

# A Somatic Investigation of the Cyborg

by

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## **Introduction:**

I was trained to understand my body through drills in technique classes and adjudication on a two and a half minute solo. When I started participating in somatically informed dance classes in college, I immediately gained interest in this new way of dancing and learning. I realized that this somatic inclination was prevalent in most classes I took. The transition of dance from competition to something so healthy in my life mimicked larger transitions within the dance world - giving dancers more agency, taking care of dancer bodies, and forming more eclectic movers. Somatic practices can take form as preventative and rehabilitating of injury, as a practice that encourages the enhancement of our understanding of health, pedagogy, and movement, and as a way of physicalizing sensation and experience. Somatic practices have emerged from the periphery to become not only forms of recovery, but also forms of bodily knowledge that are central parts of the current dance world.

Throughout my time as an undergraduate, I have experienced an overwhelming connection between topics discussed in my multidisciplinary course work. My fascination with the “natural” or “authentic,” especially in terms of movement, and the role of somatic practices in finding organic movement for some people, is rooted in small examples of challenging nature and universalizing experience.

As I was sitting in my first anthropology course, one called Reproductive Technologies and Reproductive Futures, I suddenly found myself learning about the nature-culture separate through the implementation and use of reproductive technologies in society. Central to reproductive technologies exists a tense conversation between nature and technology and a merging of flesh, life, disembodiment, and

machine. The heart of the nature-culture tension specifically exemplified through reproductive technologies is revealed when technology is considered an intrusion on biological processes. When technological involvement, including artificial reproductive processes, is considered an interference with the natural, nature and culture exist as intrinsically separate with nature being threatened by culture. Contrarily, the replacement or mimicking of natural processes by artificial ones exemplifies the postmodern collapse of the nature-culture dichotomy and the embracement of the idea that nature and culture do not have to exist as distinctly.

Nature in the context of reproduction and assisted reproductive technologies involves mere, unaltered, stationary biological processes, and serves as an embodiment of the pure animality of reproduction. Nature can be seen as the basic, animalistic remainder after social and cultural impositions have been stripped from human needs and desires. The idea of naturalness can also describe human imperatives, including reproductive drives. On the contrary, culture embraces a more dynamic definition. Culture can respond to societal fluctuations and progressions, as it becomes a reflection of the *current* state of a group of people. Culture and technology are tightly intertwined in this techno-age and the crumbling of their separate makes any somatically instructed return to a “natural” state unclear.

The following year, I was in Perspectives on Dance as Culture: Dancing Bodies, Cultures, and Environments, and was exploring the implications of somatic practices as universal practices. Essential to the ability of somatic practices to universalize is the function of these practices under the umbrella of hard science. Scientific knowledge becomes the framework somatic practices can use to reach places science does not tread. In order to universalize, science fits somatic practices into a larger, known discourse that

can easily become uniform, general, and universal. In this sense, fundamentally individualized experience is stabilized and universalized by ensuring a collective context. Although somatic practices focus on the fundamentally unique experience of each person, the experience is limited in scope based on practices that promote certain individual experiences and quiet others. In order to have a somatically informed experience, one's physicality must be molded to fit or work towards a specific conception of the body. The expansion of somatics into a general, universal practice with the validation of a scientific framework fabricates a cyborg body. As Isabelle Ginot says, "Somatics itself is a technique of fabricating the body, the result of which is the creation of a unique cyborg, with or without prosthetic devices. In other words, one may have to think of somatic methods as queer practices, among other processes..." Even if the fabricated body takes on a cyborg character that is inclusive of many different anatomical possibilities, it becomes exclusive of any one body as a whole. The alternative would then be one singular body type, exclusive of all others. In either scenario, a fabricated, distant, and not universally relatable body, or cyborg, is created.

A cyborg joins the picture in the attempt to create a figure with which to universally empathize. A cyborg – a ubiquitous hybrid of machine and organism, and the ultimate individual self of a post-gender world – exists as a manifestation of more than the literal culmination of both machine and flesh in a being, and extends into the politic of disembodiment and cyborg consciousness. The cyborg is a hybrid, a copy without an original, and an individual without a historical text. A cyborg in this realm, and in the context of this thesis, does not necessarily involve techno humans or prosthetic devices; it rather involves a re-assembly of a body that attempts to be universally relatable in its inclusion of many different anatomical possibilities, but is actually exclusive of any one

body as a whole. Somatic practices, both studied and exercised, have the potential to create a cyborg body by universalizing and neutralizing human experience to fit one somatic experience.

The nature-culture tension discussion is fully embedded within the cyborg in that totalizing ideologies are often unrealistic and mistaken. There is a danger and inappropriateness of reducing somatics to one standard for individual physical sensation. The construction of any singular whole can be dangerous and tragic to the human species and the avoidance of such a construct leaves room for natural, human, essential hybridity and boundary confusion. There is a pleasure and responsibility in boundary confusion and for the lack of ontological separation between the technical and the organic, as shown through the cyborg.

There is awkwardness and a hesitation with which I write this thesis, for the introduction of somatic practices into the dance world is responsible for much encouragement of individualized, simple, animalistic, and organic movement and the healthier relationship of dancers and performers to a dance world. The issue of having conducting experiential research with a narrow pool of participants and people doing the research does open up somatic practices to a more critical eye. It has now become critically important to acknowledge the potential intercultural and gender-political complications of these practices and the monocultural approach to somatic pedagogy created by the common-thread search for “the universal,” “the humanistic,” or “the biological.”

Chapter one of this thesis will address the body and the production of the body experience through specific somatic practices. Chapter two will address the universalization and neutralization of the body through these practices and the creation

of a cyborg through somatics that is distinct from a techno-cyborg. Chapter three will discuss associated deconstruction and reconstruction of the body from somatic practice to the rehearsal and performance spaces. Through these chapters, I hope to bring into focus the individuality with which we experience and to raise critical questions regarding the role of somatic practices in the fabrication of a cyborg or post-human body through the universalization of experience and neutralization of the body.

## **Chapter 1:**

### **The Body and the Production of the Body Experience through the Somatic Practices of Alexander Technique, Bartenieff Fundamentals, and Body Mind Centering**

Thomas Hanna, a philosopher who dedicated his life to freeing people physically and intellectually, coined the term and field of “somatics” in 1976 as a means to name approaches to body-mind integration. Hanna worked with Moshe Feldenkrais, an Israeli physicist and body educator, who established a method of somatic education that was compatible with Hanna’s thinking. Hanna founded and trained at the Novato Institute for Somatic Research to evolve and expand the work he had been doing with Feldenkrais. He paid particular attention to postural difficulties and noted processes, later to become Hanna Somatic Education, that were effective in helping regain control of the muscles that cultivated detrimental postures.<sup>1</sup> He was able to offer his first training program in 1990 and successfully shared his work with 38 students who continued to share the essence of Hanna’s work after Hanna died in a tragic car accident in July of 1990. For the purposes of this thesis, and for the maintenance of the integrity of Hanna’s work, somatics can be defined as, “the study of the soma: namely, the body as perceived from within by first-person perception.”<sup>2</sup> This working definition illuminates a key distinction within somatic practice: that between the soma and the body. When the

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Hanna, *Somatics: Reawakening the Mind’s Control of Movement, Flexibility, and Health*, (Cambridge,

<sup>2</sup> Thomas Hanna, "What is Somatics?" *Somatics* (Spring/Summer 1986), 4-8.

lens is shifted to involve observation of the human being from the outside, the body is perceived. The revealing of the soma occurs only when the human is observed through the first-person perspective of its own proprioceptive senses. This type of intimate observation exists as completely distinct from observation by an outside eye. The subject of both the body and the soma remains the same, but the differentiation takes form in the shifting viewpoint. There is a huge difference between the immediate proprioception and resulting unique data that accompanies viewing the soma and observation from a third-person viewpoint that accompanies viewing the body. The same individual is categorically different when viewed from a first-person and third-person perspective.<sup>3</sup>

In this chapter, I will briefly describe characteristic features of three different somatic practices. A full social-historical contextualization of these practices is beyond the scope of this thesis, but this chapter will serve as a more factual introduction to the practices and later chapters will further contextualize them.

### *I. Alexander Technique*

Although there exists no reliable biography of Alexander, nor a definitive book delineating his work and established practice, Alexander Technique can be defined as, “a process of psycho-physical re-education: by inhibiting automatic habitual responses it allows you to eliminate old habits of reaction and mis-use of the body and, through more reliable sensory appreciation, brings about improved use and a more appropriate means

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid. 4.

of reaction.”<sup>4</sup> The technique functions more as an educational process than a form of exercise or relaxation.

Alexander Technique, although developed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century by an Australian Shakespearean actor, Frederick Matthias Alexander, has been adopted by many areas of performance arts and even sports training. Alexander suffered from voice loss without any identifiable cause. He resolved to believe his voice loss was a result of something he was doing and something he could control; when he was preparing to recite in public, he noticed an unnecessary tensing of his body and a contraction of his head and neck muscles. This began Alexander’s ten-year journey of research and practice to develop a system of correcting habitually misaligned body postures. The idea was to consciously re-educate the body, break habits of posture and movement that previously caused pain and possibly disease, stop muscular engagements that create unnecessary tensions, and to allow ease and efficiency of movement.

Alexander found that interference with the balance of his head was caused by an over-extension of his neck muscles. His logic then went as follows: “ I must relax or release my neck. If I stiffen the neck I pull my head back and down, so I’d better direct it to do the opposite, i.e., “go forward and up”, and as I at the same time shorten the spine and narrow the back as I take a breath I’d better direct the back to “lengthen and widen.””<sup>5</sup> Alexander’s, “Primary Control” of the body solidifies these notions and holds that the proper alignment and dynamic relationship of the head, neck, and spine can

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<sup>4</sup> John Gray, *The Alexander Technique: A Complete Course in How to Hold and Use Your Body for Maximum Energy*, (New York, NY: St. Martin’s Press, 1990), 13.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, 23.

improve coordination, sensory awareness, reaction, and general functioning.<sup>6</sup> Alexander's primary control became the foundation and most basic goal of Alexander Technique. More specifically, Alexander found that if he paid particular attention to the freedom and balance of the head on top of the spine, he could eliminate a cascade of harmful alignments before they magnified farther down the sequence.

Alexander emphasized the power of undoing. He did not advise to try to do or achieve any of his orders, for one cannot "do an undoing."<sup>7</sup> His technique is based on the idea of undoing and inhibiting automatic habitual responses, reactions, and mis-uses of the body. Because of Alexander's belief in the benefits of the least muscular effort, directions in his technique are more appropriately thought of as thoughts rather than actions. Shedding excess muscular tension was thought to leave behind an uninhibited and unobstructed natural poise and alignment. Primary orders in Alexander Technique function to offer proper alignment and verticality: "Let the neck be free so that the head can go forward and up so that the back can lengthen and widen."<sup>8</sup> The neck in Alexander Technique functions as an extension of the back, and must remain in alignment with the rest of the spine. The forward and up direction of the head, made possible by the freeing of the neck, is meant to prevent the head from pulling back and down, a common habitual alignment that compresses and tenses the neck and body. The spine and shoulders are thought of as a loosely arranged unit, central to all other parts of the body, and the head loosely poised and balanced on top of a lengthened spine.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 41.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 39-51.

<sup>9</sup> John B. Harer and Sharon Munden, *The Alexander Technique Resource Book: A Reference Guide*, (Lanham, MD: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2009), xxvii.

Alexander's orders involve a redefining of the vertical in a specific way that leads to health and ease of movement.

Although Alexander Technique can be taught to a group, it is best learned by working one-on-one with an Alexander instructor to identify movement habits involved in everyday activities. It is from these everyday activities that habits of movement and posture become deeply ingrained in the body, and it is the misalignments of these deeply ingrained habits that Alexander Technique targets and aims to correct. The student's aim is to inhibit habitual response, while the instructor activates the student's primary control mechanism.<sup>10</sup> Over the course of the lessons, awareness of the functioning of the nervous system, muscular system, and skeletal system is ideally expanded.

A typical lesson involves some table work with the student lying down with knees bent and pointing upwards. This position allows for identification of unnecessary tension in the hopes of enlivening sensory awareness while quieting the nervous system. The second part of a typical lesson involves guidance by the instructor on normal, simple activities. Verbal, visual, and physical clues are given to correct painful habits and promote and maintain ease, efficiency, and freedom. The goal of practicing Alexander Technique is to use the least amount of energy and in the most balanced way when placing the body in motion.<sup>11</sup> Similar to other somatic practices, Alexander Technique is used as a form of recovery, pain management, and prevention of injury. It is also said to relieve performance anxiety, stress, fatigue, insomnia, neck and back pain, chronic

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<sup>10</sup> Gray, *The Alexander Technique*, 31.

<sup>11</sup> Matthias F. Alexander and Edward Maisel, *The Alexander Technique: The Essential Writings of F. Matthias Alexander*, (Secaucus, NJ: Carol Publishing Group, 1995).

muscle tension, digestive problems, and bring increased awareness of a body mind connection.

This technique does not put one's bodily awareness above all else. It works with the idea that one's previous awareness and sense register of the body are potentially misguided, unreliable, and pain-inducing; re-education must occur to fix the bodily effects of these previous notions and to reach a balanced, poised, well-aligned, and new state. As Alexander instructs, "Change involved carrying out an activity against the habit of life."<sup>12</sup>

Alexander intended for his technique to be inclusive and able to be applied to everyone. Not only do people of many different occupations, at least including performing artists and athletes, use Alexander Technique, but also the technique has a presupposition of further universality. Writings of Alexander Technique refer to "people," "children," and "humans" in an all-encompassing and uniformly damaged manner. The general idea that guides Alexander Technique suggests that there exists a general mistaken understanding of the self that composes a pathetic instance of human delusion.<sup>13</sup> Both the self and the human in this fundamental concept of Alexander Technique are generalized and homogenized. Such a presupposition of commonality is also present in the place of child training and education within Alexander Technique:

The child of the present day, once it has emerged from its first state of absolute helplessness, and before it has been trained and coerced into certain mental and physical habits, is the most plastic and adaptable of living things. At this stage the complete potentiality of conscious control is present but can only be developed by the eradication of certain hereditary

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid, 3.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 17.

tendencies or predispositions. Unfortunately, the usual procedure is to thrust certain habits upon it without the least consideration of cause and effect, and to insist upon these habits until they have become subconscious and have passed from the region of intellectual guidance... it is the rule which was taught to us, and we pass it on either by precept, or by holding up our imperfections for imitation and then we wonder what is the cause of the prevailing physical degeneration!

What is intended by these methods of education is to inculcate the accumulated and inferentially correct lessons derived from past experience. It is true that the lesson varies according to the religious, political, and social colour of the parent and teacher, but speaking generally, the intention would be logical enough, if we could make the primary assumption that each generation starts from the same point, - the assumption, in other words, that a baby is born with the same potentialities, the same mental abilities and assuredly the same physical organism whether he be born in the 16<sup>th</sup> or the 20<sup>th</sup> century.”<sup>14</sup>

Despite differences in ways and place of being raised, children, according to Alexander Technique, are as an entity set up to have mistaken ideas about their own bodies that necessitate correction. The implied universality and simplicity of practice treads into potentially dangerous territory involving assumptions of individual experience. The one reprieve from this danger is the catch that if one feels a sense of “doing,” an adjustment in practice must be made. A simple, three-fold system is readily engaged:

1. Let the neck be free
2. Let the head go forward and up
3. Let the torso lengthen and widen out<sup>15</sup>

## II. *Bartenieff Fundamentals*

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid, 95-96.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, xxiii.

Bartenieff Fundamentals is defined as “an approach to basic body training that deals with patterning and connections in the body according to principles of efficient movement functioning within a context which encourages personal expression and full psychophysical involvement.”<sup>16</sup> The goal is to facilitate interplay between inner connectivity and outer expressivity.<sup>17</sup> Irmgard Bartenieff was a student of Rudolf Laban who developed the Laban Movement Study, and as such, Bartenieff Fundamentals is inevitably an extension of Laban’s work. Rudolf von Laban exposed concepts of effort, space, shape, action of body parts, and group relationships as contributing factors to the ways in which humans express themselves through movement. As Laban’s student, Bartenieff was able to substantiate Laban’s work with her experience in physical therapy. Bartenieff was action-oriented and a proponent of intentional movement as a source of new knowledge. She identifies change, relationship, and patterning body connections to be fundamental within movement.<sup>18</sup>

Similar to many somatic practices, Bartenieff considers her “Fundamentals” to be a re-education into the body’s connectivity. Again, we observe the desire to *return way back* to the original, fundamental, and primitive to change our approach to development such that less becomes underdeveloped and weak. This logic involves an assumed closeness with oneself that results from conceding to these primitive controls and stripping away of any collected clutter or pollution. Because “Fundamentals” focuses more on achieving body connectivity and embodiment, the direct portrayal of the body through this

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<sup>16</sup> Peggy Hackney, *Making Connections: Total Body Integration Through Bartenieff Fundamentals*, (New York, NY: Routledge, 2002), 31.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, 34.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, 12.

practice is less obviously delineated than in the case of Alexander technique and other somatic practices. Within “Fundamentals” is also the self-aware recognition that there is no one “right” way to teach or learn embodiment and connection. This open-endedness adds to a certain believability of the practice, but it still does make use of an idealized image of a connected and embodied body.

The organizational progression of the material in Bartenieff Fundamentals is easily shaped into a mold of developmental progression that seems based on the work of Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen with Body Mind Centering (BMC). The Laban/Bartenieff Institute of Movement Studies certified Cohen as a Laban Movement Analyst. Although Cohen studied Laban and Bartenieff, the organizational progression through Bartenieff Fundamentals intuitively fits with a development indicative of BMC. If not coincidental, this hints at the active conversation between somatic practices because without it, the expected progression of influence would be from Bartenieff to BMC. This sequence and group of movement connectivities in Bartenieff includes: breath, core-distal connectivity (navel radiation), head-tail connectivity (spinal), upper-lower connectivity (homologous), body-half connectivity (homolateral), and cross-lateral connectivity (contralateral).<sup>19</sup> Bartenieff found patterns and connectivity that take form within a developing body. By focusing on certain connectivity, one can increase movement efficiency, flow, and coordination.<sup>20</sup> Bartenieff Fundamentals includes the ‘Basic Six’ with a breathing and rocking preparation: thigh lift (hip flexion), pelvic forward shift, pelvic lateral shift, body half, diagonal knee reach (‘knee drop’), and arm circles and diagonal sit up.

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<sup>19</sup> Peggy Hackney, *Making Connections: Total Body Integration Through Bartenieff Fundamentals*, (New York, NY: Routledge, 2002), 31.

<sup>20</sup> Irmgard Bartenieff and Dori Lewis, *Body Movement: Coping with the Environment*, (New York, NY: Routledge), 2002.

In order to better conceptualize Bartenieff Fundamentals, a basic understanding of Laban Movement Analysis is necessary. The scope of movement possibility in Laban functions to explore the limits of efficient and expressive physicality. Laban movement analysis utilizes the notion that each person moves in daily life and creates phrases and relationships that fit a personal, artistic, or cultural style. Changes in the dynamic interplay of body, effort, shape, and space create differences in phrasing that allow individualisms and the formation of relationships.<sup>21</sup>

“Whether one is a dancer, actor, athlete or business person, a fully functioning expressive body increases life’s possibilities.”<sup>22</sup> Irmgard Bartenieff holds that, “Body movement is not a symbol for expression, it *is* the expression.” The work explored in Bartenieff activates connections with the intention of facilitating integration and enrichment from many perspectives. Bartenieff provides the opportunity to explore the connections within ourselves that, when developed, contribute to fully embodied members of society.<sup>23</sup> The scope of people able to benefit from this practice is once again potentially overestimated.

The Basic Six of Bartenieff Fundamentals is used as a framework for somatically and experientially understanding body sequencing and achieving robust three-dimensional movement through space. Explicit concepts in Fundamentals include core support, connectivity, and vertical thoroughness. There are many different concepts involved with Fundamentals, and each have many different associated body experiences, so the

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<sup>21</sup> Peggy Hackney, *Making Connections: Total Body Integration Through Bartenieff Fundamentals*, (New York, NY: Routledge, 2002), 31.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*, ix.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid*, vii.

definitions of these concepts are fluid and context-dependent. To get more of an idea, a few concepts include anchoring, body attitude, grounding, hollowing, intent (and spatial intent), kinetic chains and sequencing, patterning, phrasing, weight sensing, and three dimensionality.<sup>24</sup>

### *I. Body Mind Centering*

Similar to Alexander Technique, Body Mind Centering, originated by Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen, is a method of movement analysis and bodily re-education. It functions on two premises: that the mind is inseparable from and central to the body, and that the mind can be explored and expressed through the body.<sup>25</sup> Pivotal to BMC is the uncompromising idea that all parts of the body are conscious. Taken to its farthest relevant extreme, this means that the body can experience and be experienced intimately and microscopically. Each cell is capable of perceiving and taking action so that we are aware both with and of every single part of our physical beings. BMC is a dive into the mind of the body as well as into the intelligence and constant interactions of every cell.<sup>26</sup>

Alignment in BMC does not come from an external understanding of how specific body parts anatomically relate, but rather comes from the relationship between the smallest, cellular, microscopic activity of the body and the largest bodily movements. Alignment in BMC is different than a physical bodily stacking and is more about the relationship of inner cellular movement and the external expression of this movement

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<sup>24</sup> Peggy Hackney, *Making Connections: Total Body Integration Through Bartenieff Fundamentals*, (New York, NY: Routledge, 2002).

<sup>25</sup> Gill W. Miller, Pat Ethridge, and Kate T. Morgan, *Exploring Body Mind Centering: An Anthology of Experience and Method*, (Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books, 2011).

<sup>26</sup> Linda Hartley, *Wisdom of the Body Moving: An Introduction to Body-Mind Centering*, (Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books, 1995).

through space. The differentiation and identification of specific parts of the body, as particular as possible, and the discovery of how they contribute to movement, development, and the expression of the mind all contribute to alignment in BMC.<sup>27</sup>

The principles of Body Mind Centering, as with many somatic practices, are not reliant on words for transmission, so words often become a clumsy description of the study. As illustrative of this linguistic shortfall, Body Mind Centering includes more than its name implies. Embedded within the name exists a body-mind duality or dichotomy, attempted to be avoided by using multiple words to describe a totality of being. Additionally, the term “centering” implies a single center, but the practice of Body Mind Centering theoretically includes a dynamic balance around an ever-shifting focus.<sup>28</sup>

Body Mind Centering investigates the linkages of body and mind. It holds that movement is largely reflective of the mind, and that through an experiential journey into the body and its movement, an understanding of the mind’s expression is reached. Because of the connection between the body and mind, or movement of the mind in close relation to movement of the body, any one movement becomes representative of the mind’s expression through the body at that particular moment. Changes in movement imply changes in focus of the mind - when the mind attends to different areas of the body to initiate movement, the quality of the movement changes. Body Mind Centering promotes the ability to spontaneously and openly perceive the bodily mind. Perceived differences between these spontaneous perceptions open the potential for transformation and further development. Body Mind Centering emphasizes the

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<sup>27</sup> Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen, *Sensing, Feeling, and Action: The Experiential Anatomy of Body-Mind Centering*, (Northampton, MA: Contact Editions, 1993).

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, vii.

importance of embodying, physicalizing, emotionalizing, and reinterpreting traditional concepts; in this sense, BMC mediates between experiential and conceptual understandings by shifting between roles of observation and embodiment.

Much of the establishment of Body Mind Centering came from a collection of articles published in *Contact Quarterly* that were written by the dancers and coeditors of CQ who journeyed into the body to find spontaneous movement, all in collaboration with Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen. Attempting to articulate experiences and place them in dialogue with each other was a step towards illuminating the BMC experience. However, directly translating Cohen's knowledge and vision into a document was a tremendously challenging undertaking, and another instance where rhetoric falls short. New articles with related, responsive, or evolved information about the study of BMC were published and gained a wider following. The practice grew in this fashion.

One of the goals of BMC is to compile many different personal experiences and researches in order to develop an empirical science. Not only has the study developed its own science, but also the practice works to continuously add experiential meaning to already existing notions of anatomy, physiology, and kinesiology. BMC is a group recording of experiences with embodiment of all body systems and stages of human development. An important part of the emergence of this science is the scope of the research, with the amount of participants in the thousands, and with some participants maintaining engagement for more than twenty years. Finding a comfortable common experience that embraces the many different experiences with BMC has allowed a universal and collaborative practice to emerge from something specific. This theme of small to large, specific to universal, cellular to external, is foundational to the study of BMC. More generally, a theme in BMC is the merging and blending of dualities. The

merging of Eastern philosophical and Western medicinal influences is prominent in BMC, and will resurface later in this thesis.<sup>29</sup>

Similar to Alexander Technique, BMC can be applied to people with many different interests and occupations. It is a continuously changing and updating field, with its original establishment in 1982 as a product of the histories, experiences, and educations of those involved in the primary experiential research and exploration.

In practice, a BMC class might involve taking a model of a specific bone, group of bones, or joint. From the model, students might identify other bones and notice functional, spatial, or anatomical relationships among the bones. Bone identification and exploration would then move from the model to own bodies and the bodies of others. The relationship between function and anatomy may also be explored, especially with the goal of inferring related muscular engagements. Specific function often leads to specific shape. Such skeletal and muscular exploration grew to include organ exploration and total experiential anatomy. Initiation from muscles, bones, and organs yields observationally noticeable differences in produced movement. For example, moving a ribcage mechanically and with one's hands on the actual bones, yields different movement qualities than movement generated by placing one's hands on the muscles between the bones, and still different movement than that generated by focusing attention on the organs inside the ribcage. The differences in movement quality may be reflective of the different natures of the tissues involved in the movement initiation, and the common knowledge of these differences.<sup>30</sup> What forms these common distinctions between such abstract ideas? What part of bones, muscles, and organs do we latch on to

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

when producing inspired movement? Why are trends within this movement so prominent? When viewing movement or a photograph that implies an involvement of movement, can one specifically tell if the inspiration comes from the bones, muscles, or organs?

In *Sensing, Feeling, and Action*, Cohen claims that the integration of organs into movement encourages a “full-bodied three-dimensionality”<sup>31</sup> and a vast qualitative range. “Organ motivation can technically increase flexibility and strength, creatively offer vast choices for improvisation and expression, choreographically refine stylistic preferences, and analytically establish a vocabulary for articulating differences and cross-references.”<sup>32</sup> Movement prompts that call on inspiration from the organs may include: warming up with organ breathing, hissing, and sounding, improvisation with initiating externally in space through the skeletal system and then allowing the improvisation to travel internally through organs, transitioning from one movement to the next through the organs, and combining organ vocalization and movement.<sup>33</sup>

Cohen also dedicates a page of *Sensing, Feeling, and Action* to a compilation of descriptions of experiences with various organs. The organs are almost defined by these shared and intimate perceptions. The descriptions are by no means absolute. To name a few:

**Brain:** organ of perception and thought; activating/letting go of one’s mental processing; awareness and action filtered through qualities of electricity.

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid, 36.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

**Heart:** organ of circulation and relationship; the warmth of passion and compassion being open/closed to others; love/hate; authenticity; true to oneself; generosity; awareness and action filtered through qualities of fire and magnetism.

**Liver:** organ of power and stability; endurance; detoxifying; dealing with “heavy” emotions that require complex processing; anger; awareness and action filtered through qualities of deep rootedness.

**Spleen:** organ of defense; destroying that which is harmful or has lost its value; cleansing; revenge; awareness and action filtered through qualities of cutting-through.<sup>34</sup>

Cohen also reveals her enticement with early developmental processes and seems to be actively inspired and intrigued by beginnings of movement perceptions, discoveries, and connections. This throws the reader back in time to the simple, early, and seemingly natural and pure place where a baseline understanding of body connectivity may be present.

## *II. Concluding Remarks*

These three somatic practices begin to represent some breath and diversity within the field of somatics. With Alexander focusing on physical and proper verticality as the crux of alignment, with BMC emphasizing the ability of all levels of the body to perceive, act, and reflect the mind, and with Bartenieff focusing on the sequentiality and connectivity of the body as it moves robustly through space, somatic practices show a potential to represent the body through a variety of lenses.

However, each of these three somatic practices has an understanding of the body that is rightfully particular to the practice, but also inherently limited in scope, and similar to other somatic portrayals of the body. The true ability of these techniques to apply to all

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid, 39.

types of people and bodies, as intended, might be slightly misguided. Since no one body is the same, a singular practice may produce distinct impacts on different bodies. Body Mind Centering exhibits limitations within the methodology thought to make the practice universal. Although thousands of people joined in the process of exploring BMC, only a few hundred have fully committed to its entire study and transmission. This means that the experiential findings and recordings that have produced an empirical science are based on a few hundred people with access to the practice. Experiential research with a narrow pool of subjects can become problematic when expanded and universalized.

## **Chapter 2:**

### **The Universalization of Somatic Practice and Creation of the Cyborg**

Peripheral but still dance-related movement practices have marked the history of dance from its origins in the early modern era to the present. “Somatics” encompasses many different movement practices that come together to form a contemporary set of peripheral practices. Dancers themselves have sought out these practices, even though tangential to their dance practice itself, because of the potential of somatics to enhance other dance practice and emphasize active student exploration in dance pedagogy.

Somatic practice can be both prophylactic and therapeutic in its prevention and rehabilitation of injury; it also can cultivate understanding of health, pedagogy, and movement. It is with this appeal that somatic practices have actually emerged from the periphery to become formal forms of bodily knowledge that are central to the dance world today.

By proposing a transformation in dance pedagogy, somatic practices stand in opposition to dominant dance practices and the related crystallization of the “perfect” body image. It is commonly accepted that somatic practices are presented as an antidote to the ills of more mainstream dance practice. Central to the foundation of somatic practice is the idea that the exploratory student experience is more important than the mirroring and reproduction of movement emphasized in the practice of non-somatic dance. Direct comparison of movement practices with the goal of deeming one strategy as “better,” can not only be dangerous, but can also be muddied by the similar visual aesthetic produced by the two proudly distinct approaches. Exploring the ways in which

somatic practices and more dominant movement practices yield similar products and aesthetics is one method of examining the efficacy of somatic practice in dance; additionally, the epistemology of somatic practice and the ways in which its methods are elaborated, circulated, and universalized provide insight into the potency of the practice in the dance world.

### *I. Circulation of Somatic Methodology*

As a practice that relies largely on empirical evidence and the experience of the individual, somatics must grow, propagate, and reach many bodies with caution, as the individual experience is inherently unique. Qualifying the individual experience is slippery, and making any discursive assumptions about such experience can be presumptuous. The way in which somatic practice is framed, especially in relation to somatic practices being declared “better” than other movement practices at producing bodily knowledge, may do exactly this – assume specific imperatives for the individual. Promoting somatic practice then runs the risk of becoming disingenuous to the individualized experience by presupposing any ideas of individual needs and desires. Isabelle Ginot in “From Shusterman’s Somaesthetics to a Radical Epistemology of Somatics” questions the verification of the expansion of somatic practice, “How is the bodily knowledge of somatics elaborated and circulated? Somatics, after all, presents itself as an empirically based mode of bodily thinking whose discourse relies strongly on oral tradition.”<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Isabelle Ginot, "From Shusterman's Somaesthetics to a Radical Epistemology of Somatics." *Dance Research Journal* (Cambridge University Press) 42, no. 1 (Summer 2010): 13.

Fundamental to the spread of somatics is a language or discourse that encourages exploration of the practice by many types of individuals. Somatic discourse is produced in response to the necessities of publicity, teaching, and exchange that allow practitioners to grow the practice. Discourses in the professional world of somatic practice are primarily developed in specific environments that necessitate the fostering of an appropriate rhetoric. These include therapeutic practice, practitioner and teacher training, and published texts.<sup>36</sup> Somatic discourses can be framed, as Ginot effectively explores, by two antithetical means: scientific evidence and first-person narrative of recovery.<sup>37</sup> Both methods of framing provide proof in attempt to reveal somatic methodology as a verifiable means of developing bodily knowledge. This structure is in no way intended to dichotomize science and experience.

## *II. Science and Somatics*

Science not only serves as a means of justification, but also eases the spread of somatic practices through a supposed objective and universal truth. The individual experience held central to somatic practice would not be as affirmed or worthwhile without the support of scientific “fact.” In this case, subjective experience is given greater agency when connected to objective proof.

The importance of scientific justification in somatic practice is particularly clear in Alexander technique and Body Mind Centering. John Dewey gave public scientific support to the work and teachings of his colleague, F. M. Alexander, who had neither a degree nor substantial experience in the sciences. Dewey himself is a philosopher, so his

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

“scientific justification” holds little ground. Additionally, using a vague definition of science as a source of both legitimization and questioning complicates this rhetoric, drawing attention to the shortcomings of such oversimplified beliefs. To have scientific backing of the methodology of Alexander technique is hugely beneficial to the practice and adds both a seal of approval and a pass of the test of science. Practitioners can then have faith that their work is related to an unarguable and universal truth. Dewey attempts to disclose the scientific quality of Alexander’s work by comparing each lesson to a science laboratory experiment, and to claim Alexander’s work as true, living science as opposed to the work conducted on dead organisms in contrived environments that we now consider “real” science.

Personally, I cannot speak with too much admiration – in the original sense of wonder as well as the sense of respect – of the persistence and thoroughness with which these extremely difficult observations and experiments were carried out. In consequence, Mr. Alexander created what may truly be called a physiology of the *living* organism. His observations and experiments have to do with the actual functioning of the body, with the organism in operation, and in operation under the ordinary conditions of living – rising, sitting, walking, standing, using arms, hands, voice, tools, instruments of all kinds. The contrast between sustained and accurate observations of the living and the usual activities of man and those made up upon dead things under unusual and artificial conditions marks the difference between true and pseudo-science. And yet so used have we become to associating “science” with the latter sort of thing that its contrast with the genuinely scientific character of Mr. Alexander’s observations has been one great reason for the failure of many to appreciate his technique and conclusions.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Matthias F Alexander, *The Use of the Self*, (London: Orion Publishing Group, 2001), 8.

Dewey believes scientific backing to be a precursor for appreciation of both Alexander's technique and conclusions, and that he is a supporter in all accounts - he appreciates and scientifically approves of Alexander's work. At the end of this book, Alexander cites different instances, as "cases," when doctors sought him out for help, in addition to letters and signatures from experts of scientific fields. Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen of Body Mind Centering similarly honors her "professors" in her works. These endless citations, testimonies, supportive case studies, and endorsements from those who have dedicated their lives to the sciences add a quality of legitimacy that does not detract from the endogenous support - more along the lines of proof through experience - of the practice.

The role of science in the universalization of somatic practices is therefore one that ends at the endogenous methodology of the form. By not interfering at the internal and experiential level, science exists at the margins of individual experience to cast a distant and validating gaze on somatic practice. It is this compromise and mediation that gives agency to both science and individual experience as validation of the form. Scientific support legitimates the individual experience while the individual experience makes discoveries in a territory that science does not and cannot tread.<sup>39</sup>

The idea that scientific knowledge serves as a framework for somatic discourse is crucial to the practices themselves and to the ability of these practices to gain ground. Common to many somatic practices is the idea of "original," "natural," and truly "organic" movement – much of which is placed in a context with evolution. Evolutionary theory and the contextualization of somatics in relation to the evolution of

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<sup>39</sup> Isabelle Ginot, "From Shusterman's Somaesthetics to a Radical Epistemology of Somatics." *Dance Research Journal* (Cambridge University Press) 42, no. 1 (Summer 2010): 14.

species is a common model in somatic practice. In *Body Mind Centering*, Cohen applies movement practice to developmental movement and uses infants as models.

As we develop movement as infants, we follow a basic progression that has evolved through both the animal kingdom and through human history. Usually this movement process is described in terms of the skeletal-muscular system. However, if you observe the inner motivation and the organic initiation and sequencing, you can become aware of the developmental progression through the organs as well.<sup>40</sup>

The underlying idea is that noticing the infant's organic movement patterns allows one to determine the earliest signs of organized or disorganized movement. "Through the years, I have come to realize that the babies I have known have been my most beloved mentors... In meeting them where they are, I find myself."<sup>41</sup> It is this connection to anatomical human development that grounds BMC in both evolution and science to deem the practice equally as factual as uncontroversial evolution.

Establishing somatic practice in relation to evolution and human history solidifies the practice as something untouchable.

Evolution thus provides the ultimate legitimation: it gives a universal, even cosmic and a-historic, dimension to somatics, implying that all humans operate according to the same patterns. Does not somatics, by placing itself on the same plane as evolutionary theory, thus effectively situate itself on a suprahuman scale – beyond the reach of history and politics – paradoxically disengaged from all contingencies?<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen, *Sensing, Feeling, and Action: The Experiential Anatomy of Body-Mind Centering*, (Northampton, MA: Contact Editions, 1993), 34.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid*, 35.

<sup>42</sup> Isabelle Ginot, "From Shusterman's Somaesthetics to a Radical Epistemology of Somatics." *Dance Research Journal* (Cambridge University Press) 42, no. 1 (Summer 2010): 15.

Science in somatics represents a nearly eternal truth, but functions mainly to cultivate belief – to foster enough trust among practitioners and followers to solidify a genuine faith in the practice. “Somatics induces us to *believe* in the ‘scientific,’ universal, and ‘provable’ nature of experience, in order to provide a stable collective context for what is fundamentally an unstable, highly individualized experience.”<sup>43</sup>

The vital role of science in BMC manifests on one hand as a validating truth, and on another as simply a form with which somatics can be in conversation. BMC in particular offers a means by which anatomy, development, and body forms can be physically explored – an alternative to mainstream notions of “science.” BMC in this way prioritizes experiential, fluid, and movement-centered exploration as a means of discovering the workings of the body. In either case, with science as validation or science as a method of understanding to place in question, science and somatics exist largely entangled in conversation. The placement of these two forms in the same conversation aids in the ability of somatic practice to grow and circulate.

### *III. Experiential Support*

Although the scientific framework of somatics is crucial to the accountability of the practice, its justificatory reaches cannot breach the border of personal experience. Science provides a supportive context for the individual experience, but legitimization of somatic practice largely also takes place within the realm of the intimate and individual experience. Experiential narratives in this case highlight individual experience as something more valuable than general experience. These narratives often follow

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

classifiable and recognizable trends: a tragic injury that miraculously heals against odds, the case study, and the exemplum.<sup>44</sup>

The inexplicable healing of a tragic injury is foundational to Alexander technique. The technique was established through one man's self-guided journey back to health. F. M. Alexander was an Australian Shakespearean actor who experienced seemingly unprovoked voice loss that developed into chronic laryngitis whenever he performed. Doctors were not able to help, nor could they identify the cause of Alexander's formative injury. Alexander started to believe his voice troubles were the result of something in his control, so he started independently searching for ways to help himself. He took note of unnecessary tensing of his body and contraction of the head and neck before performing. He began to think of ways to re-educate his body and honor the power of undoing. He focused on correcting misalignment and breaking ingrained and stubborn movement habits. This interest and personal assertion plunged Alexander into a long process of developing a system of correcting misalignments that resulted from acts of habit. His health improved and his story mobilized his friends and previous doctors to encourage Alexander to teach what he had learned. His teachings became the Alexander Technique.<sup>45</sup>

Many other somatic practices began in a similar way or advertised a similarly miraculous recovery: Elsa Gindler of body psychotherapy and sensory awareness, Feldenkrais of the Feldenkrais Method, and Gerda Alexander of Eutony. Somatic practice is legitimized by the experiential narrative in these cases because of the founders'

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> John Gray, *The Alexander Technique: A Complete Course in How to Hold and Use Your Body for Maximum Energy*, (New York, NY: St. Martin's Press, 1990), 20-26.

abilities to heal him or herself and then heal others through the extension and application of the methodology. Because of the founder's first-hand engagement with the practice, the methods can take on increasing value as they are contextualized with the difficulties that emerged during the process and the time it took to move from identification of the injury to healing.

Another experiential narrative is the case study,<sup>46</sup> which focuses on a student or patient's recovery rather than that of the founder of the practice. Typically, the instructor takes the role of the hero, and the student becomes the victim who is in need of resolve of a previously insoluble affliction. The student's current state is presented as having devolved from accepted postures and ways of treating the body that reflect poorly on previously involved practitioners and their misunderstandings. The characterization of the student as such places the narrator and present practitioner as someone with knowledge that resists dominant ideologies and is uniquely capable of solving the student's "issues." The case study combines confirmation of efficacy of the founder's methodologies with scientific and medical rhetoric to create a compelling and supportive argument. It presents somatics as a "well-oiled machine that responds without hesitation to the difficulties or demands of the student or patient."<sup>47</sup> The case study shows proud results in the form of fewer difficulties and does not open the practitioner's technique or its results up to questioning. Doubt is excluded.

The case study is productive in legitimizing the practice given the circumstances presented in each case, but it largely fails to verify the field in full. Use of the case study

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<sup>46</sup> Isabelle Ginot, "From Shusterman's Somaesthetics to a Radical Epistemology of Somatics." *Dance Research Journal* (Cambridge University Press) 42, no. 1 (Summer 2010): 16.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

as a defining feature of somatic discourse excludes the potential to legitimize the practice, as most experiential narratives point to the original narrative of the founder. These narratives rarely focus on the consciousness of sensing, and rather use somatic practice as a means of moving from point A to point B without a detailed discussion of the somatic elements. The wide application of these case studies is possible, but the analysis and information gained is limited by the details divulged in the case study.

The *exemplum*<sup>48</sup> is the final type of experiential narrative used to verify somatic practice and enliven somatic discourse, and can be thought of as a more extreme case study. The *exemplum* also differs from the case study in that it can address a less specialized public, and in this respect, is more effective when it resonates with more than one other person. *Exempla* are still individual and personal experiences, but they are found to be salient for more than one other individual. To do so, *exempla* infuse somatic discourse with lived experience to effectively relay information to an audience. Because of this pairing of relatable experience and discourse, the *exemplum* is a powerful tool when conveying somatic methodology to the general public and also while training practitioners. An *exemplum* is the story of a near “miracle” found in curing an extreme ailment through only the work done within a specific somatic practice. The explanation of miraculous recovery through somatics demonstrates the rationality of the practice as well as the power of its methods. Abstract somatic concepts, such as the head floating above the spine in Alexander Technique, can be more reasonably contextualized through the *exempla* and concrete examples of loss or gain of corresponding abilities. The story of the *exempla* follows a standard trajectory: a person encounters a seemingly unresolvable

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

impediment, is introduced to a somatic technique and practitioner, and is then cured of this difficulty because of the experience with the practice<sup>49</sup>

The perfect narrative of the *exemplum* is uncomfortably similar to a fairy tale and conceives of a more fantastical component of somatics. Each *exemplum* has a miserable beginning and a happy, clean, tied-together ending. The mess of reality is absent and the perfection of fantasy is largely present. The fairy tale is conveniently capable of taking on a presence of its own to help depict a somatically grounded experience without addressing and focusing on somatic technicalities. The audience simply knows because it was able to grab onto the larger themes of the experience. The fantasy produces a particular world that lacks in somatic technicalities but transmits similar ideas. The *exemplum* is a key player in the transmission of somatic information through its ability to free the author or orator from elaborate and technical explanation. It allows the transcendence of explanation via the illumination of “miraculous” experience.

Since the production of somatic discourse is contingent on belief, if the belief is unsuccessfully or unfavorably transferred to its wide recipients, doubt spills over to the original environment and places the practice in question. “From the eminently pragmatic point of view of martial arts, one ‘must believe’ in the efficacy of the action being engaged in; one must be able to change one’s faith, and thus one’s course of action, when the context requires it.”<sup>50</sup> Somatic discourse, dependent on belief, is left inherently context specific.

Somatic discourses, therefore must be... situated in a precise context and targeting thereby an equally precise efficacy. In this regard, somatic discourses do

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid, 16-17.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid, 18.

not stand apart from the practices that engender them. Their value is not universal but isolated, and their validity can only be measured by the effect they produce on a given subject, in his/her encounter with a given context.<sup>51</sup>

The expansion of experiential narrative is expectedly tricky. How is an individualized experience brought to different bodies with different sets of beliefs and expected to maintain the integrity of the practice? Somatic practice is known to be presented as an antidote to dominant movement habits; its is known to straddle the line between being an objective alternative to and being a subversive discourse of the mainstream medical, anatomical, scientific, and even social understandings of the body.<sup>52</sup> Furthermore, there exists at least an undertone of belief in the exploratory, individual experience as better than generalized practice, and somatics as better than the dominant, non-somatic, technical movement conventions. This ideology can be extended, with the assistance of somatics in conversation with social norms, to reach the conclusion that there exists “good movement” and “bad movement” and that somatic movement is good.

The somaesthetics of Shusterman<sup>53\*</sup> thus arranges itself according to an axiology of the more and the less, where exaggerated techniques (too much effort, feeling, speed, force, etc.) embody a modern Western civilization of violence, whereas the subtle techniques could be a pathway to improving of the self that seems to be the only path possible for collective salvation. Thus emerges an ideal of the body and of experience...<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Richard Shusterman, *Body Consciousness: A Philosophy of Mindfulness and Somaesthetics*, (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

<sup>54</sup> Isabelle Ginot, "From Shusterman's Somaesthetics to a Radical Epistemology of Somatics." *Dance Research Journal* (Cambridge University Press) 42, no. 1 (Summer 2010): 22.

\* Somaesthetics as defined by Shusterman: “the critical meliorative study of one’s experience and use of one’s body as a locus of sensory-aesthetic appreciation (aesthesis) and creative self fashioning.”

#### IV. *Dichotomies and Cyborgs*

If somatic models, existing largely as paradigms, become ideology, an expected series of corrections and transformations of movement habits would follow. Gestures that are already present and in need of correction become “bad” gestures and those that improve ones condition and coordination become “good” gestures. A distinction between good and bad is easily seen in the characterizing inhibition of habitual movement to make room for others in Alexander Technique. Following the assignment of “good” and “bad” boundaries is a world of dichotomies within somatics “between natural and artificial, ancestral and contemporary, Eastern and Western, slow and fast, gentle and violent, conscious and ‘un-self-aware.’”<sup>55</sup> These dichotomies are human attempts to place order in the world, but it is this avoided and dreaded confusion that in fact strings the world together. The clean dichotomies erase the potential for variety, boundary confusion, chaos, and for the continuously forming amorphous mess of the world. They nonsensically separate human experience from the surroundings to create a controlled understanding of a world that is actually so far from human. Our world does not make sense in clean-cut dichotomies, but rather embraces *mess*.

When experiential narrative is dragged out to reduce thinking to terms only related to dichotomies, terms that are so unfitting and insufficient for describing current human dynamics and conditions, a world so far from a human one is established. The mess and confusion that we attempt to systematize into dichotomies is actually a source of cohesion in this world. By forcing it into a series of dichotomies, we are removing our glue, removing our commonality in experience, removing the string that holds us

together, and removing that which make us human. Following the lineage of both scientific discourse and the experiential narrative to their farthest extents leads one to believe that there is a non/supra human element to somatic discourse and its universalization. According to scientific discourse, legitimation through evolution removes somatics from the reaches of human history and grounds the practice universally and cosmically, and experiential narrative leads to a series of nondescript dichotomies.

The produced suprahuman element of somatics is also formed from the curious transcultural influence but limited international infiltration and application. Body Mind Centering is based largely on various Eastern therapies and techniques, posing Eastern practices as some sort of remedy of afflictions of the Western body and its poor relationship to the environment, to stress, and to breathing.<sup>56</sup> The incongruous part of the multicultural influence is the corresponding lack of heterogeneity in the body produced by somatics. This body is still very much a Western one, but the means of correcting its ailments are borrowed from different cultures. The point at which this multicultural influence crystalizes or surfaces is so hidden and potentially even non-existent that it confirms the inability of somatics to incorporate otherness and unfamiliarity. A practice so focused on individual experience would be expected to not only incorporate, but also comfort and harvest, all shapes and forms of that individual.

When we incorporate the idea of “good” and “bad” denominations of movement and physical sensation with the idea that room for otherness in somatic practice is rare, we are left with a pairing of “good” physical sensation with a homogeneously Western body.

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid, 23.

This conceals any politically or socially diverse aspects of the individual and, “reduces somatics instead to one standard for individual physical sensation.”<sup>57</sup> In a world of globalization and multicultural mixing, this singular somatic consciousness replaces the political and social multicultural awareness that is so imperative. Somatics in this sense prioritizes a closed subject in a time of great multicultural influence and flux. Since Western society is inevitably multicultural, how can somatics justify the physical veiling of other influences? How can somatic practice truly be responsive to cultural ills when, “it has remained fixated on the concepts of body and culture current at the time of its advent”?<sup>58</sup> Does the somatic body even face these issues if it is multicultural and universal in its origins?

Justification through science, as a universal truth, helps both associate somatics with scientific fact and transmit the practice to those who value scientific truths – unlimited in scope, in theory. This sets up somatics to be universalized via a unanimous faith in science. Universalization is dangerous when the subject is removed from multicultural dialogue and when the understanding of the practice is based largely on a singular understanding of the body. Science brings into the conversation a vocabulary of non-culturally specific terms. It enables discussion without cultural insensitivity, but also without cultural specificity or attention. Scientific framings are largely inaccessible and removed from every day, human experience, and sometimes even incomprehensible and difficult to embody. This consequently isolates scientific somatic conversation as lacking a human or cultural connection.

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid, 24.

This is where the cyborg enters - in the attempt to create a figure with which to universally empathize. The cyborg contains the abundant, inappropriate, and non-human dichotomies, and it also contains the cosmic, a-historic, and suprahuman legitimization. It is the manifestation of a post-human body produced by the expansion of somatic practice through both scientific and experiential discourses. A cyborg – a ubiquitous hybrid of machine and organism, and the ultimate individual of a post-gender world – exists as a manifestation of more than the literal culmination of both machine and flesh in a being, and extends into the politic of disembodiment and cyborg consciousness. The cyborg is a hybrid, a copy without an original, and an individual without a historical text. A cyborg in this sense does not necessarily involve techno humans or prosthetic devices; it rather involves a re-assembly of a body that attempts to be universally relatable in its inclusion of many different anatomical possibilities, but is actually exclusive of any one body as a whole. “*Somatics itself is a technique of fabricating the body*, the result of which is the creation of a unique cyborg, with or without prosthetic devices.”<sup>59</sup> Because somatics makes claims of bringing out natural and organic movement, the *fabricated* element seems slightly contradictory. Cyborgs are understood in the context of technology and prosthetics, and less so in the context of somatics, but both instances raise questions of nature-culture dynamics. How can the exploration of the body’s most natural movement work to actually and seemingly antithetically create a cyborg? How can a body be fabricated through only the use of the most natural and organic movement explorations?

To answer this question, there needs to exist a distinction between natural and fabricated, or unnatural. Anthropological academics including Donna Haraway and others of such a related lineage have visited this nature-culture tension as it thematically

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

repeats throughout feminist history. Although no consensus on the exact meaning of “nature” or “culture” seems to have been reached, the distinction between the two has been historically and deeply engrained in modern Western society to a degree in which people have felt a tangible, conversational, and alterable relationship between the two. A discussion of the historical origins of the nature-culture separation is beyond the scope of this paper, but it is important to note the necessary and appropriate acceptance as true of this existing dichotomy in modern society. By the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, the prior establishment of the border between “nature” and “culture” became undermined and blurred by “techno-bodies,” embodied technological advancements, and combinations of influences, fields, or cultures that previously did not fit together.

It is also important to acknowledge that the distinction between the terms “nature” and “culture” is intensely rooted in semantics and linguistics. Without semantics, nature and culture would exist in some undefined and untitled form - possibly in deep relation to each other, possibly in isolation, and possibly in some in-between space. The point is that the distinction between the two ideas is not imperative if they are not given different linguistic titles, but the inconsistently nuanced social and cultural implications of the two terms creates a platform for debate. The characterizing history of unclear definitions of “nature” and “culture” themselves, and also of other relevant terms in the nature-culture tension discussion undermine any use of the terms without a pertinent definition.

Through the works of Sarah Franklin, Marilyn Strathern, Donna Haraway, and others, some conceptualization of these terms was possible, but limited to the grounds of this discussion and not meant to challenge arguments of linguistic borders.

The context of feminist theory is appropriate for this discussion of somatic dance practices because within both exist blaring nature-culture tensions that eventually lead to the development and confirmation of a distinct, unnatural, cyborg form.

Within feminist theory, there are often situational vectors that must directly address a distinction between natural and artificial and their associated connotations. One relevant context within feminist theory in which rhetoric is established around prominent nature-culture tensions is that of reproduction and assisted reproductive technologies.

Unnatural cyborg character is formed with any aiding of the quintessentially natural and human act of reproduction.

“Nature” in this context involves mere, unaltered, stationary biological processes, and serves as an embodiment of the pure animality of reproduction. It can be seen as the basic, primitive, pure, and raw remainder after social and cultural impositions have been stripped from human needs and desires. The definition of “culture” involves the potential to be more dynamic, fluctuating, and reflective of current societal states; it also takes on the more artificial, synthesized, and man-made denotation. Culture has the ability to respond to societal fluctuations and progressions. Culture and technology are tightly related in this techno-age and in the context of both cyborgs and reproductive technologies. “Technology can also be understood as ‘too much’ culture; nonetheless as a source of anxiety in this field it seems a relatively new target.”<sup>60</sup> Technology is often characterized as an artificial extension of nature, as it includes tools that have the capacity to impede on or interfere with nature. Although it could be argued that technology forms and shapes a culture on its own, technology is usually viewed as

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<sup>60</sup> Marilyn Strathern, *After Nature: English kinship in the late twentieth century*, (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 40.

inversely related to nature when a nature-culture distinction is drawn. In a world with a clear nature-culture separate, more technology constitutes less nature. In the context of the cyborg, nature and technology fuse – naturalization of technology complicates terminology of the described rhetoric because culture and technology must still be considered “non-naturalist” in order for any distinction to prevail. A drive for technological resemblance of nature clearly reveals social distaste for technology and the need to conceal its very essence.

So, in the case of somatics and cyborgs, the attempt to revert to natural, original, organic, and distinctly human movement actually forms an arguably unnatural, technological, and abstract being – the cyborg. The creation of the cyborg through somatics is rare because the progression usually does not go from a natural form (somatics) to an unnatural one (cyborgs) while attempting to return to a simpler, earlier time to find natural roots. The association of cyborgs with technology comes from the deeply rooted linkage of technology with culture and with the non-natural. Cyborgs in our case are not associated with physical technology, but are embedded within related ideas of non-human, superhuman, mixed, unrealistic, and unnatural.

Denaturalizing somatics seems to be the only way to make sense of the practice as a relevant and feasible form of bodily knowledge. If we remove the pressure to restore the natural, pure, or original body and extend “natural” to incorporate modern heterogeneity, somatic practice would be completely reconfigured. But because of our stubborn fascination with the “natural,” which is quickly moving farther from the place where society is situated, there is a distance between somatic practice and current understandings of human. Importance placed on the embodiment of the distant and past idea of “natural” only makes somatics move farther and farther away from our current

conception of “natural;” the idealization of the somatic body then rapidly approaches interchangeability with a cyborg body.

We have to admit that the “soma” has always been an artificial composite; that no purity, no innocence, no naturalness resides in our modern sensations, and then the “simple pleasures” of a well thought out somaesthetic culture cannot seriously exclude the most extreme physical imaginaries. We must recognize the appearance of new “techno-bodies”... and become interested in the possible effects of an erudite somaesthetic consciousness on the latest cyborgs. We must admit that our models of perception and sensation have long been irrevocably directed toward bodies equipped mechanically... perceptively... and chemically... We must admit that the “soma” has for a long time been a cyborg-soma whose reflective, contemplative, and respiratory practices are nothing but one technological avatar among others.<sup>61</sup>

The creation of the cyborg through only the use of organic movement occurs through the universalization of the practice and resulting neutralization of the body. Although somatic practices emphasize the individual experience, there is an overhanging understanding of how the body “should” move that is “better” than other movements, and therefore also a specific understanding of the “somatic body.” When these practices are extended to a different socio-political environment than their origins, there is no room for a shift in this movement or bodily understanding. The idealized somatic body that supposedly has universal empathetic potential actually is not relatable to any one outside body in its entirety.

A central goal of BMC, Alexander technique, and Bartenieff Fundamentals is to apply to people with many different interests and occupations. There is no limit mentioned of the scope of the application of these practices, however, the research to develop each

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<sup>61</sup> Isabelle Ginot, "From Shusterman's Somaesthetics to a Radical Epistemology of Somatics." *Dance Research Journal* (Cambridge University Press) 42, no. 1 (Summer 2010): 25.

practice was and still is done on a limited population – one that is predominantly white and occupies the middle class. There exists undisputed danger in claiming universalization of such practices from a limited sample size.

#### *V. Further “Cyborgification” through Global Influences and Universalization*

Somatic practices, as we know them today, have emerged from global influences and other movement practices that are missing from standard somatic teaching. The most obvious and blaring influence on somatics comes from Asian movement practices. T'ai chi ch'uan and chi kung were influential in Bartenieff's practice, and similarly was Judo in that of Feldenkrais. Irmgard Bartenieff and Moshe Feldenkrais both directly practiced an Eastern martial art form that perforates their respective somatic practice, as we are familiar with it. Because of the connection of Body Mind Centering to Bartenieff Fundamentals and Laban Movement Analysis, it too has influences deeply rooted in Eastern movement practice and martial arts. Cohen's famous appendix in *Sensing Feeling and Action* contains a tracing of the BMC lineage and all of Cohen's teachers. The lineage of those who taught Cohen and shaped BMC includes professionals from the United States, Europe, and Asia. This list is stretched to also encompass doctors of traditional Eastern medicine who helped orient Cohen within the field by peaking her interest and belief.

Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen works within a somewhat spiritual space that is reminiscent of complexity theory in that her awareness is constantly shifting. For example, she may move “attention from appreciation of the wisdom of babies and animals in exhibiting integrated movement to the different cellular structures of the body and the diverse

layers of tissue that we can experience.”<sup>62</sup> BMC focuses on experiential anatomy and expands on the idea of cellular intelligence by accepting that the “mind” includes emotional response and is found in any and every part of the body. BMC practitioners attempt to heighten their ability to both bring sensory and motor awareness to and initiate movement from part of the body that are deeply internal, such as organs, fluids, and glands. This is the similarity that brings BMC practitioners closer to yogis. Within BMC, Cohen has separated the body into body systems to which she works to bring attention and embodiment in her teaching, independent investigation, and practice. Even with such meticulousness in bodily embodiment, she was only going to poke at all of the possibilities for bodily awareness and embodiment. Her studies with a particular yogi, Yogi Ramira, was particularly influential for her exploration of and interest in the “organ;” her movement experience with Noguchi Sensai in Japan not only gave her material to integrate with her prior dance experience, but also specifically related to her work with the “nervous system,” among the other lessons she learned. Sansai’s movement practice of katsugen endo differed from Cohen’s previous practice in that it did not focus on any external form but rather found and discovered a vocabulary of movement from within. The witness was not another person, as is the case with Authentic Movement, but was instead the “universal source.”<sup>63</sup>

Cohen’s experience with learning such intensely internal movement practices in drastically different cultures, and even regions within the same culture, was one that came with extreme discomfort at times. Sometimes she felt in the way, awkward,

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<sup>62</sup> Martha Eddy, "Somatic Practices and Dance: Global Influences," *Dance Research Journal* (Congress on Research in Dance) 34, no. 2 (Winter 2002): 51.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid*, 51-57.

unwelcomed, and less entitled to the experience of the practice and the class. She was a beginner, a woman, and often a foreigner. She further differentiated herself from the practices she was studying by categorizing herself as process-oriented, improvisational, creative, and intuitive, and those of the surrounding culture as being more interested in linear thought and answering questions directly and correctly. Stemming from this discrepancy were accounts of frustration and isolation, but also of delight and appreciation, all emotions that can be accessed somatically. It was this more linear influence that sparked the formal, direct, and specific communication that was imperative for the start of BMC. Aikido and BMC both hold that intention and attention lie within the whole complex of the body-mind and that true knowledge is obtained only through the use and exploration of this body mind totality.

In addition to the impact of aikido and other Asian movement practices, the African diaspora has influences that grip deeply into somatics, particularly with Emilie Conrad and her practice of Continuum. Conrad was raised in Brooklyn and had a tumultuous childhood from which dance was an important reprieve. Conrad moved to Haiti during a time of political upheaval and was inspired by the cultural history marked by movement forms. She saw and experienced first-hand the importance and power of dance in sustaining African and Caribbean movements. It was in Haiti that she developed her somatic system based largely on the idea of fluidity and it was also in Haiti that she discovered the ability to physically internalize multicultural influence through dance.

Similar to Cohen, Conrad returned to the United States with the intention and goal of expanding her experience into a universally accessible bank of knowledge that eventually

forms a “technique of communication of the organism and its environment.”<sup>64</sup> To spread the practice, Conrad followed the prescribed path to universalization by using non-culturally specific scientific terms. Although she recognized that this might be a disservice to the highly culturally specific dance practices involved, she also proceeds with universalized terminology. She fairly attributes initial insights to culturally specific practices, but also notes that the somatic applications of her work offer her a vector of communication to a larger audience. Use of universalized terminology is a means of diluting a culturally specific practice to a more globally digestible form. Although there are problems with dilutions of such intricacies, the practices would likely remain isolated and without wide reaching bands if it were not for the ability of dance and somatics to communicate across culturally diverse histories. Martha Eddy asks the question, “How can we teach somatic practices and philosophy with intercultural sensitivity?” How can we remain true to each practice and also sensitive to involved cultures? “Why don’t we automatically teach with this sensitivity?”<sup>65</sup> What happened to somatic practices, seemingly set up to prioritize the unique individual in any environment and without judgment? The attempt to find a universal muddies the intention of somatics and somewhat counteracts its principle values.

Is it possible for society to currently be at a point when many people find more comfort in unfamiliar traditional practices than in the Western translation and softening of them?<sup>66</sup> Western translation becomes particularly problematic when the translational form’s roots are traced to derive culturally specific information. This reversal is largely

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid, 56.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid, 58.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid, 57.

inappropriate because the dehistoricization and decontextualization of art is not uncommon, but any supposed contextualized and culturally informed derivations become misinformed and unrepresentative.

If Cohen dealt with extreme discomforts in experiencing multicultural movement practice, why are we able to assume that any one practice, despite the extent of its multicultural origins, can have total intercultural sensitivity? And if Conrad was able to directly realize the faults of simplification for the sake of similar communication across cultures, why are we satisfied with analogous attempts and the circulation of diluted universals? It seems almost expected that one practice, even if made seemingly ubiquitous, will have largely different impacts on different cultures and even on different people. To Kleinman, the variation in impacts and interpretations of similar material in different cultures is highlighted during his intercultural teaching experience.

I often begin the first class by asking, “Where is your mind?” Usually, the students will immediately point to (or place their hands on) their heads. However, several years ago one person offered a different response: He placed his hand on his heart. He also happened to be the only one in the class who was not an American. He was an African student from Nigeria.<sup>67</sup>

With the expansion or universalization of a practice often comes a divorce between its niche in the place of its origin and its reception in the various other nations in which it takes hold. One body in a specific context cannot be expected to embody information in the same way as any other body, especially another in a drastically different context.

The development of the principles of somatic practice and teaching takes root in many global influences, yet these influences are not at the forefront of conversation.

Much of the reason for the muting of multiple influences stems from the monocultural approach to somatic promotion and pedagogy. The search for a single motif - be it “the universal,” or “the humanistic,” or “the biological” - focuses practitioners on one single through line that is expected to exist in relatively constant form for all people in all places involved in somatic practice.<sup>68</sup> The evolution of such a monocultural approach to somatic pedagogy is curious in the context Thomas Hanna produced. According to Hanna’s definition of the soma, there does exist room for current and unique understandings, but valued notions of “natural” tighten and restrict this space. Emotional and varied experience is then muted and neutralized by a “universal” experience of the body.<sup>69</sup>

This one “universal” does serve its purpose in easing pedagogy, but also creates pressures to narrow in on the most essential aspects of somatic understanding. The essentialism of one nominated aspect of somatics surely changes among people, and definitely across cultures. Although identifying a “universal” may assuage pedagogical somatics, it seems counterintuitive to the liveliness of the soma as Hanna has framed. Hanna draws attention to the soma’s willingness to change and its cellular intelligence that allows for self-perception and gaining of knowledge from within.<sup>70</sup> Somas of this sort live in and respond to the specific environments in which they are situated. For somas to be alive, they must be reacting to their surroundings. How then does one also declare a specific “universal?”

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<sup>67</sup> Seymour Kleinman, "Moving Into Awareness," 2001.

<sup>68</sup> Martha Eddy, "Somatic Practices and Dance: Global Influences," *Dance Research Journal* (Congress on Research in Dance) 34, no. 2 (Winter 2002): 46-62.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid*, 50.

<sup>70</sup> Thomas Hanna, "What is Somatics?" *Somatics*, Spring/Summer 1986: 4-8.

Living organisms are somas: that is they are an integral and ordered process of embodied elements which cannot be separated either from their evolved past or their adaptive future. A soma is any individual embodiment of a process, which endures and adapts through time, and remains a soma as long as it lives. The moment that it dies, it ceases to be a soma and becomes a body... At the center of the field of somatics is the soma – an integral and individual process which governs its own existence as long as it has existence.<sup>71</sup>

Another representation of the soma and somatics branches off from the idea that a soma necessarily must be isolated from its cultural context to aspire towards a pure experience of only the mind and body. Pure mind body experience that results from the stripping away of external context can mistakenly pit the individual against its cultural context.

When explicit notions of a “pure” experience, especially as something that involves the stripping of context, are laid out by a limited pool of people, we not only start to work towards a culturally desensitized and meaningless experience, but also we begin the search for a “global” or “universal” understanding that ends up being the common denominator, at best, of infinitely different people. This “universal” truth is then devoid of any emotional, cultural, social, or relational truth and remains “objective” and “scientific.” Even the “pure” experience, stripped of emotion and culture, probably differs.

If the only emotional content allowed in the somatic process were the goal of “feeling better,” would there exist commonalities in the “pure” experience? Can wisdom of the body be reached when devoid of social, emotional, and religious influences? Is there a fear that emotions muddle or threaten the “pure” experience? The importance of the

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<sup>71</sup> Thomas Hanna, "The Field of Somatics." *Somatics* 1, no. 1 (1976): 30-34.

“emotional body” in somatics seems as if it would add to the truly individual experience, but it may also destabilize any sense of a “universal” in the field. Women leaders in the field of somatics more often advocate for and prioritize the importance of this emotional body. Is it then a male construct that leads anyone to believe emotions muddy “pure” experience?<sup>72</sup> What makes a somatic experience truly individual if emotions are not included? The origins of the entangling of women and emotion are beyond the scope of this paper, but I think it is fair to bring to attention the vulnerability of the female body that is so deeply engrained in society. This vulnerability may be responsible for the emotive, intimate, and intense individual experience that is so present in the somatic work of some influential women.

Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen, Emilie Conrad, and Anna Halprin are among a lineage of women with far-reaching thoughts and influential voices within somatics. Since the 1960s, the original and formative work of Cohen and Conrad has gained enough ground to position these women as leaders of the field. They both discuss the multicultural influences on the generation of their work as well as stories involving embarrassment, solitude, shunning, and depreciation. As their work has gained value, so has the emotional component of intelligent bodies in somatic practice; the body, mind, and emotion connection, drawn largely by women in the field, started ringing essential to the development of the self, and hence to somatic engagements. The muting of the emotional component of somatics that accompanies its universalization is not free from politics, especially when one considers that women largely developed the emotional body. It is also interesting to note that some women including Halprin, Conrad,

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<sup>72</sup> Martha Eddy, "Somatic Practices and Dance: Global Influences." *Dance Research Journal* (Congress on Research in Dance) 34, no. 2 (Winter 2002): 49.

Bainbridge Cohen, and Sondra Fraleigh have not given respective technique's their last names, while men such as Alexander, Feldenkrais, Heller, Laban, and Trager have. Some other women such as Bartenieff, Rolf, Rosen, and Rubenfeld have also used their last names to name their body of work, but some not extraordinarily willingly. The politics and dialogue behind these decisions must have been telling of the state of women in somatics at the time and of the practices themselves.

Somatic practices cultivate an indulgent focus on the body within a culture that has a history of criticism of the body. Remnants of that criticism still linger. As views and discourses shape our new construction and understanding of the body, we are able to be selective in the valued views. This is a political endeavor, especially when some views are muted for the sake of others and are not prioritized to fit the diverse cultural inputs. Even the simplest of foundational ideas to somatics in one world may be of very little significance elsewhere. Kleinman spoke about the differences in the physical understanding of the mind among different people and different cultures. His teaching of somatics across many cultures informs his understanding of the field. He continues,

The mind-body question, in cultures outside the Western world, is of little concern either on the practical or the theoretical level. As a result of these experiences and my study of Western literature, I have come to the conclusion that the separation of mind from body in the West causes us to view persons in an 'un-natural' way.<sup>73</sup>

To reconstruct the body and infuse it with chosen viewpoints leads me to a possible dismantling of the body's connectivity that pervades somatic practice.

BMC and its movement prompts isolate, attend to, and invigorate specific body parts that may normally exist in such connectivity that they go unnoticed individually. A

common place for BMC prompts that isolate specific body systems is in the dancer's warm-up. One common prompt involves the balancing of the container (skeletal-muscular system) with the contents (organ/endocrine system) to integrate form with organic flow and feeling; another involves the initiation and expressing movement through actively lengthening and shortening the ligaments to increase range, clarity, and focus.<sup>74</sup> There exists a hefty list of similar isolations of body parts and ways of warming them up. Alexander technique also infuses specific parts of the body with sensations and contexts previously unfamiliar. "This isn't breathing; it's lifting your chest and collapsing," "Doing in your case is so 'overdoing' that you are practically paralyzing the parts you want to work," and "If your neck feels stiff, that is not to say your neck 'is' stiff."<sup>75</sup> With such a deconstruction, muddying, and carefully curated reconstruction comes a body that might be relatable in its parts, but is largely unrelatable in entirety. The sum of its parts possibly flirts with a universal, but its whole does not have a place anywhere. The process of deconstruction serves as a motif within somatics. It is largely representative of the problems with somatics – we often deconstruct and decontextualize until there is nothing human in the remains. Somatic discourse disengages and decontextualizes from its origins in attempt to find some form of universal body knowledge.

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<sup>73</sup> Seymour Kleinman, "Moving Into Awareness." 2001.

<sup>74</sup> Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen, *Sensing, Feeling, and Action: The Experiential Anatomy of Body-Mind Centering*, (Northampton, MA: Contact Editions, 1993) 14-17.

<sup>75</sup> Matthias F. Alexander and Edward Maisel, *The Alexander Technique: The Essential Writings of F. Matthias Alexander*, (Secaucus, NJ: Carol Publishing Group, 1995) 3-12.



## **Chapter 3:**

### **Somatic Exploration Integrated Into Rehearsal and Performance**

#### **Spaces**

*“It is part of the human condition to search, not knowing exactly what it is we seek, yet somehow sensing something hidden in our hearts. This mysterious balance of ‘knowing’ and ‘not knowing’ drives us to take tentative steps into the unknown. Learning is simultaneously a leap into the new and strange and also a return to what we already know deeply. Thus, as we move forward on this journey we find that we are returning to our source and remembering ourselves along the way.”*

– Linda Hartley, *Wisdom of the Body Moving*<sup>76</sup>

*“This ability to make connections, to create relationships, is a skill which begins “at home,” within our own bodies.”*

– Peggy Hackney, *Making Connections*<sup>77</sup>

The rehearsal process of creating dance serves as a time to flesh out embodiment of thoughts and ideas. It serves as another mode of travel through this personal journey and inquiry. In the rehearsal space, dance truly becomes metaphor and a means to explore, generate, manipulate, and interpret ideas in the particular form of movement. Rehearsal is a rich space of exploration, risk, and comfort. It is in this space that an idea has room to live, breathe, and grow. Connections are formed in rehearsal that begin within the body and eventually extend into the realm of embodied research to bridge movement and cerebral thought. Rehearsal is the lived experience of theory, especially when linguistic explanation falls short. The language that surrounds the ideas and questions

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<sup>76</sup> Linda Hartley, *Wisdom of the Body Moving: An Introduction to Body-Mind Centering*, (Berkley, CA: North Atlantic Books, 1995), xxi.

<sup>77</sup> Peggy Hackney, *Making Connections: Total Body Integration Through Bartenieff Fundamentals*, (New York, NY: Routledge, 2002), vii.

embedded in this thesis is messy and infinitely able to be picked apart. The studio gave me the opportunity to let ideas marinate and breathe in a space that embraces mess, ambiguity, and wordlessness.

The rehearsal space is a crucial and meaty one for me as a choreographer, and also for the integration of somatics in performance. The rehearsal space is where the process of art making lives; it demands creativity, which is an internal process that parallels the internally and experientially oriented processes that guide somatic work. Rehearsal draws connections between somatics and creativity by highlighting the inner processes of both. Honing in on the creative process made sense to me somatically: the inclination to emphasize process in creativity makes the rehearsal space more somatic and integral and less mechanical. The distinction between somatics and creativity is then very easily blurred: body-mind dimensions are fostered and sought after in the creative process, and creativity and expression have become increasingly associated with somatic processes. This overlap highlights the ease with which somatic methodology fits into the rehearsal space.

In this chapter, I will discuss my own process of dance making and the conclusions I drew from exploring through rehearsal and performance of the “natural” body as found in somatic practice. In the rehearsal and performance spaces, my theoretical struggle to make sense of the soma extended into the world of the practical and the physical. This is where the dualistic view of the body mind disappeared and where the rehearsal process takes on an irreplaceable role. We live within a cultural tradition that holds activities of reasoning separate from activities of physicality or of nature, divorcing anything that involves the brain and mental processes from more physical and active ones. An important part of this divorce is the inclination to prioritize, privilege, and legitimate the

mental more than the physical. From a somatic perspective, the connectedness and wholeness that constitute a human demand that the body and mind be intensely integrated, and that the mental and physical may not exist as distinctly. When we think of the mind as something abstract and as something that does not have a physical space or manifestation within the body, we open ourselves up to the idea that the mind can be present in many places throughout the body, and not simply within the brain.

Kleinman's student who pointed to the heart as the location of the mind<sup>78</sup> and John Dewey would probably agree that any portion of or organ within the body is potentially equally likely to contain the mind. The conception of the mind and body as connected entities reveals the importance of rehearsal and movement in research and understanding. Although intellectualization and analysis provide some form of explanation, understanding can be expanded by a subjective and possibly artistic research component that is not reduced by logic but is rather experienced. Rehearsal filled this role. Rehearsal was the place where mind and body truly came together, where we were learning through our bodies, where unexpected relationships were noted, and where boundaries could flow and develop in any manner. Thinking about body and mind as independent disqualified either as fully formed and tangible entities. These ideas and concepts are characteristically somatic and encouraging of research performed in the rehearsal space. However, it was also research in this rehearsal space that complicated and contradicted dichotomies held so central to somatic practice.

A key to my choreographic process always seems to be intense collaboration. Although I had the final say in the stringing together of material and entered each rehearsal with a plan I devised and specific interests in mind, I was largely reliant on

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<sup>78</sup> See Chapter 2, page 52.

material generated by each dancer. Because somatic experience is so largely based on the individual body, I depended on the dancers to produce material that was uniquely generated by and fitting of each of them. This approach to process demands a substantial level of collaboration. Beyond this, every dancer collaborated with other dancers to make larger combinations of phrases. My first semester process focused on the context and community of the individual soma by involving a group of seven dancers; my second semester process shifted and limited focus to the individual, as influenced by a larger community, but largely zooming in on only that individual. Both semesters were collaborative and demanding of each individual to produce uniquely personal material. Collaboration was stretched and utilized to its fullest capacity to become an intentional and emphasized part of the process. Collaboration was a means to find the “natural” and the “home” for each dancer within the choreographic work. An intentionally collaborative process provides room for each dancer to find a true and comfortable place within the piece. In order to explore the “natural,” the process and piece must be structured in a way that considers and fosters the comfort levels of the dancers being asked to engage in such a process. The piece must engage each individual’s “natural” – something that inherently cannot be choreographed by another.

### *I. Fall Choreographic Rehearsal Process*

*A typical rehearsal might include a brief improvisational warm up with attention placed on movement impulses and listening to the body, creating a short phrase based on that movement, writing about a striking experience or observation or objects that hold substantial meaning, infusing the movement with the writing, possibly infusing others’ movement with the writing, and making short compositional solos, duets, trios, and general groupings of the material.*

In my first semester process, I worked with seven dancers, each with unique movement backgrounds and relationships to dance. Most lacked rigorously formal dance training, but the mixing of levels of experience with traditional dance was appropriate and of interest to our exploration of the “natural” body. Because I am not trained in somatics, we did not focus on taking somatic classes and performing material that may have stemmed from those classes. Although that is one approach to breaching this topic performatively, I focused more attention on isolating foundational questions and methodologies that guide somatic practice and exploring them through movement. Rehearsal then took on the role of providing not only the room to link the internal processes of somatics and creativity, but also the space to truly embody and live ideas central to somatic practices. Movement generative prompts were strongly rooted in concepts key to somatics so that movement served as exploration and research. Generated material was then set up to be substantially grounded in topics of interest.

How does the mind manifest through the body in movement? How do we move naturally? What does the beginning of movement feel like? How does one body part move on its own and in relation to the rest of the body? How is movement informed by impulse or imagery? How does movement change when directed from the organs instead of the skin or bones? How is movement shaped by experience and others’ experiences? To explore these in meaningful and appropriate ways without extensive somatic training, I chose dancers who prioritized spatial awareness, were interested in the connections within their bodies, and were able to endlessly improvise to reach material within which they found home, were comfortable deeming “natural,” and from which they were equally interested in straying. Collaboration brought these intensely individual movers into one community. Although alteration of individualized movement for the sake of

continuity within a group is possible, especially when weaving research themes into rehearsal and performance spaces, the community that formed in the rehearsal space became a site of individual agency and wisdom. It was a community with dynamics that explored important questions about highlighting and cultivating the individual, and the individual and shared experience of “natural.” Questions involving the mediation between the sovereign individual and a group self surfaced as we attended to the individual within a group. If the line between self and group were to be truly blurred, is the individual self left neutralized? Although neutralization might have had some place and effect, the creation of a group self that was unique to this group of movers was unexpected and juicy.

The group self produced in rehearsal situated itself in what now seems to be two distinct ways, fluctuated between the two, and shed light on different aspects of the depiction of the body through somatic practices. Fluctuating connections of rehearsal to findings from various other modes of research made sense. Although clean conclusions are tempting to reach, I was working in a messy theoretical and practical space in which both contradictory and supporting evidence was found. The group self in one instance served as an addition to our created community – something that did not eliminate or disqualify each individual, nor something that removed agency from the individual to best serve itself. It manifested as an entirely other being and other world that each dancer could tap into but not fully empathize. This easily related to the idea of the constructed cyborg body and its attempt at being universally relatable but simultaneously relating to no one body in wholeness or in actuality.

The group self in another instance became something that did contribute to a neutralization of individuality. Maybe certain movement prompts were more promoting

of a surrendering of individuality for the sake of continuity among a group than others, but there did almost always seem to be an overlying inclination to make movement “fit” with others in the group. One movement exercise that comes to mind in hindsight involved gestural movement. Each dancer made a series of around five disjointed movement gestures or static “poses” inspired by a painting of an obscured knee from my grandmother’s apartment. The movement could have reflected a curious treatment of space in the painting, a noticeable shape or color, general feelings, or any other striking element. We then made a group phrase to be danced on the floor. Each dancer contributed one movement as we went around adding to this phrase. The inclination and directive was literally to add a movement that best “fit” the existing string of movement. Even with a loose definition of “fit,” the point was to make a cohesive phrase from individual contributions.

Even within a community that embraces the internal and unique, individuals often flock to the similarities that exist among them. Finding and fostering similarities, especially in rehearsal and performance realms, is tempting for many reasons, some involving the sense of ensemble and community, others including the settling, self-affirming, and comforting discoveries that follow. It seems more comfortable to participate in movement with other people than to take a risk as an individual within an ensemble. This immediately linked to the neutralization and “cyborgification” of the individual that may accompany the universalization of somatic practice. Individuality in such cases exists as something that is often muted for the sake of universality. However, a complete surrendering of individuality was impossible, simply because some movement stuck, and inherently came from an individual, even though it was entangled with possible influences from a community of others. Can the sovereign individual be

separated from the group self? Does there exist a line between the two, even if blurred? Without this line, clear or blurred, is the individual neutralized? Can the individual be distinct? Does it matter? Can the individual and the group co-exist and fluctuate between being the same and distinct without either losing credibility? Without these linguistic barriers that are so unquestionably accepted in society, similar to the distinction between nature and culture, boundary confusion becomes more prevalent and borders more fluid.

Trying to make sense of explorative information while having specific research questions in mind may simplify all involved material. Within this initial simplification exists the ability to create connections that then provide room for rich and deep conversation.

If I had to articulate a goal for my fall choreographic process in terms of the individual self and the group self, it was to attempt to notice the unique individual. Although I found that this individual might not exist with such clarity, focusing on the inevitable overlap within a close community seemed unnecessary.

Extending from this lived conceptualization of the individual within a group was the actual experiences of these individuals in a backdrop of key concepts and questions within somatic practice. The experience of a creative and somatic process with focus on individuals within a community was messy. From the initial conceptualization of this topic to the written and performative embodiment of it, process has revealed the merging of ideas and collision of contrasting ones, the muddling of categories, and the difficulty of analysis of the impact of somatic practice. I found that in rehearsal, movement generated by prompts that intended to bring out the “human,” “organic,” and “natural” merged with movement that seemed other-worldly and post-human. Original movement that stemmed from imagery meant to bring out the proudly distinct

revealed movement that was similar to derived material from other inspirations. In rehearsal, dancers articulated the dwindling of these distinctions in a language other than words, and I was able to observe these linguistic divides physically dissolve. Rehearsals provided room for boundary confusion and for a fluid flow between ideas that otherwise seem concrete and distinguishable. An idea may arise in movement with clear intention and may just as easily transform, become muddled, and possibly find resolve in a completely other world. Surprising tensions resulted between emerging ideas that were equally fitting and reasonable of the same prompt, but opposite in direction and pull. Overlap of these tensions and connections created a muddled web of repulsion, attraction, links, and strains that made conclusion derivation discrete and complex. Similarities between isolated and sequential, organic and cyborg, and individual and communal emerged throughout the rehearsal process as well as tension between humanism and post-modernism. As these borders and boundaries blurred, so did the meaning and application of dichotomies with which we are so familiar. As discussed in Chapter 2, we have become used to defining our world in terms of dichotomies, but such thought may pull us away from our reality and limit our understanding of our surroundings. Rehearsals were a time to indulge in the limitlessness of exploration and the freedom found when fitting into linguistic barriers becomes irrelevant. They were a time to discover the physical limits and materializations of topics that would otherwise not have a chance to be investigated in such a way. Rehearsals enabled investigation of material within a different, but related language. It is in this space that my research became truly unique, personal, and expansive. This was the sphere in which my research was pieced together in real time and space in a way it had not been before – guided by my thoughts and interests, and following a process I shaped.

I wonder what would happen if research were also taught as a way of sensing, generating, exploring, and forming, and if it were widely known that research involves both passion and the kinesthetic sense. And if we taught, in all classes, the kind of courage it takes to begin a journey without knowing one's destination, and to speak in one's own voice.<sup>79</sup>

Time spent rehearsing was cherished as the part of this research process that was an active site of sensation – time when movement exploration in the studio crystalized as an essential, exciting, and rich form of research.

I began our first rehearsal with goals of honing in on exploratory and original movement that felt comfortable but still interesting to the mover. Instead of jumping into characteristically somatic exercises, I used authentic movement to begin to poke at what “authentic” and “natural” movement entailed for each dancer. With a large group of dancers, the structure of authentic movement, with one mover and one observer, helped each dancer become more familiar with others' ways of moving. Comfort within and beyond the body in the rehearsal space was prioritized and felt necessary in order to genuinely explore my research questions without temptations to impress, move similarly, or feel any sort of unprovoked movement pressure. Already, “We do not feel comfortable, ‘at home,’ in our body. Instead of knowing where we are, we feel lost and rootless. This is a fundamental source of the sickness of body and soul that many of us experience... And so we search, attempting to return to our knowledge of who we are and where we are.”<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Susan W. Stinton, "Research as Choreography," *National Dance Association Scholar Lecture* (National Dance Association), 1994: 15.

<sup>80</sup> Linda Hartley, *Wisdom of the Body Moving: An Introduction to Body-Mind Centering*, (Berkley, CA: North Atlantic Books, 1995), xxi.

The incorporation of authentic movement into our rehearsal process was complicated by the fact that authentic movement is not considered a somatic practice, but can address similar ideas. A key to authentic movement, which exists as completely distinct from somatic practice, is the necessary implication of a witness. Somatic practice focuses on the internal and individual self without any dependence on an outside witness. Authentic movement involves both a witness and a mover. The mover, with closed eyes, responds to emerging movement impulses, while the witness is consciously aware but nonjudgmental. The goal was to observe ourselves without interrupting movement flow. Authentic movement found a place within our rehearsals as a means to source movement, to track natural movement flow, and to find a movement origin or home.

We then expanded this practice by creating movement phrases based on observations or experiences from our practice of authentic movement. We infused these phrases with loaded words from a striking experience in each dancer's life that was written about or illustrated in the middle of rehearsal. Three of the most significant words were selected and given to another dancer to incorporate into phrase work. The idea was to play with intensely personal experience as prescribed by another. Can these moments be shared with any amount of previous knowing or familiarity? How do we stay true to such individualized practice when each individual experiences so differently?

The remainder of the rehearsal process was based off these initial few days. We translated, transposed, retrograded, reversed, challenged time and space, and altered phrase work to explore the material through as many lenses as possible. For example, material that was created to be standing and travelling was explored on the floor and stationary; movement that was done on the floor and quickly was transposed to only the lips. These sorts of alterations were endless.

We dug deeper into movement that “felt good” and tried to investigate any possible, concrete distinction between “natural” and “contrived” movement. “Feel good phrases,” as we called them, developed from improvisation that was limited to movement that truly felt good on the unique body. After working on these phrases and having each dancer show the remainder of the group, I created smaller groups of dancers with “feel good phrases” that somehow related. This inspired the dancers to find overlap among each other and to somehow emphasize it – to find what it was that I thought “worked well” among the groupings. This once again contributed to a homogenization, despite its critical attention on the individual.

A constant attention on feeling each individual body part was prevalent as the dancers attempted to deconstruct the wholeness of the body to the point of unrecognizability. To contextualize and inspire this portion of material, we worked with the painting from my grandmother’s apartment. I noticed this painting when I was younger, but was unable to identify the contents of the painting until I was about eighteen years old. It was at this time that I realized it was simply a human knee. There was something so mysterious and unsettling about the painting’s ability to portray something so common as something so unfamiliar and unidentifiable.

There is so much meat, both in the studio and in somatic practice, in isolating and decontextualizing to the point of intense disguise. Somatic practice does sometimes utilize elements of the body that have specific connotations as inspirations for movement. Can this specificity investigate the body so intensely that it eventually no longer seems human? If we take characteristically somatic movement prompts with gusto, will the resulting movement read somatically? If we move only from our skin, or move as if we lack a nervous system, or move only our pelvis as if we are floating in an

ocean and being rocked by waves, with enough passion and dedication, will our movements read as human? Will they make sense within the body? Will they be isolated and unrecognizable?

## *II. Fall Performance*

Performance was an opportunity to compile research and make it palatable. It was a presentation and composition of both the process and any results. Each piece of the presentation became open to analysis and every part of the composition served the topic in a way that seemed true and fitting to its content. Choreography and performance was an opportunity to compose a piece after much research had been performed. It was an attempt to find a form for this presentation and communication, and an attempt to engage an outside eye. My goal was to create a work that raised my most important questions and hinted at the investigation we found most fruitful, to present something that others could fill in with whatever contributing ideas seemed fitting to them, to stay true to the mess and to the art, to allow someone to experience and not feel the need to know, to articulate and connect in a language beyond words, to make people think, to make people wonder, to make people sense, to present an unfamiliar world that offers entry points for observers, and to make people feel something unidentifiable deep down in their gut.

There is an uncontrollable element to performance and choreography that allows a piece to take on a life of its own. It's purposefully nurtured by specific people, prompts, and ideas, but can only exist within such a tight grip for so long. A lot of the point of movement exploration for me comes from this unexpected, uncontrolled, embodied, and raw investigation that is nonetheless extremely rooted in research. This is the

material that is unpredictable and outside the realm of linguistics. This is the meat, the juice, and the reason we use movement as research. This is also the point at which I took comfort in the seven unique and thoughtful movers chosen to shape this piece.

Deconstructing a piece can involve thoughtful analysis of each dancer and of the cast more generally, the props or set, the music, the lighting, the costumes, the title, the movement vocabulary, the relationships between dancers, relationships between dancers and audience members, general feelings or images evoked, overtness and intention, spatial dynamics, role of the dancers and audience members, intentional use of unison, and the list continues seemingly endlessly. Focusing in on each element at a time may help illuminate manageable chunks of material to interpret and use as points of entry into further analysis.

Although the idea of the cyborg can easily be traced to feminist theory, gender was not a focus of my choreographic work, but also was not purposefully quieted or neutralized. Of the seven dancers, one was male and the other six were female. None were particularly gendered and the piece managed to take on an androgynous feel even though the numbers of gender identification could have produced a strange dynamic. Every dancer wore linen pants, two were black and five tan, and a grey, tight, ribbed tank top; the idea was to have a natural fabric in combination with a non-gendered work shirt, with all components of the costume able to be messed with, rolled, styled, and beat up. Androgyny was one of many parts that contributed to the produced and other world this piece generated.

Another potentially strange dynamic was that of dance backgrounds of the dancers. All had varied levels of formal training - most did not have extensive training - but this did not become a dominant factor in the piece. The various levels of dance training

helped diversify the performance focus and engage the audience. Each performer had an individual stage presence, focus, and way of communicating and no amount of training stood out more than others.

The intimacy of the performance space allowed for an extremely first-hand audience experience of the piece. Subtleties were easily observed and relationships between audience and performer seemed stronger. This enabled a baseline level of engagement with the produced world that the piece challenged the audience to temporarily inhabit. The first two dancers began the piece next to each other and facing the audience, with only a minimal space between the first row of audience and the stage. Music began, as if to set the piece on a windy beach with waves crashing. This was to symbolize movement prompts in somatic practices that remove one from a current environment and place among a specific and relatable image that is typical of a somatics class. This opening placed the dance in a setting somewhat familiar and identifiable, but not quite overt enough to empathize with or completely understand.

The following three dancers entered with different intentions. One was focusing on quick, related, and sequential isolations of the body to the extent that the mechanics of such motion within the body were unidentifiable; another was improvising and expanding her “feel good” phrase with the addition of moss; the final was “catching” improvised movements and embodying them herself. As the piece continued through both full group and smaller group moments, each dancer was able to establish an individual stage presence and role within the world that was being developed on the stage. These roles would be established, would shift, would sometimes crystalize, and would sometimes blur and become irrelevant. Nonetheless, the intimacy of the performance space helped foster such an important dynamic. The shift focused

throughout the piece. It started with individuals who were functioning in relation to each other, but mostly as unique and independent entities, only coincidentally existing in the same world with some shared interactions. By the end of the piece, the creatures of this world were purposefully noticing each other and interacting. They were exploring what it meant to learn about their bodies through the bodily experience of others. They did not only perform this idea. There was true investigation in the studio space, duets and trios created based on this exploration, movement from these duets and trios set and performed, and a continued investigation of how we learn about our own bodies through the experiences of others throughout even the performance.

The next section of the piece involved improvisations with a score that reflected ideas rooted in my research and that we came across throughout the rehearsal process. Improvisations largely played with the idea of the identifiably human emerging from an amorphous and unidentifiable other. The emerging and concealing of bodies seemed fruitful for improvisation. Additional ideas involved isolation, “home,” investigation of contact with another and allowance of this contact to bring movers closer together or to pull them farther apart, stillness that challenges, movements that feel “human” and movements that do not, truly watching each other, construction and deconstruction, sequentiality and sharpness, control and off-balance, imagining all body parts as connected, imagining all as distinct and thrown into various contexts, and manipulation of time and others’ improvisations. These exercises proved to be extremely satisfying, loosening, and productive, so we began all remaining rehearsals in the fall with group improvisations.

Most of the piece manifested as an amorphous blob that morphed into and out of order. There was a lot of floor work and a lot of realizing the full extent of the body in

space. All of these trends made sense in the context of this research. Not only is the floor highly utilized in somatic practice, but also it allows the body the opportunity to live in a space not as regularly identified as a human one. As these blobs morphed together and separated, grew out of the floor and melded back in, moved extremely quickly and slowly, I realized the inevitable involvement and contribution of amorphous mess in all of our lives.

Physical scaffolding was introduced into the piece as a metaphor to reveal this amorphous web of contradiction and support, overlap and tension, order and disorder as a means to scaffold us all together. We find empathy and connectivity within chaos. Embracing the mess and the unknown is welcomed. I constructed this scaffolding structure not as neatly or symmetrically as scaffolding typically is found, but it was able to be climbed and resembled scaffolding enough to bring in similar imagery. The uneven aspect added to the eerie qualities and to the amorphous mess. The scaffolding also represented something so stripped, raw, and skeletal – almost like a shadow of a building. It became an image of the skeleton of a building. It was the remains after all other context was stripped. It was the eerie, ordered, strong, intriguing remnants of a previously plush life. The metallic and mechanical composition of scaffolding rings true to something far from human and far from fleshy. It is in some ways not cluttered or polluted by human flesh but in other ways not relatable to any fleshy creature. It is movement from the bones. It is mechanical and harsh. It highlights contrast between the mechanical and the human in physicality but then is a characteristically human tool that is implicated in characteristically human constructions: homes and buildings. It exposes questions of mechanical and cyborg as compared to human and how these borders are constructed.

The scaffolding was contrasted with a patch of live moss that was placed farther downstage than the scaffolding. The contrast of smooth, metallic, and not alive with vibrant green, textured, and lively set the stage for questions in regards to the status of the nature-culture separate.

The piece ended by placing these two set pieces in direct conversation. All dancers were in hanging from, placing weight on, or in some way interacting with the scaffolding located upstage left. Everyone slowly melted down off the scaffolding to strip the flesh off the structure and to leave only the bare bones. The image of the scaffolding with a puddle of flesh proximally beneath still resonates. One dancer from the clump of bodies beneath the scaffolding removed herself from the clump and fiercely approached the moss. She then immediately sat down, touched the moss, and the lights quickly went to black.

The world we created was not clearly human, but all seven dancers felt comfortable functioning within this space as humans. Exploratory and original movement felt comfortable and risky enough to satisfy the human, but then also contributed to such a strange, unidentifiable, and unearthly world.

The music was a combination of harsh, cerebral, and mechanical electronic and yoga-inspired, rooted calmer music. Because this piece was a blending and meshing of all things dichotomized, this merging of distinct music within the same world seemed fitting. All pieces of music really drove the piece forward. Because much of the dance took place on the floor, and relied on improvisation and internal exploration, I felt as if it was important for the performance and for the pacing inspiration for the dancers to have music that went somewhere specific.

The piece was titled “a thousand kisses deep” to honor both the death of my father and intricacies within the piece. Whether or not intentional, my father’s death manages to weave its way into much of the work I create. The phrase, “A Thousand Kisses Deep” is the name of a poem by Leonard Cohen and inscribed on my dad’s headstone. My mom, sister, and I had recently agreed on this quotation at the time of naming my piece. As my dad was passing, he specifically told my mom about a lyric, possibly of Bob Dylan’s, he wanted to keep close with him while and after he passed. Immediately following his death, my mom could not remember the quotation. We sat on it for a year before agreeing that my mom wasn’t going to remember and that we had to accept that. This quotation was its loved replacement. There is something so engaging, telling, and representative to me about its combination of the quintessentially human and complicated act of kissing and such an objective and quantitative unit of measure used so nonsensically. The phrase has a way of leading you somewhere, but nowhere concrete. There exists a pecking and playful tone to the dreary and eternally buried state at which it hints. This pecking and entering into and out of movement ideas exists throughout the piece as the dancers flow in and out of relationships and movements. Each dancer may engage for a bit, play, and then drop the idea and exit. This pecking idea lasted throughout the piece as dancers interacted in unidentifiable, abstracted, and not decisively human ways, but was not indicative of the depth the interactions carried. This is where “deep” enters the picture as a helpful reminder that there does exist honest and heartfelt exploration within the piece. Depth is present in the title, but not clearly measured. How can depth be measured in one thousand kisses? The engaging and tangible yet slightly nonsensical nature of this phrase felt mindful of the piece and true to its investigation.

### *III. Spring Rehearsal Process*

At the heart of somatic practices lie the individual body and the individual experience unique to that body. As I worked my way through the fall choreographic process, I increasingly realized how essential and fundamental the idea of the individual is to the choreographic portion of my thesis, and how it could be more concretely implemented and emphasized in my spring semester process. Although my fall process engaged the individual within a larger community, I did not feel as if I successfully paid enough attention to each individual given the short amount of time and the large amount of dancers with which I was working.

In the fall, I worked with a group of seven distinctly individual movers with a wide range of both dance experience and relationships to movement. As mentioned, we tackled topics including the individual experience within universal practice, the experience of another's experience, the individual embodiment of common experience, the notion of natural and organic for both individuals and collectives, the idea of human and non-human-ness portrayed through humans, fluidity within categorization, and the ability to individually contribute to a common environment. During the creation and performance of this piece, individuality was explored within the context of a larger group to ultimately investigate relationships between individuals that create a common world. In movement, this often translated to individual movement generation that was then altered in some way by another's intentional influence or by the inclusion of other movers. This became messy and juicy. It was this mess and this diversity in experience that hinted at the impossibility of bodily experience to be neatly boxed into any single or unifying representation of the body.

Although my fall semester's group experience was extremely informative, satisfying, and rewarding, it lacked the perspective offered by the investigation of a solely individual experience. Room for individual experience is supposed to be fundamental to somatic practice. In order to fully investigate this individual experience, I believed it necessary to move from a piece that placed individual and "universal" experience in conversation to a solo piece that specifically focuses on the individual. I decided to choreograph a solo on myself because I intended to use the experience as research and as a primary source for writing. This would not be as possible if I were not the one experiencing; guessing at and reflecting on another's experience is not the same as writing about first-hand discoveries.

I began the rehearsal process in the exact same way I began my first group rehearsal in the fall. The acknowledgement of my new process as something similar to my group process in the fall allowed me to experience my body in a way that was not solely influenced by myself. If I thought of my body as a single manifestation and embodiment of all of the dancers I worked with in the fall, I was able to go places with movement I would not have on my own while imagining only my own body. I gave myself the exact same initial movement regiment: authentic movement (since there was no witness, this was modified to be an improvisation that involved attention to movement impulses), making a short phrase based on what was remembered, writing about a striking experience, taking action words or words that seemed significant from this memory and infusing the authentic movement phrase with them. Because I did not have anyone else's set of words to also embed within my authentic movement phrase, I opened this phrase up to modification by others by simply showing it often and allowing people to edit it.

My spring semester process was highly influenced by my dancers last semester. I made my rehearsals available to all of my precious dancers. Because my fall semester's

process was extremely collaborative and because it seemed as if the dancers sincerely enjoyed finding the connection between movement inspiration and the more conceptual or theoretical elements of this thesis, I opened up my rehearsals to them after I had established my own individual presence in my rehearsing. I had wanted each of them to run a rehearsal or two, but not all were able to. Each dancer ran rehearsal differently. For example, one person directly taught phrase work and worked on any phrase work I had already created, another led improvisational exercises that did not directly lead to material generation but did contribute to overlying feelings and content infusion within the piece, and another led exercises with specific inspirations, such as objects, that resulted in movement generation. Some came to more than one rehearsal, but I insisted on having time to digest and choreograph movement that was developed during someone else's rehearsal on my own in the studio. In this way, the process involved a substantial level of collaboration, but my choices, experience, and performance were the focus of this solo project.

I scheduled regular rehearsals twice every week, as if I was working with a group, and made sure that I was in the studio every time I had a rehearsal for the full hour and a half or two hours I allotted. So much of what was created depended on the events of the day and the experience of the studio in that moment. Rehearsals were terrifying, frustrating, monotonous, and lazy, but also fruitful, surprising, engaging, and unknown. My scheduled rehearsals created a regularity, not quite a dailiness, of physicality. Regular rehearsals created a dailiness of thought and a near-dailiness of practice to the extent that I believe Susan Rethorst's ideas of "dailiness" are true to my process.

Dailiness requires a simultaneous tuning in to time and the absence of time. One has to know and not know, prefer and not prefer, empty oneself and acknowledge one's fullness, be passive and charged. It has to happen to you and

from you. It has to be too fast for you to take in, and done in baby steps, one leaking into the other.

Dailiness allows for the endless finding of a reason, for curiosity, ongoingness, tedium, for humor, perspective for working with the unclassifiable, for the work of work, for embracing the excitement of being led by that stranger – the unmade dance.

The reason to make one decision versus another is also the pleasure in the work, the interest in the work, the mind of the work, the play of the work. The goals of the artist are all contained in that moment-by-moment ongoingness, which occupies the reason, intellect, curiosity, hunger, patience, regard. It is a sober regard, not led first and foremost by adrenaline and endorphins, but every bit as much of the body and about the body.

But on what do you base your decisions? How are you led by that stranger – the unmade dance...<sup>81</sup>

Sincerely spending time on one piece and one body felt refreshing. It took me longer to set movement and was an entirely new choreographic process that came much more from the inside. In the fall, I was able to piece together movement that looked fitting from my outside perspective. In the case of this solo work, I was arranging from the inside and imagining from the outside. I was composing based on essence, feel, and the way in which movements seemed to speak to each other. It was a semester of thought loops, endless questioning, and my own thoughts.

I spent much of my time alone in the studio playing mind games with myself. I felt as if nothing I was able to do was “true” to what I was attempting to accomplish, “truly natural,” or truly the “pure body” and its pure impulses. Even simple improvisation, which I often used to begin rehearsals had to be loosely remembered or recorded. When trying to remember, I would feel less authentic to the meaning of improvisation because

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<sup>81</sup> Susan. *A Rethorst, Choreographic Mind*, Theatre Academy Helsinki, 5-6.

I would be purposefully stringing together material in real time with the intention of remembering it. When recording, I was extremely aware of the camera and my improvisation would change and feel less true to myself. I often felt trapped and so deeply tangled in expectations that my experience was impacted and limited. When I finally settled on a phrase, I questioned its integrity to the prompt, its ability to be physically or conceptually challenging, its rigor, and its ability to contribute to a piece in a way that felt complimentary but not dull. These questions are big ones and feel especially large when dealing with them nearly single-handedly.

Other memorable instances of making phrase work for myself to eventually be performed involve dancing for another choreographer. There is an ease with which I can generate material in such a setting as a result of knowing another eye will be viewing and editing the material, or as a result of releasing judgment as I simply try my best with a movement prompt for which someone else was responsible. I tend to experience more of a willingness to explore, attempt, and say “yes.” In the case of solo rehearsals, I would generate material and immediately judge it because I was both the movement generator and the additional eye. This was a difficult dynamic to overcome and to find the innovation within. The depth and intensity with which solo work functions offered particular challenges that were at once inspiring and also paralyzing.

My history with larger groups made me comfortable enough to rely on the least “productive” rehearsals as at the very least inclusive of one short phrase by each dancer. This would leave me with a substantial amount of material to investigate. With just myself generating material, there was much more pressure on my ability to produce. If I were having an “off” day, it would be reflected in the produced material. If I were not feeling creative, I could either be okay leaving the studio and knowing it was an off day

for movement generation, or I could force myself to generate *something*. In either case, the obstacle had to somehow be translated into something that could contribute to the piece. There was no guarantee of anything beyond my control, and no safety net beyond myself.

Including others created more of a fertile ground for creating. The inclusion of others extended beyond the rehearsal space, as I engaged many people with different dance backgrounds by using them as thought sponges and bouncing boards, in addition to asking some for general or movement-based feedback. Because no additional dancers were part of this work, my questioning and reach extended beyond those directly implicated in the creation of this work and beyond those who are already familiar with the dance making process.

#### *IV. Spring Performance*

One of the tricks about performing a solo work is to, at the very least, re-engage the many people involved in the process. The re-engagement would in theory drastically decrease the divide between process and result. The term “solo” now has an entirely new meaning for me. This “solo” engaged the most people in my process of any piece I’ve choreographed; it was the least alone as a choreographer I have ever felt. I felt alone on stage as a performer, but the stage is one part of a much larger project. Even on the stage, I was constantly attempting to engage and communicate with others, hone what many people had contributed to the project, and imagine my body as beyond my own and composed of many others.

I definitely missed the ensemble on stage. I missed having the ability to communicate with other movers and I missed creating a world that also included other bodies.

Translating these feelings onto an audience does not generate the same effect. I missed making faces at others. I missed being able to reflect on all the unexpected moments that accompany performing, even with a piece that may be extremely rehearsed. I believe these aspects of performance reflect more on solo work in general than on anything to do with my more specific research.

I like to think of the performance as an extension of my research. Similar to a paper, the performance is a presentation of research. It brings the research out of the rehearsal space, out of draft form, and into something ready to be presented. It forces the choreographer to compose and to find the best method of communicating such complex and multidimensional ideas in a way that honors those ideas and their complexities. The performance is a means to be articulate in a language beyond words, and to specifically articulate to an audience. I did not expect the audience to take away a specific message. I wanted the audience to experience, to question, to wonder, to talk, to see a possibility for a new perspective, to be engaged, to ask something new, to sigh once the performance concluded. To play within a language not restricted by words is an opportunity not granted often, and to share that with an audience is also a special gift. Although the process was more purposefully deemed research, the ability to extend the horizons for research and presentation so massively is something that is truly limitless in impact.

Performance was important in its effect on the rehearsal process. Without the pressures of performing, the research would remain in fragments and there would exist little motivation to create something palatable and communicable. To compose dance is an entirely other level of research and investigation that studio work does not necessitate. I had imagined a rare day in the studio in which material would just magically take off and take on a life of its own. Although I can remember one day as more conducive to

material generation than others, I can't remember a day in which this feeling truly struck. It wasn't until the performance began to approach quickly that I began to really "say yes" to movement and start to compose the material in a way that I felt honored the questions, materials, and themes at hand.

Once a comfortable draft was created, I was able to hone in on what I thought needed to be highlighted and what I thought could handle being deemphasized. Within this process of refining the performative element was the need to flesh out each tiny detail for myself. Once I had this clarity, taking performance liberties was more feasible and guided and it would make it easier to relate to an audience. If the performer lacks clarity, it can be difficult for an audience member to relate and engage. It was more difficult to sort through these details and decide where to devote focus when the movement was in the "raw" form. In this phase, parts that needed emphasis did not stand out from those that did not. In order to speak to an audience as a soloist, I decided to try to pay full attention to each detail of my performance and to rely on this understanding, interest, and passion to shine through. This does not mean that every moment and movement made perfect sense and fit into this idealized mold of understanding, but it means that I tried to investigate each detail to the point where I had a good feel for the role it played in my piece. If every tiny detail were fleshed out for myself, and if this was clear to an audience, there would likely be other people in the audience who would relate. I do not mean to imply that this piece was in any way clean or exclusive of mess. The idea was that it was messy and unfamiliar and left room for further mess, but was visited enough that there was something seemingly more developed that could be gripped. Instances that felt extremely personal, unique, and incommunicable were often the ones that, when fleshed out, many could latch on to and

imbue with their own experience, memory, and understanding. When detail is fleshed out for the performer, other audience members will find a way to relate.

Just as rehearsals felt like mind games created by myself for myself, I felt as if I needed to establish “rules” of the game for the performance as well. Because much of the piece was structured improvisation, establishing these “rules” would help develop a sense of cohesion and of reason behind the movement. Because I was focused on similar themes and questions from the fall, but with a lens set more on the individual body, the “rules” of the game had to do with muddying the contrast between the modern and the natural, the human and non-human, the body and the mind – bringing out the quirky and the structured and placing it in conversation with the animalistic and the fluid. As always, playing with the absence of these linguistic borders as distinct movement categories. Part of the rules of this game requires a full dedication to investigation of these themes. This becomes confusing when one must play into and temporarily live within the exact categories that are being revealed as less clearly distinct. By really living within the “natural” and the more “technical” and “modern,” I was able to find glimpses of one category within the other. For example, within a section that was intended to focus on the somatic, natural, whole, and connected workings of the body, I managed to pull out the more mechanical, non-human, and unrecognizable. I think this overlap also has to do with choreographic intuition and the desire to pick up on manifestations of the same theme in unexpected places. If I were fixated on a specific movement or style that rang true to the unrecognizable, mechanical, and non-human, I may be tempted and challenged to find that quality within a section dedicated to other, possibly opposite, investigation. In any case, establishing rules of the game, and paying attention to the natural as it exists in opposition or similarity to other forms of movement revealed a

blurring of borders and a datedness of dichotomizing. This also helps to illuminate the non-ubiquitous character of the “natural,” and how this one word can take on drastically different meanings among people of one audience, let alone people of varying cultures.

The rigor with which I had to stick to these rules is responsible for the deep investigation, the passion with which I had to engage, the physical challenge of the material, and the discovered inter-categorical overlaps. I also think it is this rigor that kept the piece interesting to both the audience and me, and enabled the development of tangible movement themes throughout the piece. Additionally, I would challenge myself each night of the performance with a different and unrehearsed task. For example, I might have tried to guess when approximately three and a half minutes into the piece, and would have had to stare at the audience from whatever position I was in for thirty seconds. Another task might be to take a risk after five minutes. The list could continue endlessly.

The piece began with a walk backwards into the space, triggering a symbolic backtrack in time that referenced the inclination in some somatic practice to return to a simpler, past time when the body’s development and connectivity was explored. Immediately following was an improvisation in which my face was averted from the audience and I was establishing and pushing my body’s sequentiality and connectivity. After a large circle around and carving of the space, I landed near where I began and acknowledged the audience – allowing myself to be seen. It is within this introductory moment that I intended to really throw a lot at the audience and to expose these ideas of body connectivity, humanism, disjointedness, quirk, and naturalness. My introduction ended with an acknowledgement of the two differently sized white cubes surrounded by vibrant and eerie green moss, an establishment of the backwards-looking theme, and a

long section that was relatively static, slow, and on the floor. The modern cubes and surrounding moss strongly resembled the structural set of the piece in the fall, but highlighted a contrast between the modern and the natural. Connections to my fall semester piece were meant to stand out, as my spring choreography expanded from and was in deep conversation with “a thousand kisses deep.”

The floor section was largely developmental. I was working to find the connections between my head and my spine and my extensions. It was during this section that material thought to be quirky, angular, and modern unexpectedly peaked through and a spatially distant connection with the cubes emerged, exposing the overlap and fluidity of our arbitrary and simplifying dichotomies. The pace of the piece drastically changed for this floor section and the music was simultaneously mechanical and rooted. Through a short transition, more quirky, machine-like, and uncharacteristically human movement began to dominate and took place among the cubes and moss. Rigorously shaking arm movements, with completely straight arms, mimicked the angularity of the cubes. This last portion of the piece focused on further connections and expansions of established themes and concepts. This began with a phrase that for some reason felt more contrived than the rest of the movement. I worked to either highlight its uniqueness or find its similarity to other movements and bring those out, but it continued to feel slightly off. It was a challenging and unsettling part of the piece, which added to the excitement each night. The important part of this section was that it allowed me to begin to take real weight on my hands and arms, which then transitioned into an improvised crawling section. My tasks were to make the crawls hard, to challenge the audience, to feel not myself (whatever that meant at the time), to stretch time, to stretch my body, to throw myself, and to transpose any movement desires that felt necessary into these crawls. The

crawls took me back to the cubes, where I finally rested on top and mimicked the slow, floor movement I did towards the beginning of the piece. Being a body on display was not the end-all I was aiming for. I was simply playing with the idea of bodies on pedestals, bodies slipping off pedestals, bodies being pedestals, bodies being the opposite of pedestals, but maintaining these as a fluid concepts and ones open to discussion. The pieces concluded with the same style of ending as “a thousand kisses deep.” I slowly slid off the pedestal, stripping away the flesh, into the puddle of moss on the floor. In the last instance, I threw myself off the floor and back on to the floor, traveling as much as possible in that low, horizontal position.

The music created an eerie but comforting, natural but mechanical, recognizable but out of sorts world that shared some of the same artists and one of the same songs as last semester. I wore a loose, sheer, black, long-sleeved turtleneck and black underwear. The turtleneck slightly obscured the body, hinted at the existence of something “unnatural,” and related to the modernism associated with the white museum pedestals. A strong consideration was nudity for this piece. My hesitation involved the immediate involvement of gender and the possible sexualization of the female performing body was not a realm into which I was prepared to throw this piece. The interplay of nakedness and naturalness is one of definite and endless interest, but to be explored at another time.

The piece was titled “In Witness Whereof.” This is a phrase used immediately before a blank line for a signature of a witness on some legal documents. I found it on a proclamation made in my father’s honor from a council he started. My dad’s influence continues to sprinkle my work, and I find comfort in that. Although the title may not be a recognizable phrase to everyone, it definitely hints at legality. I like the official way in

which it demands attention but simultaneously makes little sense on its own. There is a formality within somatic practices that allows them to exist, even though not clearly defined or known by a majority of people. Many dancers have exposure to somatic practice through classes in other techniques that simply utilize somatics for warm up. People are familiar with the formality, even if the form is not clear. Within this title prominently exists the word “witness.” The role of the witness is strong and structured in Authentic Movement, but not in somatic practice. In both these highly internal methods of exploration, the idea and implication of a witness can be endlessly analyzed. The muddling of the word “witness” between “in” and “whereof” places “witness” in time, space, and place, but in a way that is far from sensible. One gets a sense of place and time and their importance, but not an overt revealing of how these all play into each other. The muddying of witness in real time and place seems significant.

Similarly, the muddying and complication of most categories, classifications, borders, boundaries, and dichotomies was important to this spring semester work. The welcoming of fluidity, the release of “natural” as placed on a pedestal, and the incorporation of a spectrum of understanding was hopefully revealed.

## **Conclusion:**

This thesis served as a theoretical and practical struggle to contextualize a somatic portrayal of the body. Much of this thesis served as an experimentation with building a rhetoric that effectively serves the subject matter. As repetitively seen throughout this thesis, language falls short. The exact dichotomies and linguistic distinctions that are shown to hold minimal weight and value are utilized in the discussion of their irrelevancy and insufficiency. This is in no way a final step or an end of a discussion. This is one step towards increasing our understanding of universalized somatic portrayals of bodies and their counterintuitive contribution to the cyborg.

The first chapter serves as background and context for somatic practice and the addressing of the body as presented by the practice. Three examples of somatic practices, Alexander Technique, Body Mind Centering, and Bartenieff Fundamentals, are each discussed in relation to their specific and unique portrayal of the body. In delineating each practice, I attempt to reveal their depictions of the body and the foundational desire of each practice to extend to a universal audience and student body. With such a narrow scope of research subjects, expansion beyond a small and comfortable reach becomes problematic and neutralizing of individual bodies. When the individuality of a body and experience holds a prominent position in each practice, it really needs to be honored, attended to, and handled cautiously as the practices grow and take form in new places.

In the second chapter, focus shifts to the universalization of somatic practice and the resulting creation of a cyborg body. Through methods of expansion and justification,

somatic practices, which exist as adjunct to formal dance training, grow and universalize without making foundational changes to better fit different communities and people. Because the individual experience is inherently unique, disingenuousness arises when the circulation of somatic methodology involves presuppositions of individual needs. Science and individual experience work together to justify and expand somatic practice by tackling separate avenues of a somatic experience. Science can exist at the margins of individual experience as an entity that casts a validating gaze on the practice. Once we dive into the details of individualized experience, we enter a territory science cannot and does not tread. It is this compliment of individual experience and science that validates the form as a whole and readies it for expansion and universalization.

The cyborg results from this universalization and the attempt to find a figure with which to universally empathize. The cyborg is created by the lack of heterogeneity in somatic interpretation of the body as well as the decontextualization that functions as a means to universalize. Somatics, as similar to science, is a method of fabricating a body and creating a cyborg, with or without prosthetic devices. A cyborg in this context is not simply a means for flesh and machine to combine, but is a re-assembly of a body that may be unrealistic and exclusive. There does exist a strong tendency within somatic practice to revert to the “natural,” as found in a past instance of time. There is a temptation to rediscover the simplicities and strengths of original body connections and ways of development. This glancing backwards with awe and curiosity does not make temporal sense with the futuristic and fabricated feel of the cyborg. This is the juice of this thesis – the unexpected interplay between somatics and cyborg, and the ability of something so backwards oriented to create something so futuristic. The cyborg that results from a supposed reversion to our bodies’ most natural states seems

counterintuitive but also speaks to the distance we have created between our current and most natural states. Is “natural” at this time so foreign as to be considered cyborg? Is the notion of the cyborg fitting enough to our ontology to be deemed our new natural?

Is the universalized and cyborg body indicative of a body we all share - the common denominator,<sup>82</sup> so to speak, of relatable bodies? Does there exist a single scale of evaluation that applies to all bodies and their ability to be relatable? Even if this global standard of evaluation exists, it must not preclude that differences among bodies are prevalent and deserving of differences in handling.

A helpful example of the common denominator argument and universality is that of Kitsch art. “The need for kitsch arises when genuine emotion has become rare, when desire lies dormant and needs artificial stimulation.”<sup>83</sup> When I think about kitsch art as something that universalizes because it is easily digested and evocative of more superficial and baseline emotions, I do wonder about the place of genuine emotion in such a world. Is the need for somatics parallel to that of ideas similar to kitsch art? Does the need for somatics as a method of universalizing and neutralizing the body reflect on the rarity of genuine bodily experience? Is the stronghold of kitsch art and somatics truly a deficiency on the part of the consumers?

The ease with which one can easily become entangled in theory and thought loops made the rehearsal space a productive one. Rehearsals were a time to abandon the complications and shortfalls of rhetoric and turn to an unspoken language. True embodiment of research ideas was given space to become established and familiar in the studio; embodiment allowed the discussion to take place through movement and

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<sup>82</sup> Noel Carroll, "Moderate Moralism," *British Journal of Aesthetics* 36, no. 3 (July 1996): 4.

<sup>83</sup> Karsten Harries, *The Meaning of Modern Art*, (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968).

interactions of bodies. The performance space demanded a high level of compositional ability in order to find a palatable and relatable form in which the research could be presented. I experienced the heart of this thesis to be found within the rehearsal and performance spaces. This topic demands a rehearsal and creative component as an escape from the bounds of linguistics and as a meaningful extension of processes valued in somatics. However, I do not think the scope of this research inherently demands a performative demonstration. The challenge of composing a piece that holds true to the core of the subject matter and that does not allow performativity for the sake of performing to take over was one that I very much appreciated. It was a challenge that genuinely and fully made use of the choreographic and compositional skills I was taught in my time with the Wesleyan Dance Department. How does one show and perform a work about a subject matter that purposefully does not demand being witnessed? How does one present in a formal performance setting a raw and unpolished work that largely raises questions? The importance of the communicable part of performance is similar to the importance of the written part of research. To do the research and investigation is one part of the process, but to present to others in a way that can be digested and understood is an entirely other.

Transcendence of language by movement was necessary for the communication of this topic. There needed to exist the potential for boundary confusion, fluidity of borders, insufficiency of categorization, and unbounded flow between all that once existed as distinct. Clear dichotomizations may satisfy our inclination to fully grasp and understand, but they also undeniably simplify and consolidate in ways that detract from the very essence of that which they are categorizing. This thesis was not an attempt to

clean up a messy topic – this was rather an attempt to find the vocabulary, spoken or otherwise, to embrace and highlight an ever-present mess.

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