

The following week on October 18, I noted the following in solo rehearsal for “Heel, Skull”:

Fall from the future, Frozen Lake, middle of night. deep in the forest.
Talk to my ancestors
Raise the dead, be the dead, raise the dead
Run from the dead
Become Limón
Cino Theater
while initially about disidentification
> ultimately it became about the presence of somatic exploration as it relates to emotions and empathy for those present in the audience

In solo rehearsals on October 25 through 28 I noted:

solo tasks: frozen lake > distal ends waking up > evolutionary walk > change directions
walk sickle twist > round in swirl x2 > slices x4 > diagonal reach in

not coming or going anywhere lets all be a little more connected I wanted to invite friday's practice to watch what i'll be performing in NYC in NYC in NYC dont worry so much we can slip into and out of these processes

I was notified by email on October 29 that I was awarded the GSA Travel Reimbursement Grant for up to \$500 for my upcoming trip to New York, for which I was grateful and relieved.

I had a solo showing for the group on October 31, including Lily, Gabby, collaborating stage manager/ performer Jacob Halpern-Weitzman and new cast members Katie Melby and Astrid Espita. (They both approached me after their performances in the WOW Festival, which I attended on Oct 19. Expressing an interest in joining my rehearsal process, they asked me to reach out to them if I was still looking for performers. I could not have asked for a more fortunate turn of happenstance.) I documented my interpretation of the cast's feedback in the following notes:

transparency of the energy needed for the journey-
masculine, sexual, struggle, anxiety
what is masculinity
How am I supposed to be a man in my skin?
"Walking Bit" different connotations of dance, soldier, Charlie Chaplin
therefore theatre + modern + contemporary
characters / dualities
prison line up
ballerina line up
tennis balls + tennis player
solider motif...
bring blindfold back felt fear of not seeing
very multi direction
feels so unique
please do the actual dancing
stretching classical material and wobbling -> sustainable
lean into

I performed another draft of “Heel, Skull” on November 1 for dance faculty Rebecca Chaleff, Liam Clancy, Yolande Snaith, and dance community member Ariadna Saenz. I documented my interpretation of their feedback as follows:

start with crawling - not / what’s the beginning
more open face energy for first face + sound
home warm place - for poses personal + infernal + generous
what is my relationship to sound
known / conventional with sounds
what’s the motivation?
where am I in the space?
dropped into face beautiful + satisfying
how long would these states really take?
acting and retracting at the same time
voices - surrounded by other people not alone
double end
why the phrase - laughing - how real is that?

In my final showing before traveling to New York, I was witnessed by dance faculty Eric Geiger and MFA dance cohort Melissa Cisneros on November 7. I remember having the distinct feeling at the end of the solo that I was “putting on a fake happy face” before I walked toward an uncertain end, which happened to be at the studio doorway. My nervous system was still juggling the burden of taking on too many emotions within the dramaturgical context of this work. I documented my interpretation of their feedback:

4pm
the viable predictable parts of alternating durations
subtle shades of acting v sensation
stay open to your visual field
see the space in a diff way
what is my space?
how am I seeing
costume?
casual
questioning of masculinity disability

New York City Performances

My trip to New York City on November 12 through 17 was fast. A few hours after landing at Newark International Airport, I staged my 20 minute solo during the tech rehearsal at the Cino Theater division of Theater for the New City in Manhattan. In this welcome back hour, Emily beared witness to my dialogue with the lighting technician and stage manager. I had the paradoxical feeling of being back at home while observing the new sense of authority with which I was working, one that I did not have before my two years of production experience at UCSD. It felt good to view myself in evolution.

A couple of hours before the dress rehearsal the following day, I had a CranioSacral Therapy session with Anne Hammel. After giving her a brief summarized update of my life, explaining my concern over recent first time experiences with vertigo, and relaying my intentions with performing “Heel, Skull” just down the street from where she resided, she placed her hands on me and deeply sighed the affirmation, “Your system has a lot going on”. What followed was a quiet hour and a half in which I was able to rest and bask in being cared for in a way that only CranioSacral Therapy can deliver. Anne spoke about addressing my vertigo by working with balancing the grooves in the temporal bones just behind my ears. She engaged me in soft and strategic dialogue about my memories and emotions. I left the session feeling open, sensitized, and more deeply attuned to my exhaustion.

The images below are from the dress rehearsal in which I integrated her CranioSacral Therapy session into performance. I moved through the fluctuating intensities of the vocalized movement with a greater sense of internal clarity. It was easier for me to sense when and where in my body unnecessary tension would arise. It was more manageable to refresh the directive to

let it go. In my physical fragility, my body was more supple, more accessible to my senses, and more responsive to my internal commands of expressive performance.



Figures 32 and 33. Performing “Heel, Skull: Reimagined” at Theater for the New City

For five consecutive nights I had the opportunity to dive deeper into the psychological and somatic aspects of “Heel, Skull”. As I performed, I got to experiment with different ways of interacting with the audience and determine specific gestures and moods. While soaking up the traffic sounds emanating from the frenetic and freezing outside metropolis, I was able to carefully craft the drawn out, four minute conclusion of the solo, which included me crashing into the back wall and chewing on the curtain before illuminating the audience for a good long look at who was present. As a bonus, I had the luxury of performing on a specially cushioned marley floor, which, for my temperamental joints, was like dancing on a cloud.

I shared the *We Are All Starz Festival* program with the work of Emily Vetsch, modern dance elder Wendy Osserman, as well as my mentor and professor from UC Santa Barbara, modern dance elder Tonia Shimin, who set a new solo on my dear friend Chelsea Retzloff. True to the spirit of mentorship, Tonia offered me probing questions regarding the groundedness of

my presence at the start of the solo. I received invaluable feedback from Wendy, who said that Anna Sokolow would have loved my work's depiction of the human condition at its most vulnerable amidst a democracy in chaos.²² This was another uncanny link to artmaking in the 1930's.

By day, I had the opportunity to catch up with members of my New York City dance family, including Desira Barnes, Randy Burd, Sumi Clements, Meredith Glisson, Jenni Hong, June Jaffe, Joanna Nobbe, Chelsea Retzloff, and Emily Vetsch. Their supportive roles as friends and witnesses were invaluable to my spirit, as well as the evolution of the work.



Figure 34. Marcos, Joanna, Emily, and Randy saying goodbye after closing night

²² Anna Sokolow (1910 - 2000) was an American dancer and choreographer who worked internationally, creating political and theatrical pieces. Beginning in the 1930s, she affiliated herself with the politicized "radical dance" movement, out of which developed her work *Anti-War Trilogy* (1933). During this time period, she performed and choreographed both solo and ensemble works, which tackled subject matter that included the exploitation of workers and growing troubles of Jews in Germany. Sokolow drew a lot of inspiration from the Union movement as she considered the unions her first audience. She often explored themes of Communism, socialism, and the working class through her dances, particularly in *Strange American Funeral* (1935) and *Case No. --* (1937).

In response to my time on the east coast, I wrote in my journal on November 19, “Please take me away to the other side of wonderland.” A week later, I received Randy’s feedback during a phone conversation on November 25:

1. So unconventional, very original, a man really coming to his own with a true distinct voice
2. He wanted to see more, 20 minutes went by really quick
3. The vocalizing was about learning how one speaks/ communication. Vocal sound comes in and out, the simultaneous key steps are about searching.
4. Flicks of digits - it is always little things that are nice
5. Saluting the corner - Joanna read that as a reference to the political He interpreted it as rules being set and having to live by the standard, autonomy, and breaking those rules
6. Running into the audience very quick was like dipping a toe in. The 2nd time to the audience went further, like reaching the hand into the unknown
7. Taking off my jacket looked great, but he wanted me to take it off slower
8. I’m like the electricity controlling the lights
9. The square light on stage - Joanna said it was a trapped cage

I subsequently had the opportunity to discuss “Heel, Skull” in greater depth with Tonia. I explained that one part of the solo operated as a structured improvisation in which the direction was to repeatedly “fall and recover”. We had an illuminating conversation about the differences between how Anna Sokolow and Jose Limón treated falling, as Tonia worked in the companies of both of these choreographers in the 60’s and 70’s. She recalled that Sokolow’s interest was in the body’s pure and undecorated fall to the ground, and the body’s natural response to that fall. Limón, on the other hand, used breath to define a more somatic and stylized descent and rebound from the floor. I compared these descriptions with my intentions of closing my eyes and allowing my body to release while repeatedly throwing myself into a fall in any sporadic manner, using momentum to spring back up in a type of looping whirlwind.

Group Rehearsals Continue

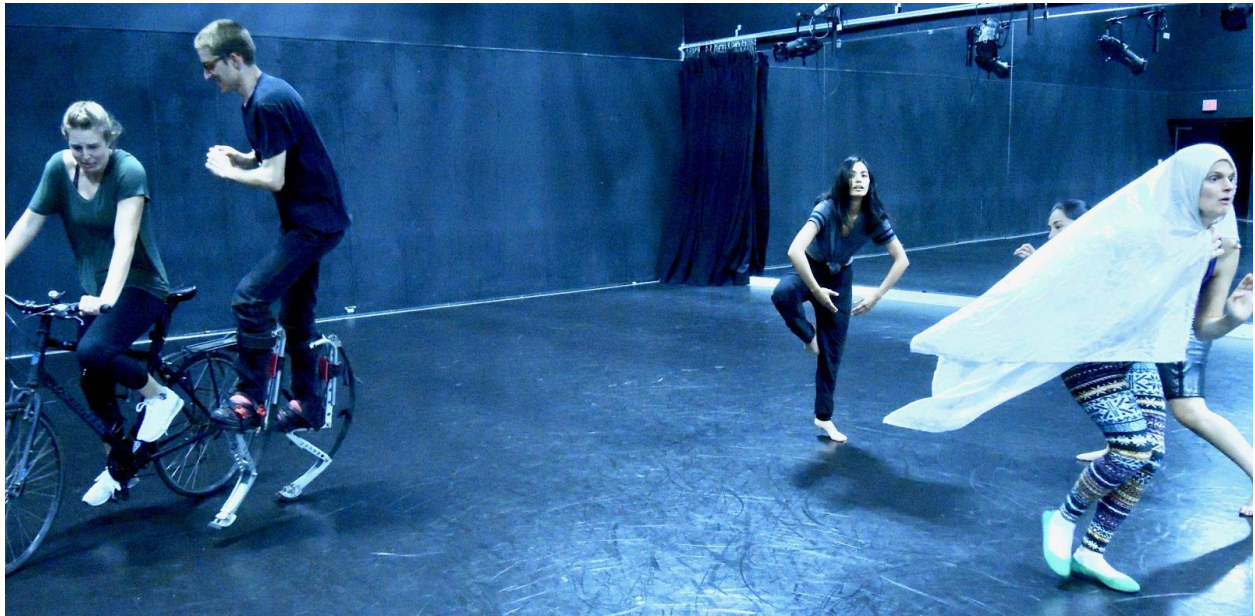


Figure 35. Lily (bike), Alex (stilts), Gabby (dancing), Astrid (hidden), Melby (nun)

By October 24, I realized that I had struck gold with Melby's added professional expertise to the work. Her and Astrid's preference for embodying caricature from a more theatrical standpoint had been the missing link in balancing the abilities of the cast. As a more complete ensemble, we experimented with the use and presence of a bicycle, Alex on the stilts in various relationships to the other performers, combining character work with phrase work, and my stream of conscious directions as I observed improvised events unfolding. Each performer got to try riding the bike, having different experiences with navigating it around the room.

Astrid bike mechanic (bike anxious) > phrase > Dick Van Dyke > 12 bikes inside > cauldron

Melby lost shelves high shelves > nun > playing bike as instrument > bike as lover > 12 bikes inside > cauldron

Lily phrase > bike > walking bike > Dick Van Dyke > 12 bikes inside > cauldron
Potion culminating > drinking potion > carrying casket off > political protest



Figure 36. Lily, Alex, Marcos's hand, Gabby, Melby



Figure 37. Astrid, Lily, Melby, and Gabby (duets), Alex (downstage)

October 29, 2019

Starting Balcony Justification:

We start in the shadows but end up in the light

Panic > sense of wonder

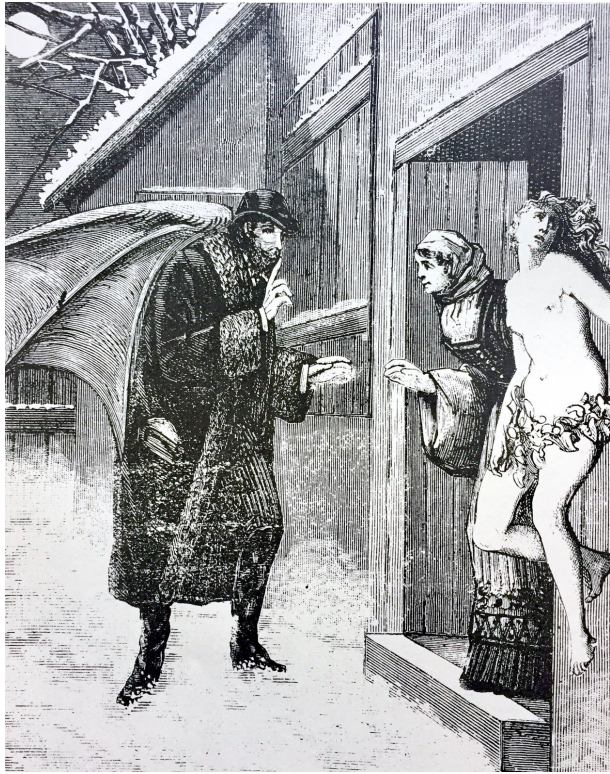
audience can see the magnanimous shadows from above

sitting in Ian's secret garden, on his birthday bench

noticing the holding pattern of my nervous system and recentering my focus on the wonder that's around me: branches, foliage, spider web as nest, spider corpses



Figure 38. Taking time to reflect on my surroundings before a rehearsal in dance 3



Figures 39-42. Selected Ernst collages that provided inspiration for performance maps



Figure 43. Melby, Lily, and Gabby exploring solo material as a trio

By the last October group rehearsal on the 31st, we were well versed in cultivating methods of movement and performance collage. Drawing directly from the moods and images of *Une semaine de bonté*, we focused on developing solo material to then workshop as duets, trios, quartets, and as a full group. In these configurations, we experimented with decision making in response to our partners choices. I noted, “waiting, transference, ninja child, shadow, energetic muscular integrity... Melby bigger gallops > Woody Woodpecker cross front Lily”.

My journal entry from November 2 states:

Lunar moths, cocoon, I still exist
struggling sleep, become new, house, days
becoming, waiting to wake, still as a seed, wait
scissors, deer, albot (?)
Holding time - remember something you've never remembered before
let's not forget who we are
reflecting on a time when you were put under a spell by someone or something

Sketch and Mindmap
November 2019



Figure 44. *The Underground* title sketch (3), charcoal

Figure 45. A mind map starting with dada/ surrealism

Nothing has to make sense. Little dog, bark bark.

Exit to wonderland.

Not sure if I want to educate the audience
maybe just frontal bone and occipital bone.

Artists belong together

different mediums

compliment

wish I'd known better

worrying is not necessary > favoritism

can't sit still

So many ideas.

Going. going. Gone.

Embodying Figurative Depictions

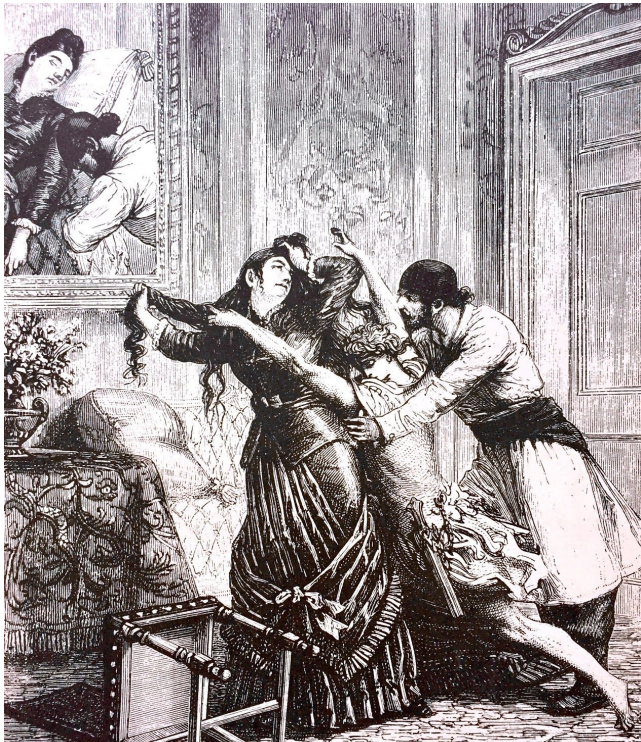


Figure 46. Collage by Max Ernst



Figure 47. Astrid, Lily, Gabby, Melby, Alex becoming an Ernst collage

November 5, 2019

Performance partners - responsive to one another and the spaces between/ around each other. (Performers workshop their developing solo material in rotating duets)

Responses from witnessing the duets:

Natalie - spontaneous > group

Melby - Liked watching old partner's material

Alex - I was still developing my material w first partner, w 2nd partner able to build off others

Gabby - moves can change so slightly to accommodate others in the space
introduction of interaction

I don't feel bad if I take something out or put something

Lily - I like that the material is ours and that I have authorship to slightly alter the material

November 7, 2019

Made stream of consciousness lists for each of the performers

My list: draw a picture, fall, laugh, eat a cookie, circle my elbows, encounter a waterfall, drop my pelvis, writhe on the floor, Elvis get up, escape the space, darkness, superficial, tell me about it

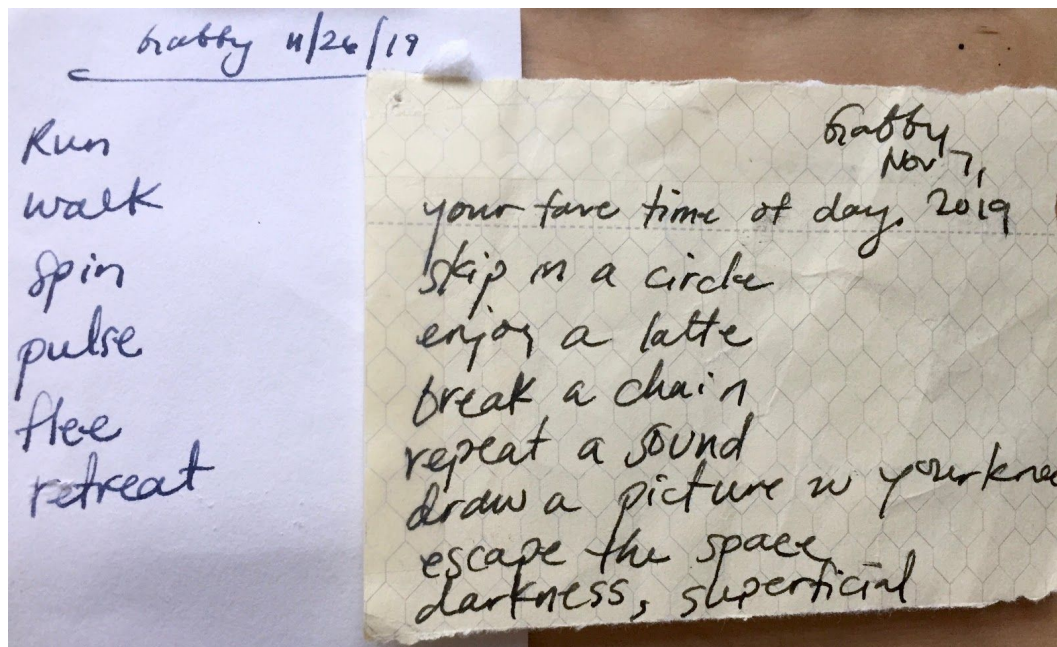


Figure 48. Selected lists used as movement guides

In addition to lists, the performers developed their own performance maps in response to Ernst collages, conversations about their favorite time of day, the use of a bicycle, and the questions, “What would I be without my shadow? What are the edges of myself?”

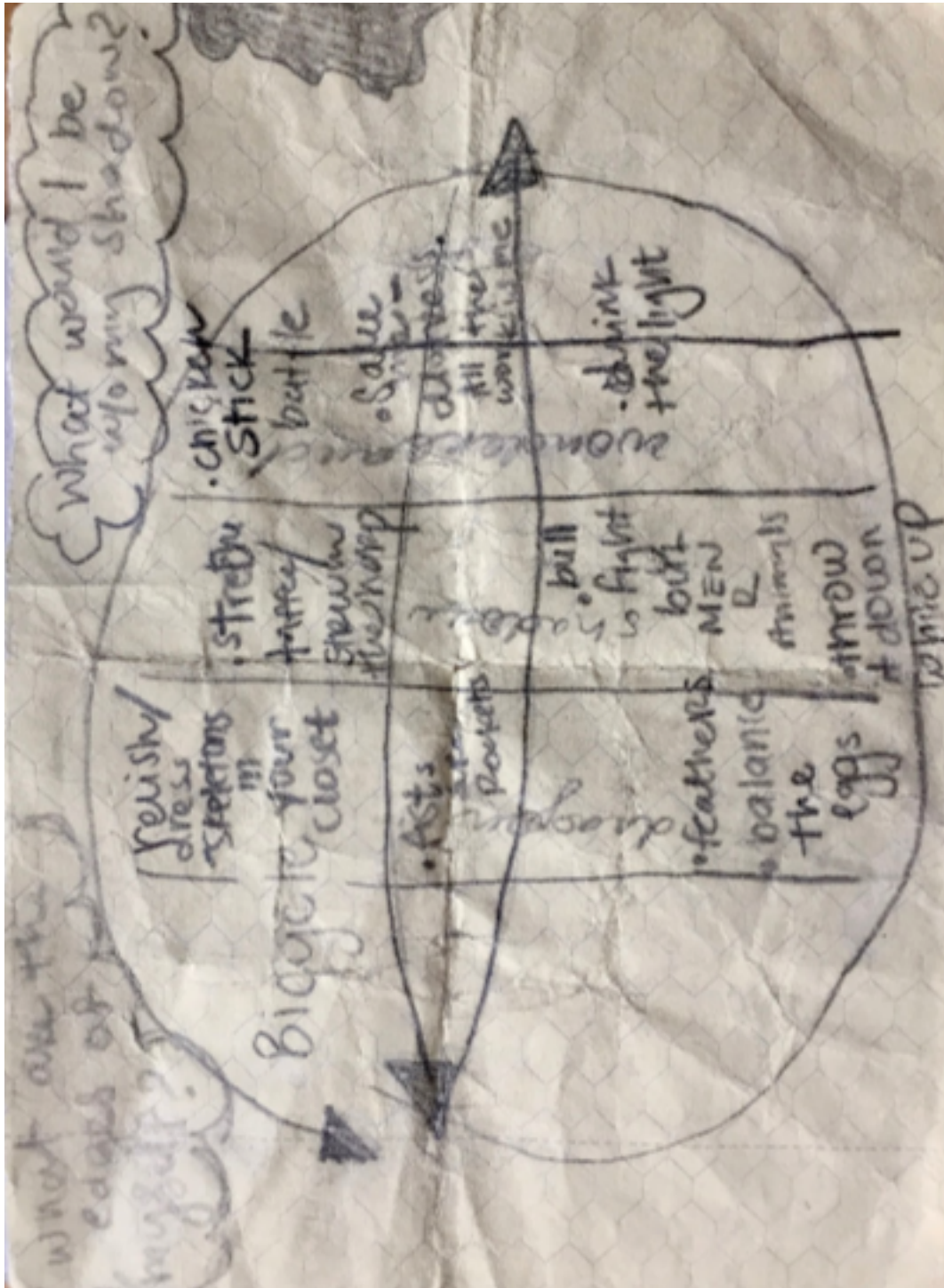


Figure 49. Selected performance map (1) by Astrid

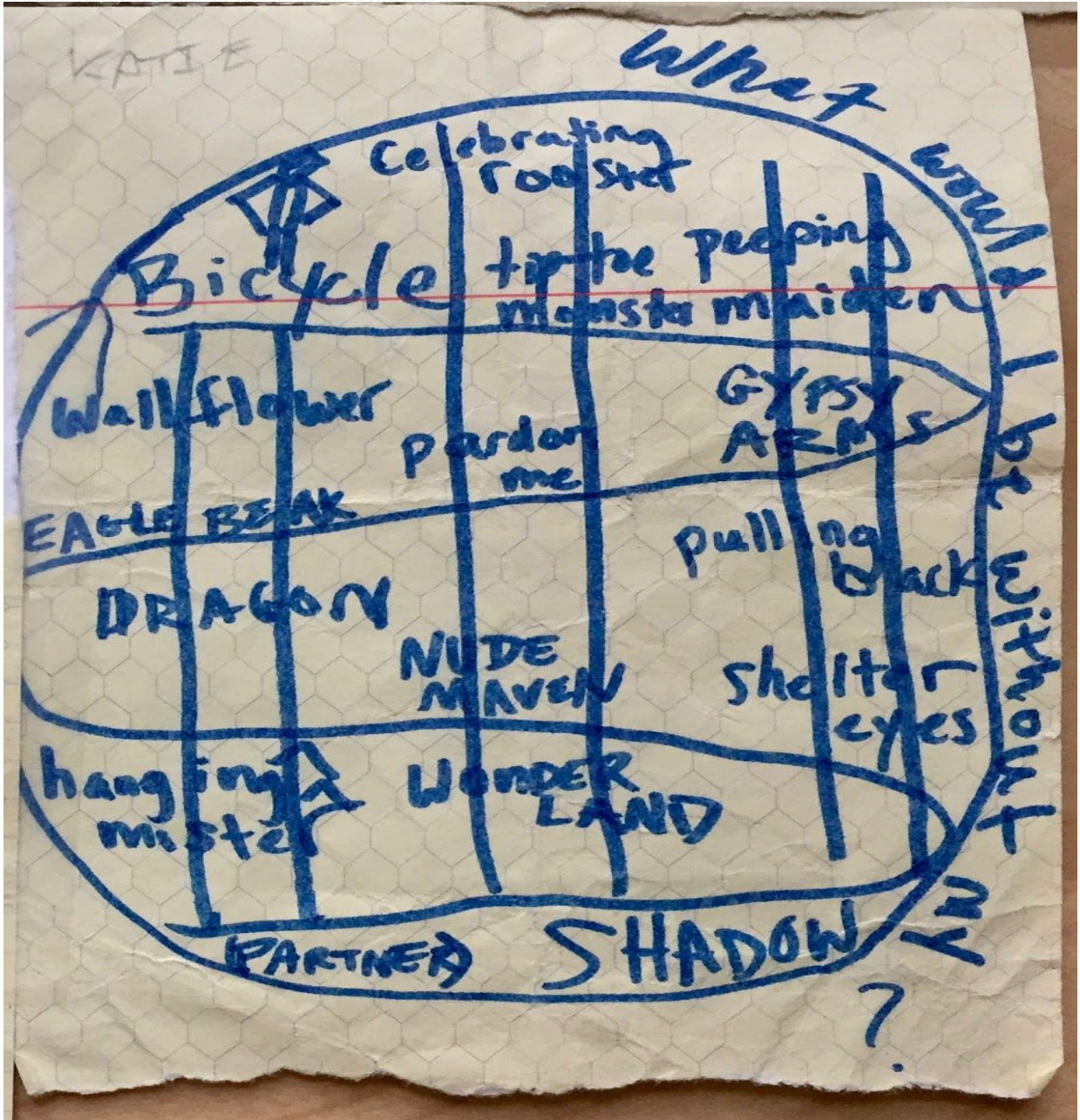


Figure 50. Selected performance map (2) by Melby

On November 21, we began workshops for “News Cycle”, which was inspired by a collaboration between myself and composer Alex Stephenson during our Crossing Boundaries course with Shahrokh Yadegari and Victoria Petrovich in Fall 2018. I invited Alex to join the cast of *The Underground* to evolve our initial research on soundmaking and performance with found materials. Initially, this section focused on repeatedly tearing strips of newspaper in different configurations and durations, huffing it intensely, and aggressively interacting with one another to share or steal. This practice would last up to 45 minutes.



Figure 51. *News Cycle* workshop (1), photo by Natalie Barshow



Figure 52. *News Cycle* workshop (2), photo by Natalie Barshow

“News Cycle” rehearsal, performers’ response:

Satisfying, visually impactful, strange & arrested, that’s favorite thing so far, newspaper smells good, relaxing - deep breaths of it, ear very close to the tearing, having the tear and the flapping, image of stacked newspaper, strips everywhere, moments of sudden silence, “silence break”, track was good before the simultaneous tearing, moving arm positions a lot, aware of tension neck and shoulders, am I pulling horizontally or vertically? Is my center with the point of the tear? discovery, curiosity, newness, like a child holding a ball for the

November 23, 2019

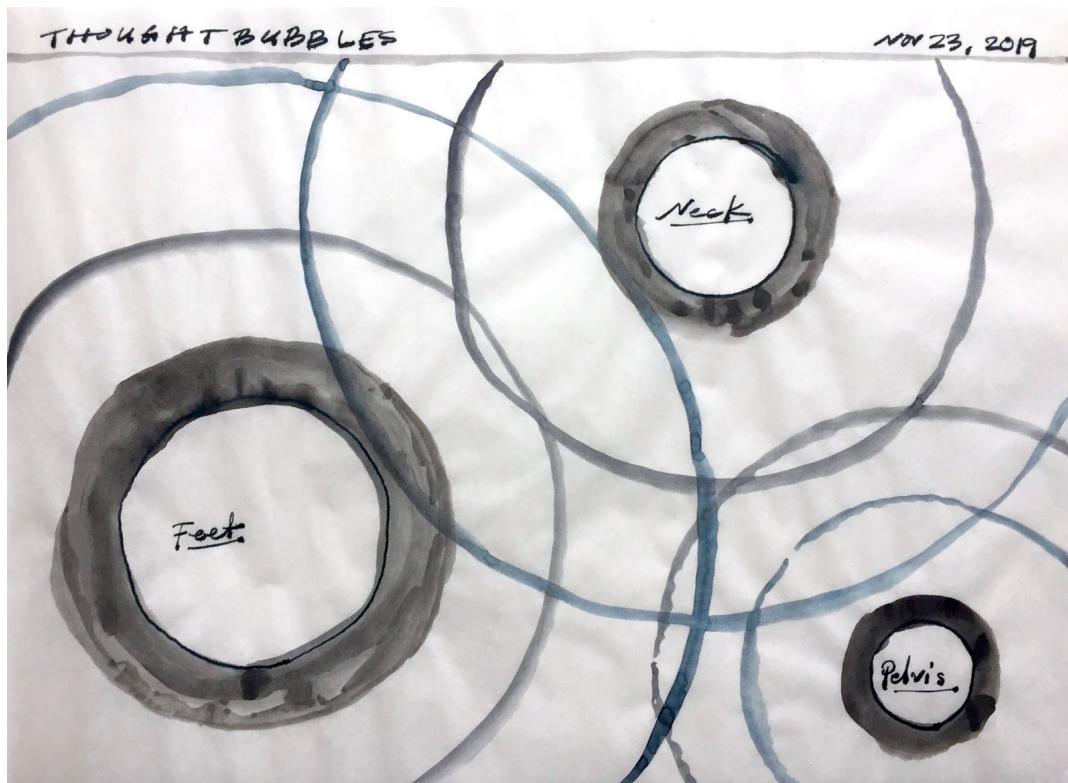


Figure 53. THOUGHT BUBBLES, watercolor and ink

Nov 24, 2019

Hands dry with chalk and logical exactitude stretch out to grasp freshness and uncertainty. A shiver down the spine. Shiver of growth. Wings grow. And the story of the prodigal son begins again.²³ - René Crevel

²³ Crevel, René. *My Body and I*. Brooklyn: Archipelago Books, 2005.

December 5, 2019

Questions read aloud to faculty, staff, and designers during a production meeting:

The Underground

What would we be without our shadows? How are we affected by the 24 hour news cycle? What are the stories we tell ourselves to ease the inner unrest? How do we connect? How are our relationships changing with advancing technology? How is our relationship to technology affecting how we see each other? How does our skeletal anatomy affect our behavior? How does our own skeletal anatomy affect how we treat others? How do we collage all of these ideas together? How do we blur the lines between performers, designers, and stage managers? How do we blur the lines between performers and audience?

After so many attempted meditations I must, though I am unable to conclude, at least try to summarize my ideas... Me? ... Both animal tamer and animal. Yes, an animal tamer, but one who delights in his fear, is indulgent with his nerves.²⁴

- René Crevel

December 7, 2019

Reflections on Crevel's *Babylon*.²⁵

"A binocular played the role of scepter"

Red Light/ Green Light

Ripping Off the news

Will I need a warm Jacket?

Controlling what is public about me

will I need a warm Jacket?

"impertinence of the citroens" > ? WTF René Crevel lol googling it

"a pretext for regretting the majestic and dustless era of victorias and princess gowns"

Quieting down, quieting so far down

"the refuge of shade, a cool cube of air where she could forget the flamboyant insult of day"

need to massage my neck with arnica

bed time notes

Let me explore this, Let me explore this

"scrofulous negligence"

"Andromache of classical matinees"

I ran

A petty thing to say

"what dreams in their branches could the protectors of childhood cling to?"

²⁴ Crevel, René. *My Body and I*. Brooklyn: Archipelago Books, 2005. p 135.

²⁵ Crevel, René. *Babylon*. San Francisco: North Point Press, 1985. p. 17-23.

Genes
I ran to the lake
A bed time
I learn from the forrest

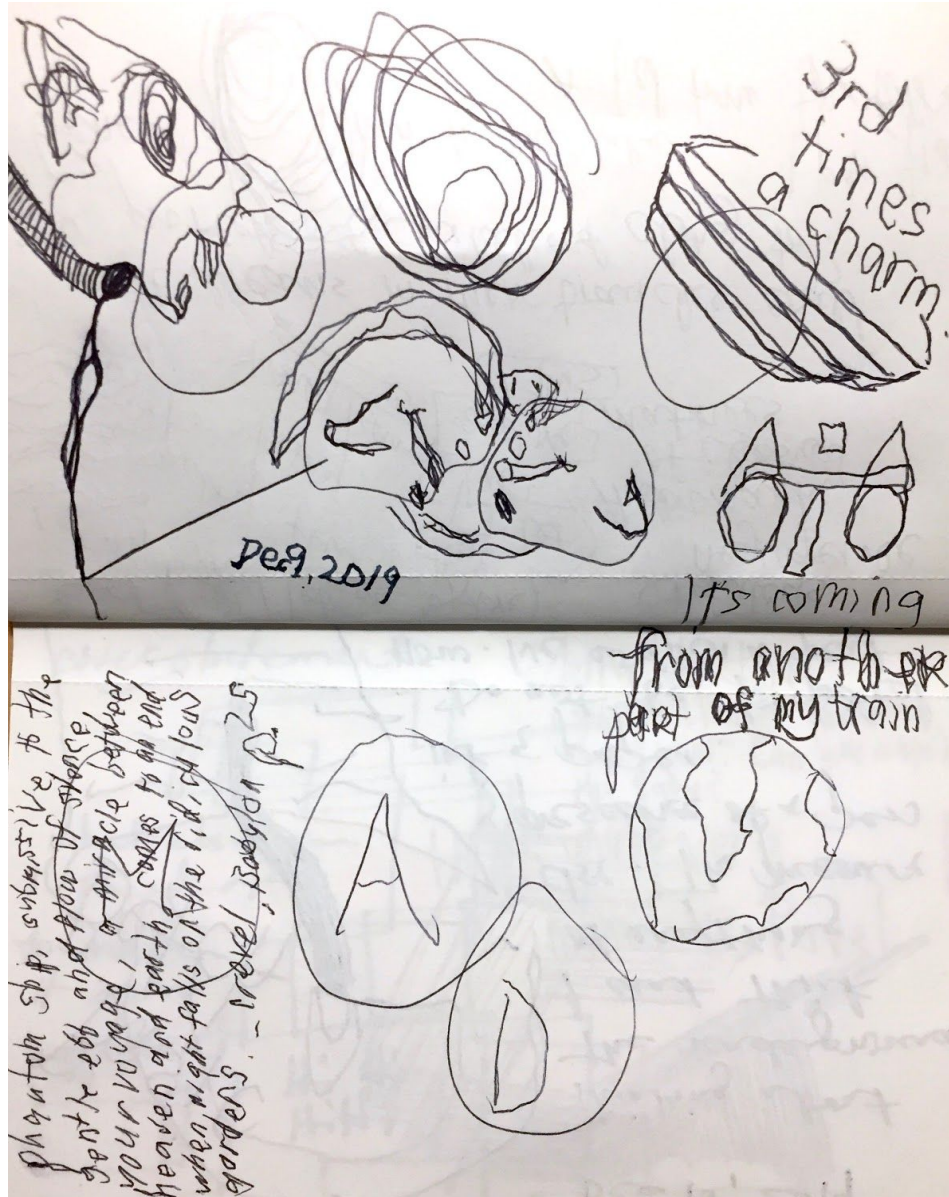


Figure 54. Non-dominant hand writing and sketch (Reflections on *Babylon*)

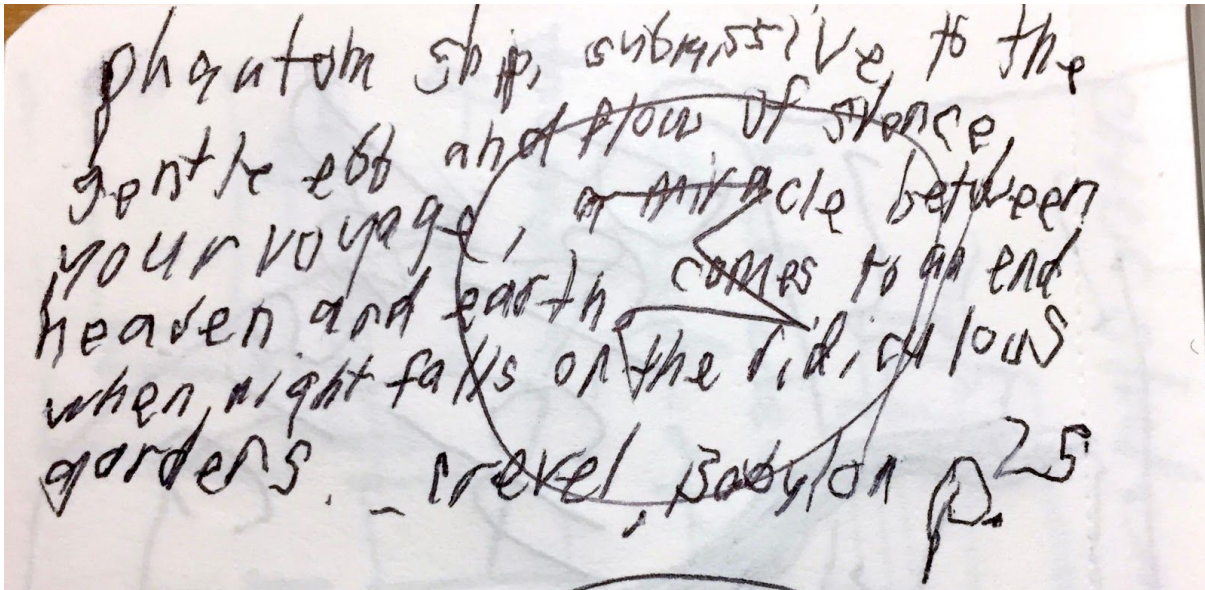


Figure 55. Non-dominant hand copied quote from *Babylon*

On December 12, we held a final rehearsal showing before the holiday break. Present were Eric Geiger, Derek Weiler, Tristan Samson, the cast and collaborating designers. Eric, Derek, and Tristan climbed on top of the bleachers, as at this point we were hoping to have the audience sit only in the balcony to view the dance from above. We performed a preliminary draft of *Intertwined Distances*, and working drafts of *No, don't... stop. Please*, and *Exit to To Wonderland*. My recorded interpreted feedback from Eric Geiger states:

Cinematic- old black and white film, silent, chapters, episodes... but not quite a film, an animated film; disney films; Bambi; fantasy like, series of odd animals, creatures that never come together; queer, bizarre world, 2nd section sound section, 1st so refreshingly formal, super post modern, very current homage to post modern, kind of dated, cunningham like, not a continuity with back of neck and eyes, Lily soft face, some tighten up eyes at back of neck, "how do you look like you're not poking fun at some antiquated idea of asylum?", a looney bin, rhythm adds composition, responsive to the sounds, transcends making fun of, group of sound artists, so ready for more *Exit To Wonderland*, more biking in court of the dragon, some more theatrical than others

The Poster Manifests
December 16, 2019



Figure 56. North Bend, Washington, photo by Marcos

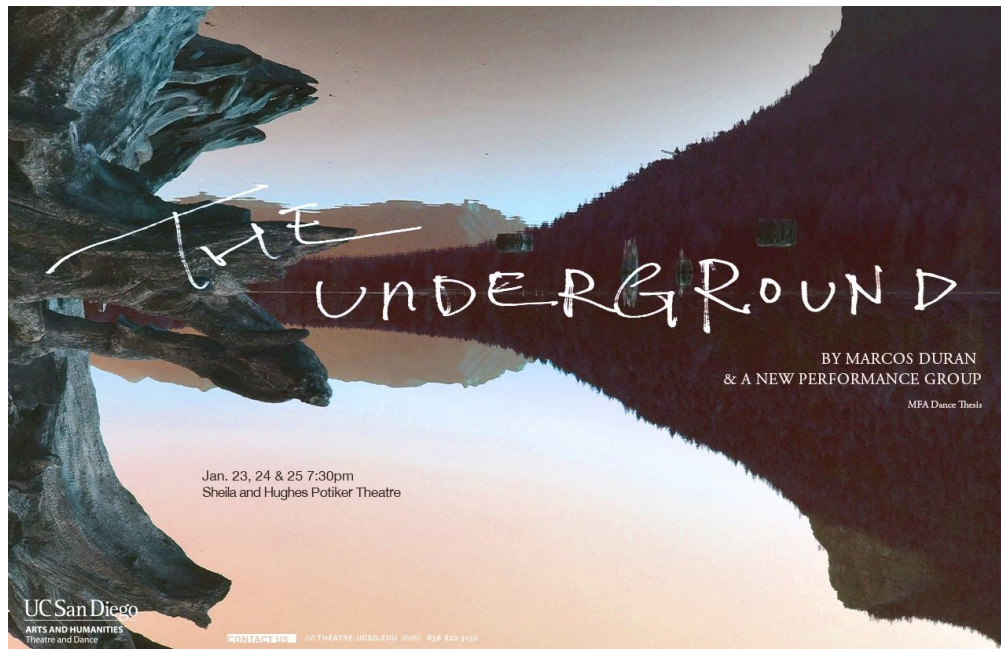


Figure 57. Promotional poster, designed by Hsi-An Chen

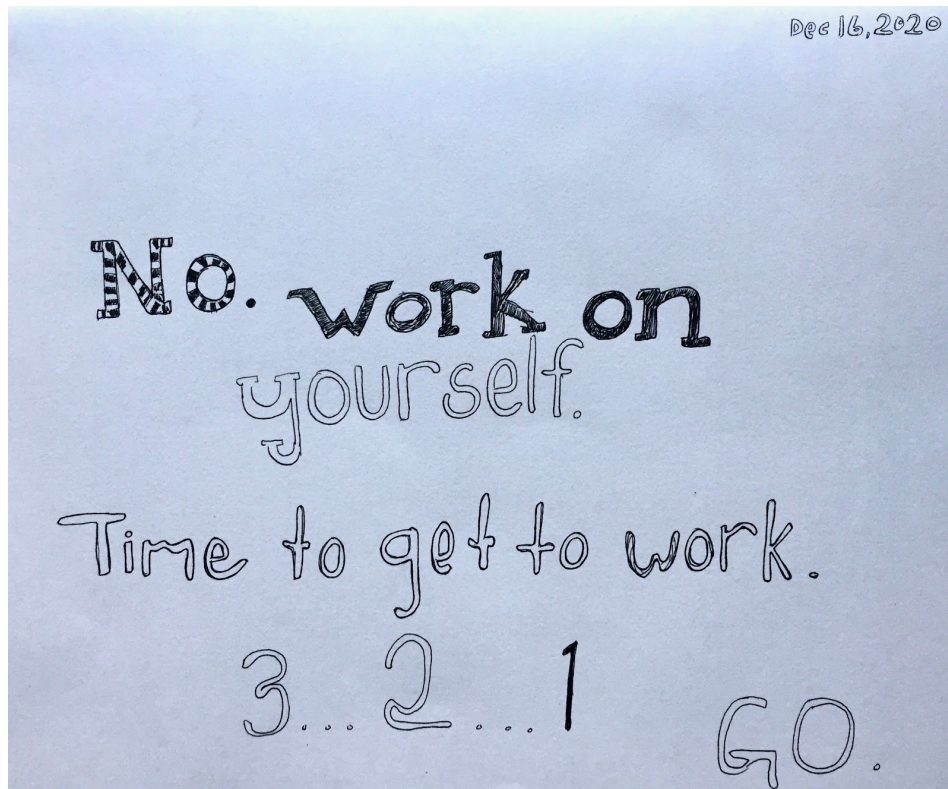


Figure 58. Work on yourself, ink sketch



Figure 59. The State of Things, watercolor

Exit To Wonderland Research

December 25, 2019

Los Gatos, California



Figure 60. “Exit to Wonderland” photo

A hike on Christmas Day allowed me to brainstorm the energetic and aesthetic possibilities for “Exit To Wonderland”, the section of *The Underground* that would be danced to the *The Chairman Dances* by John Adams. Before spending the day with my extended family, Derek and I ascended to heights overlooking the Bay Area. At the top of our hike, we could see the city scapes of San Francisco and Oakland in the distance. They looked like tiny, shimmering versions of Oz, glowing amidst the surrounding translucent fog; interspersed, low hanging clouds; and reflective water of the bay.

News Cycle Research
December 30, 2019
Calistoga, California



Figure 61. "News Cycle" photo

While walking through downtown San Francisco the following week, I surveyed newspaper stands and various headlines. I allowed the daily news to inform my desire to save the earth from climate change. I had a photographic vision of a hanging newspaper glowing in front of the low sun as it was carried by a pedestrian. I tried to realize my idea a few days later. It didn't quite turn out how I imagined, but I find that it is a good reference to my thoughts as I awaited production.

CranioSacral Therapy Research

On January 3, 2020, I performed CranioSacral Therapy's 10 step protocol on *The Underground* stage manager Jacob Halpern-Weitzman in dance studio 2. After the session, I asked him about his somatic experience in receiving this form of bodywork:

Jacob: I could feel my whole body. I can still feel the warmth of my feet still after. The warmth was really surprising and therapeutic. Interesting that the most aggressive was the first time at the skull (cranial base) and I wasn't expecting it to be the most rough- the most pressure sensitive. It did feel very massage like without being a massage. It was very minimal effort and that's cool.

I then asked if he experienced any noteworthy thought processes during the session:

Jacob: It was easy to let go of thoughts and focus on my body sensation. Now that I think about it, my thoughts were more dream-like. I can't remember what I thought except for a memory of us in Collective Creation²⁶. I did go into a dream state. I can still feel the warmth.

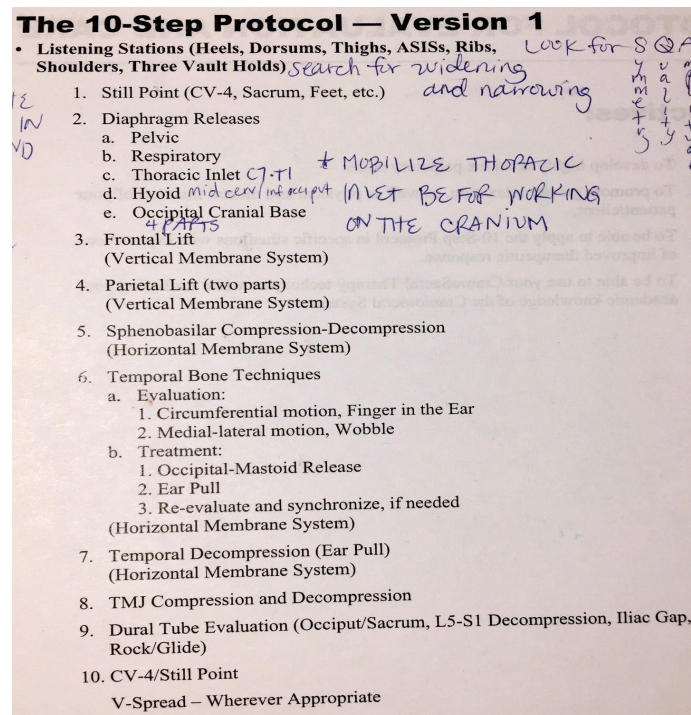


Figure 62. The CranioSacral Therapy 10-Step Protocol - Version 1²⁷

²⁶ Collective Creation was a course in Fall 2017 with visiting theater faculty Katie Pearl, where Marcos and Jacob met and collaborated for the quarter with cohorts Mextly Almeda, Amara Granderson, Dave Harris, and Kristin Leadbetter.

²⁷ Upledger, John. *CranioSacral Therapy I Study Guide*. Palm Beach Gardens: Upledger Enterprises, 2011.

The Underground Production

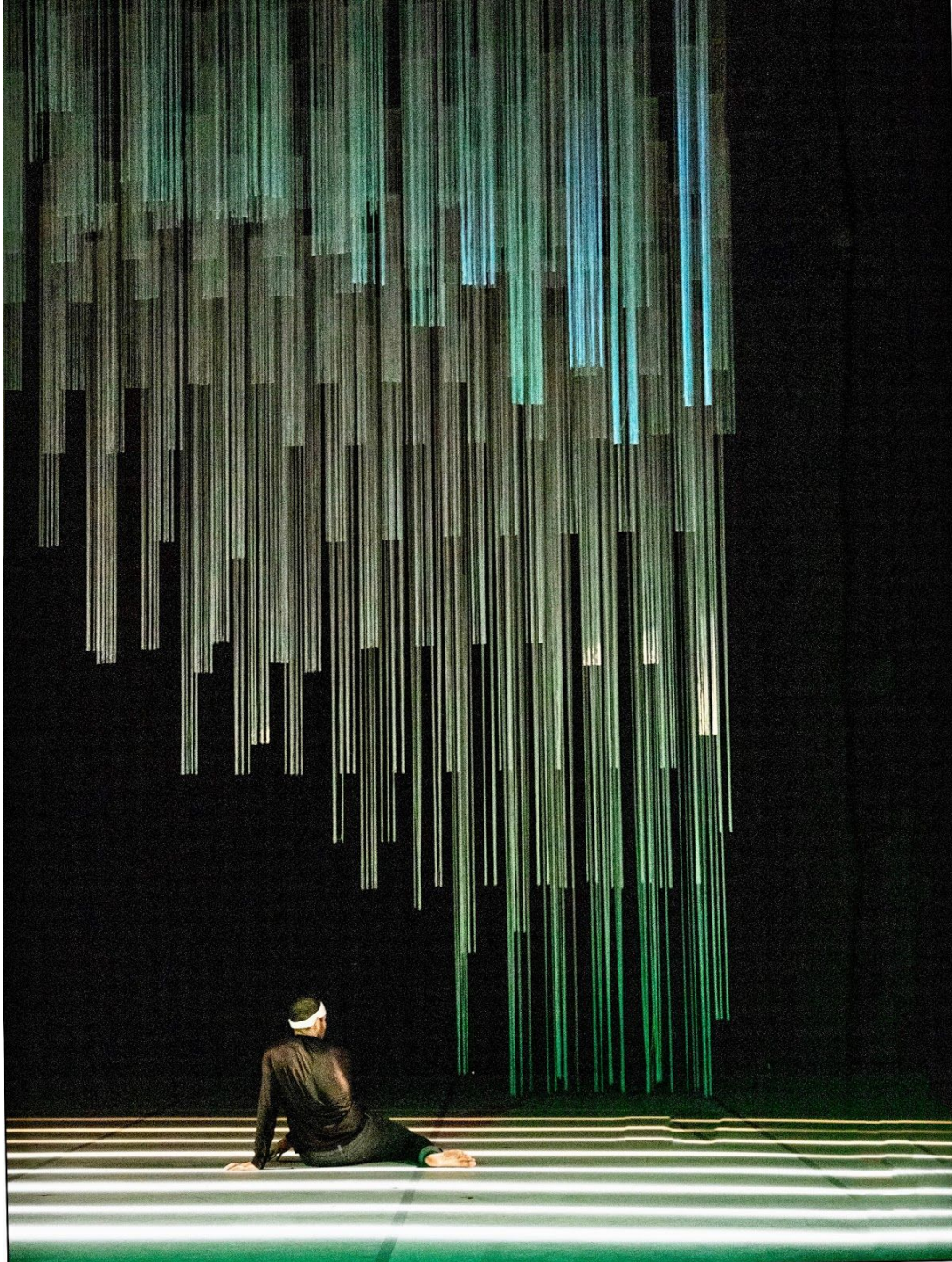


Figure 63. Marcos in *Heel, Skull*, photo by Manuel Rotenberg



Figure 64. Collage by Max Ernst

The effort spent revealing my artistic and directorial voice on the stage of Sheila and Hughes Potiker was, in the words of Crevel, like a...

...point in time when it is possible to understand oneself. Understand oneself, grasp oneself, and not with words or fingers but by the grace of those invisible antennae that turn hearts at dawn into the strangest dragonflies... because... the hour of unrestrained thoughts had rung, you hid nothing of your anxiety and then, quite suddenly, because of the light... you pretended there was no longer any reason to be afraid, that you were no longer afraid. You tried to rebuild the world... and, in the midst of a fusion that the others were unaware of and with which you quieted the elements, went on your way...²⁸

The four month rehearsal process for *The Underground*, culminated with performances of the “world that I sought to build”. This world was inspired by the desire to quiet my anxiety, to explore the possibilities of light and shadow, and to foster a community in which I could bask in friendship and mutual respect for kinesthetic momentum and forces of theatrical design. I was able to “understand” myself by the grace of “invisible antennae”, and realize new heights of my potential as a collaborator, director, dancemaker, writer, and somatic performer.

The two weeks spent in the Potiker Theater was the pinnacle of collaboration between myself and performers Astrid Espitia, Alex Gruenenfelder, Katie Melby, Gabby Nathanson, Lily-Rose Medofer, composer and performer Alex Stephenson, production stage manager and performer Jacob Halpern-Weitzman, costume designer and performer Natalie Barshow, scenic designer Miranda Friel, projection designer John Burnett, lighting designer Justin Beets, sound designer MaeAnn Ross, assistant sound designer Carlos-Rios Dominguez, assistant stage manager Chloe Miller, and production assistants Nicole Kim and Brian Salvenera, among nearly two dozen other crew members.

²⁸ Crevel, René. *My Body and I*. Brooklyn: Archipelago Books, 2005. p 50-51.

Together, we performed ten physically co-authored “short stories” as a 95 minute evening of experimental dance theater. The program for the show revealed the following as my “Creator Statement”:

For me, movement can be precious, as well as meaningless. Everything you will see performed tonight has an expressive purpose without too much preciousness. All of the material exists as an indication of our imaginative journey. I hope this evening of physical theater attends to your sense of dream and awakening.

The Underground is like a collection of short stories presented in the form of experimental dance performance. I invite you to interpret each story as much or as little as you wish, but please realize that *not* understanding is also the point. Does a dream always make sense? “Free association of images” is a phrase I employ when I am creating and performing work. So please, stop reading now, and choose your own adventure.

“I gently place my hands upon the skull and stare, waiting for a warm glow to emanate. When it reaches a certain temperature - like a patch of sun in winter - the whitepolished skull offers up its old dreams. I strain my eyes and breathe deeply, using my fingertips to trace the intricate lines of the tale it commences to tell. The voice of the light remains ever so faint; images quiet as ancient constellations float across the dome of my dawning mind. They are indistinct fragments that never merge into a sensate picture. There would be a landscape I have not seen before, unfamiliar melodic echoes, whisperings in a chaos of tongues.”

- Haruki Murakami, *Hard Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World* ²⁹

The short stories were called:

Pilots
Let’s Expand / Craniosacral Integration
Intertwined Distances
No, don’t ... stop. Please.
Dragon Duet
Exit To Wonderland
Stilt Operation
The Underground: Heel, Skull
News Cycle
Dragon Obituary

²⁹ Murakami, Haruki. *Hard-Boiled Wonderland and The End of the World*. New York: Vintage Books, 1993. p183-184.

Pilots



Figure 65. Marcos and Jacob open the show, photo by Jim Carmody

Jacob Halpern-Weitzman and I walked onstage for an opening welcome scene in which we bantered and inquired about the “warmth” of the audience. Blurring the roles of production stage manager and performer, Jacob called the initial cues from the stage as I comedically contacted him in a mimicked blend of hands-on therapies. Going against tradition, Jacob encouraged the audience to take photos and record throughout the show, so long as the appropriate social media handles were tagged. The scene ended when I suggestively kneeled at Jacob’s feet and pushed his knees wider apart.

Let's expand/ CranioSacral Integration



Figure 66. The cast performing CranioSacral Integration, photo by Manuel Rotenberg

With the help of the performers and a microphone, I guided the audience through an episode of self reflection via CranioSacral Integration. I invited everyone to close their eyes and bring one hand to their forehead and the other to their heart. I instructed them to take a deep breath. After I asked them to move their palms over their eyes, I posed the rhetorical questions, “What do you see? How do you see it?”

Following a few more minutes of instruction and questioning, each person arrived with one hand back on the forehead and the other at the cranial base. I stated, “The human skull is considered to have 22 bones. Right now you are holding your frontal bone and your occipital bone. Imagine for a moment that these two bones could float away from each other.” I waited. Then I said, “Take one more deep breath in... Let the shoulders drop as you exhale...” After a few more moments of silence I concluded, “Okay... I think you are ready... as we most are certainly ready... to have a show.”

Intertwined Distances



Figure 67. “Intertwined Distances”, photo by Miranda Friel

Showcasing the “hidden talents” of the performers, “Intertwined Distances” was a compelling study on expanded human presence and its various geometrical trajectories through space. The cast performed this first section of choreography as a series of overlapping solos that culminated with a brief group tableau of interactions. We were unafraid to hold space and take our time over the course of 16 minutes. *Intertwined Distances* (2018), the pre-recorded solo harpsichord and electronics (quadraphonic), was composed by Anahita Abassi, a Ph.D. candidate in music composition at the University of California San Diego. She consulted with sound designer MaeAnn Ross to ensure the sound was amplified with clarity and directional intensity.

No, don't... Stop. Please



Figure 68. "No, don't... Stop. Please", photo by Manuel Rotenberg

To me, within the show, "No, don't... Stop. Please" represents my highest achievement as a dancemaker, as it exhibits my appreciation for seemingly nonsensical and unrelated series of events that are guided by an invisible thread of togetherness. For this twelve minute section, the performers behaved as soundmakers as much as dancers. Through spoken language, vocalizing, and body sounding, they embodied an extreme range of physical depictions inspired by the collages of Max Ernst, intensities of emotional states, and their own imagined characters. Throughout the work, MaeAnn Ross strategically amplified the recorded phrases, "Are you my mom?" and "No, don't... stop. Please", which added a layer of surreal logic. Justin Beets directed lighting on an ominous, slow evolving orbit around the performers. This piece ended

with all of the dancers looking up, Melby and Alex softly waving as if to a silent, ascending balloon.

Dragon Duet



Figure 69. “Dragon Duet”, photo by Miranda Friel

This short two minute transition was performed by Melby and Astrid as they moved in improvised swirls around each other wearing all interchangeable parts of the dragon costume. An opportunity to dance specifically with the motion sensor technology, projection designer John Burnett produced holographic replications of their dancing on the wall and sculpture behind them as they moved, which were regrettably not captured in this photo.

Exit To Wonderland



Figure 70. “Exit To Wonderland”, photo by Jim Carmody

A ten year work in progress, *Exit to Wonderland* had the chance to culminate as a 13 minute dance for 7 performers, including one on stilts. Originally a solo that I crafted for myself in 2010 (Centerstage Theater in Santa Barbara), a trio in 2012 (92nd St Y in New York City), and a quartet in 2013 (Center for Performance Research in Brooklyn), the choreography was made with the desire to embody the musicality of *The Chairman Dances* by John Adams. I always maintained the feeling that it was never quite complete. With the resources provided by the Department of Theatre and Dance, I felt this would be the perfect opportunity to bring it back to life with the full force of production design for the very first time.

The work began as a traditional contemporary concert dance with a unison trio between Lily, Gabby, and myself. We performed large, identical, release phrases that moved on three asymmetrical trajectories. Each of us maintained a different “front”, and the role of who held centerstage consistently shifted. Pivoting away from expectation, we landed in suggestive “demon sex baby” behavior by sucking our thumbs while crawling and stumbling around the

perimeters of the stage. Through hand holding, we became more aggressive, pulling and pushing each other around before sprinting back and forth on two different diagonals. After a partial blackout, purple lights softly illuminated our kneeling bodies as three kitty cats licking our paws and rubbing our skulls.

On a specific musical shift, a giant and two fairy-nymphs appeared to guide us into wonderland. We encountered a castle, battled a dragon, rambled the countryside, navigated extreme laughing and crying, tore down a snowy mountainside, ringed around the rosie, spread out for a unison phrase, and swiped through tiny multilayered dimensions. Ultimately, we came together in center to slowly back away in an expanding circle, exhibiting a quiet, momentary ritual of stirring forearms, embodying the image of slowing gear trains.



Figure 71. "Exit To Wonderland", photo by Manuel Rotenberg

Stilt Operation



Figure 72. “Stilt Operation”, photo by Manuel Rotenberg

This three and a half minute transition depicted the womxn in opposition to Alex. They physically opposed his trajectory in their walking circular pathway around the stage. Melby initiated an antagonizing interaction with him for being “different”. In a closer confrontation, she told him to “shut up” before knocking him down to the floor.

Momentarily, there was a shift of unknown potential. Would this turn sexual? No, far from it. Gabby and Lily started to tinker around his stilts - at first curiously, then aggressively. Alex writhed and screamed while Melby and Astrid held him down. After taking off his “legs”, Alex passed out and Melby dragged him offstage. The mood was set for what was to follow.

Heel, Skull



Figure 73. “Heel, Skull”, photo by Jim Carmody



Figure 74. “Heel, Skull”, photo by Kevin Vincent

My entrance into “Heel, Skull” portrayed an energetic shift into a much deeper sense of somatic attention. Figure 74 depicts how I allowed myself to bathe in the light, open my mouth to drink it in and let it shine through all parts of my being. From the inside out, I became the light as my hands explored my jaw. I placed my little fingers symmetrically between each side of my molars. I turned my body to diagonally face the audience and the downstage right corner of the stage and position myself strategically in relationship to my shadow. I dragged my fingers down my face to reveal the inside flap of my lower lip, and paused when my fingertips arrived at my clavicle. I closed my eyes and turned my head right and left as I allowed my sternocleidomastoids to release into greater length. My hands softly palpated down my torso, pausing at my diaphragm, my low belly, and directly in front of my genitals.

I dropped to the floor to bask in the experience of expanding my energy through all parts of the space as my body moved to form various positions. As the beat of Alex Stephenson’s electronic composition began to pick up, I emulated a creature picking up insects to eat while my eyes looked up toward the nighttime sky. On all fours, with my fingers flexed and knuckles leading, my skeleton fluidly ambulated as I crawled across the stage to encircle a pool of light at the downstage right corner.

I situated at the downstage left side of the pool so that my shadow would be fully visible. I tucked my toes, dropped my head, and pushed back into a crouch before slowly rolling up my spine. My hands tremored as they turned to fists, and with my cervical spine still hanging, my feet began to take slow, timed steps to every other beat of the music. After six steps, I stopped to fully roll up and stand tall, drop my presence down through my legs and expand my awareness once again in all directions, especially back and up behind my neck. Scanning the horizon with

my eyes, I rotated my torso right and left before I slackened my limbs to walk directly toward the downstage left corner.

I entered a state of vocal exploration as I performed a lengthy movement phrase that was decorated with specific gestures of the hands, pelvis, and feet. My body eventually pounced into a large rectangular cage of light. In the cage, I held my left hand over my mouth to communicate into a two-way radio, my voice emulating a deep, muffled, one sided conversation in a hidden language. I bounced back up onto my feet to hang over my legs and shake my ass toward the audience while sounding a haunting, guttural laugh. I dropped and spiraled my body back to a quadruped position, where I began to spasm and vocally vomit out continuous calls of ascending and descending registers. Rolling up to stand, I allowed the tension to accumulate in my body as I elevated my shoulders and rolled onto my tiptoes while screaming out a muffled, uninterpretable cry for help. Reaching a smothered point of silence, I waited in suspense before dropping down into a steady, royal curtsy.

I waited with my palms open wide toward the audience and my fingertips reaching for the ground. After I pressed my palms and arms 4 inches closer to the audience, I continued into about 13 more minutes of dancing where I emulated classical Limón technique, played with rays of light, slowly walked in a native-like ritual procession with my hands posed as feathers, ascended the risers alongside the audience, danced a gestural phrase interspersed with floorwork, pulled up my pants, frantically tore of my jacket, covered my eyes with my palms, repeatedly threw myself into falls and recoveries, confronted the downstage left corner after a salute, repeated pike jumps and tiny hand articulations, spasmed my arms, durationally spun around in circles as my hands gesticulated, searched for, and pressed into invisible channels, collapsed onto

the ground, heaved and recovered my breath as I approached the audience, contacted two people in the audience as I wept, took a deep breath in, walked quickly and heavily toward the back wall, unexpectedly crashed into the back wall, knocked on the back wall while pressing my ear onto it, looked around the room nervously with sudden turns of my head, played with the string curtain, found my jacket, slowly walked toward and smiled at the audience, put my jacket on backwards, saluted the audience, threw my arms around myself, and marched to the back of the stage to crash through the door under the stage right exit sign.

News Cycle



Figure 75. "News Cycle", photo by Manuel Rotenberg

News Cycle was a complete departure from anything in the show thus far. The entire cast and crew were required to do a lot of side preparation with all of the moving props which included newspapers, globes, rolling tables, bicycles, a large black wall on wheels, and myself,

Alex (on stilts), Gabby, and Lily covered and stuffed with taped on strips of newspaper to emulate “news monsters”.

Performers included composer Alex Stephenson and costume designer Natalie Barshow in the initial durational section of individuals collapsed over white, misshapen tables who eventually sat up for newspaper tearing. MaeAnn and Carlos carefully crafted and cued sound clips from the most recent political events, such as Elizabeth Warren and Bernie Sanders in a confrontation during one of the democratic debates. Eventually, the tables were turned and their tops removed to stick on the moving black wall piece by piece. A 2 dimensional human skull was puzzled together as performers came to bicycle around Gabby in a large circle. We once again played with different registers of laughing and crying as we repeatedly zoomed around the stage.



Figure 76. “News Cycle”, photo by Miranda Friel

Dragon Obituary



Figure 77. “Dragon Obituary”, photo by Manuel Rotenberg

Zohar for wind quartet by Omri Abram was the perfect musical backdrop for the conclusion of the show. In this 11 minute piece, horns and flutes surged, and we danced in the mess that was the stage. After Alex G. and Lily expanded the pieces of skull on the wall to make space between each bone, we danced a unison phrase and a series of superimposed solos. Astrid re-entered as a lone cyclist to circle around us as we traveled to the downstage left corner. With the lights flashing on and off, we improvised six moving dragon tableaux. We shed all parts of the dragon before moving to the downstage right corner for a final unison phrase of slow and methodical floorwork. Alex Stephenson re-entered as an evil corporate queen, and directed the

stage hands to bury us in the news. After our complicit burial, he attempted to steal the final piece of the skull. Suddenly, Gabby emerged from her grave and ran to take it back. In a perfectly timed moment of comic relief, she “shooed” him off the stage. She placed the bone back onto the wall, turned to face the audience, and proceeded to soothe herself by brushing her hands repeatedly down the sides of her face. The rest of us sat up to watch, and follow her lead.



Figure 78. “Dragon Obituary”, photo by Miranda Friel



Figure 79. “Dragon Obituary”, photo by Jim Carmody

Appendix



Figure 80. Me and my shadow in performance, photo by Valarie Duran

A Transcribed Response by Alicia Peterson Baskell, MFA

January 23, 2020

Tonight I attended a performance of a graduate student at UCSD, Marcos Duran, and it was absolutely stunning. It was remarkable. It was so well done on many levels. I always go into a graduate concert expecting to be knocked off my feet. I am disappointed if I'm not. This work knocked me off my feet.

I can see the fiction in his work, the improvisation, the desire for full-bodied movement - all of it. But that's not what the work is about. Which is super exciting. The work is not about form. It uses form and it sort of turns form on its head at times, but it's not about form. It's about something bigger. Something far more interesting.

I'm just going to start from the beginning. When you walk in there is a beautiful scenic design. I can tell that Marcos had very intelligent and integrated collaborators. They trusted him, he gave them space. The ability to create on such a simple design that is so complex. Hanging from the stage was this beautiful three dimensional tapestry that created an uneven arc across the stage and truly a frame. I sat dead center so it was fabulous to experience everything that occurred inside and out of this frame.

The piece starts with Marcos and the stage manager in a short duet. Somewhat Sexual. Somewhat funny. You can already tell there's a sense of play here and a closeness of everybody involved. I do believe that this unity is very important when making a piece.

Then, all of the performers come onstage and he introduces everybody one at a time. Then he takes us, the audience, (he's talked a bit in the program about having craniosacral training) so he takes us through a grounding exercise. He has us put our hands on our heads and literally asks us to expand our cranium so that we will be ready to embrace this piece, so that we will be open and available. I have some questions about it because I have experienced things like this before. Artists leading a meditation before a performance or playing with the audience's perception in this way. I think it's an interesting concept to try to get the audience into the same space for receiving, but I often find it assumes I can't do this myself. But I trust Marcos, so I go with it.

Then everybody onstage leaves.

Then Marcos comes on. He exits one door. He re-enters another door. He could have continued going in a circle like that. For me, I could have seen that alot. he didn't, but it was significant in opening and expanding the space. It felt like an official start of a new chapter. I think this was a chapter on discovery. Introductions. It was solos. They felt like they may have been pulled from choreography that is going to happen. Certainly from ideas that are going to unfold. We kind of get to know each person. I don't trust everybody yet. I see the remarkable storytelling that is going to happen. I say to Marcos - I trust you and I'm staying with you and I trust that you are going to reveal something.

Same with the next section which is even more raw. Because everyone is onstage together and yet not acknowledging each other. Simultaneous solos. There is one girl who is asking questions of the others but without response. And this goes on for a while. You can see the worlds. You can see that they are all in their own world. And I've made dances like this and I wonder - I love the process of it but this was a question I had while watching it - ...where is this going to go? then I said - I trust you. I've been here and I trust that you want This to be This. And you could see that the performers trusted themselves. They were deeply in what they were doing. They weren't trying to access audience appreciation...at all. I guess that's a big thing for me. Accessing Audience Appreciation. Audience appreciation wasn't necessarily NOT there and it wasn't necessarily there - It just wasn't in their minds. And that was awesome. And at the end they all recognized the same thing at one moment. And that was awesome.

Then they leave except maybe two? or maybe two come back?

And they're a dragon tail and a dragon head. I've already seen these dragon body parts sort of spread out. I can picture them as a whole but they never become a whole. The dragon exists only when the six of them are onstage wearing each part of the dragon. Together they make the dragon.

(I think I forgot a whole section of phrase work)

So then we move into this amazing world that they've created that is part of everything I know. It's part Alice in Wonderland, it's part Wizard of Oz, it's

part old dramatic hollywood movies, It's part noir. And the performers are all there. The costumes are incredible and the dancing is gorgeous. It ends so violently. Such violence. As they rip apart the one who they perceive as different from them. He really wasn't that different from them.

And then there was a solo and the solo is in an empty room and he's alone and there are hints of war, hints of absolute solitude, imprisonment. And alarm. It's really interesting this imprisonment and spaciousness together. And I see war. And I don't know if this war is internal or external. It feels like this war is coming from internal. From him. This imprisonment. When he runs into the back wall, it surprises all of us. And the sweat on the wall. And the light and his response. A new way of being. He was almost a character then all of the sudden he was really lost. Then he found us. the audience. But us. other people. us. He put his hand on his chest and the other hand on his head - the practice he taught us in the beginning which now felt like a secret he had whispered to us rather than an exercise. Then he gave one member of the audience something of his and then gave another member of the audience something else of his from his head - energetically. And then he stepped back and he got his jacket and he looked at us and I think the lights came on on us at that point so he could see us. And I wanted to take his jacket for him. I wanted to stand up and ask him if I could hold that for him. But he put it on backwards and he hugged himself. He would be his own support. He would be his own healing. I think he needed us. But I think he said that he could take care of himself. and he will take care of himself. Not in spite of us but for us.

And then they brought on some tables and chairs that we recognized from the beginning. and people sitting in ties (like in a workspace) laid on them for a long time. Everything was cold. Black and white. and an almost blue light. And the fan slowly turning overhead. Then the newspaper nazis came onstage and they were holding globes and we recognized the globes from the beginning but the newspapers were new. People at the desk start ripping the paper. And there is so much information. So much information. So much information that we are taking in. There's so much. It's called the News Cycle. They cycle around on bikes and the floor is a mess now because there are bits of newspaper everywhere.

And they build a cranium. Only Marcos takes off the back of the cranium. And then they separate the cranium. This image makes sense to what I've experienced as a receiver of cranial sacral therapy. So the dragon comes back. There's the wings, there's the head, there's the tail, There's the lower body. and the chest and the shoulder pads. Then the dragon is gone.

Dragon's Obituary. And these artists are doing a floor phrase in unison at the down right corner until Dr. Evil comes and puts all that news all over them. All the newspaper pieces ALL over them. Buries them with news. Meanwhile there had been a sound score of extremely current news of the last week or three weeks.

Then this Dr. Evil character goes to steal that back of the skull. Then one of the dragon girl stands up and shoos him away. She grabs it from him and shouts "shoo shoo". It was amazing. And then she helps the others to ground. So I

see the craniosacral work all over this work. Cranial Sacral philosophies and techniques.

But it's also got these layers of fiction and then it's also got this layer of deep political or social commentary and I love it - bravo.

Social commentary: That violence on that flower for being different. isolation. Taking care of oneself. Taking care of each other. And all of the noise that is overwhelming in our world that almost is controlling us, could control society, could bury us. But Marcos doesn't have a hopeless take on it. He doesn't say "This is it" - He just understands that "this is NOT it" and that's in the piece too. Bravo.

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