

A TRAJECTORY IN DANCE  
THE EVOLUTION OF THE ALEGADO MOVEMENT LANGUAGE

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A THESIS SUBMITTED IN FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE  
DEGREE OF MA DANCE TEACHER AT

BUDAPEST CONTEMPORARY DANCE ACADEMY

2017

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my sister and brother-in-law, Pat and Tom Chodosh, for allowing me sanctuary in their home during this period of writing.

To Ivan Angelus, I offer my gratitude and many thanks for all your understanding.

Petra Péter, thank you for being there in moments when I needed a voice from across the ocean.

And finally, I thank you Erica Stanton without whose help, comforting words and sage advice I would have had a much different experience writing this paper. Your guidance was invaluable. Thank you for agreeing to supervise my work.

## ABSTRACT

This thesis traces the origins of the Alegado Movement Language (AML) from the embryonic stage of its somatic history reflected in the physical activities of childhood, the undeniable role of sports, the diverse dance techniques experienced and, most importantly, the distinct influence of the José Limón Dance Company. In following this root system to the point of emergence, it is important to identify the qualities of each and demonstrate how their individual attributes have contributed to the essential character of the AML as it is manifested in the dance class structure as well as in the choreographic movement vocabulary. By directing our focus to the nature and origins of this movement language, we can get a clearer idea of the impetus behind its primary goal – the creation of a class structure which can have the potential of taking a dance student through an organic evolution of movement principles from the beginning of a class to the variation or choreography at the end. Essentially, the acquisition of performance tools obtained through each level of development in class becomes an invaluable source of information when navigating the extraordinary journey from the classroom to the performance stage and, ultimately, performance artistry.

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The catalyst for the origins of the Alegado Movement Language (AML) was, without a doubt, the moment I began working in the José Limón Dance Company. Before this point in time, there were other contributing factors such as sports and other dance techniques yet, it was through Limón's movement principles where my instinct began the internal dialogue with all the somatic information lying dormant in my body since childhood. It was also my instinct which began to translate this inner dialogue into tangible physical calibrations within my body as they informed my responses to the incoming influence of Limón's physical movement vocabulary. Even though the confluence of our somatic histories revealed my affinity for his principles of movement it, contrastingly, also manifested the distinct and unique vocabulary of movements emerging from my body. This has helped identify and clarify the differences which have existed between our work, as well as the individual paths we have left as traces through the landscape of the dance world.

It is in uncovering the similarities and differences in our respective approaches to dance where this paper directs part of its attention. In establishing a pathway from the origin of my somatic education to the present, I will shed more light on this journey so that - a clearer description of sequential events will help orient the investigation; the environments where all things take place can provide a better perspective and, finally, the people inhabiting this journey can be recognized for the contributions they have made. By delineating the progression of events from the origins of my somatic history, leading to the confluence of my work with the Limón company, I will endeavor to demonstrate, not only the rewards stemming from our paths crossing but also, how this merging eventually led to the breaking away from Limón's dominant influence on my work in the classroom. Ultimately, the desire

to create my own choreographies led me to the decision of distancing myself from the Limón tradition in my classroom.

I have come to realize that my evolution has served as connective tissue for some of the Contemporary dance movement of today. What were once groups doing extreme contemporary work, are now groups who are more reliant on actual technical expertise in order to perform their choreographies. It also seems that dancers which have incorporated the use of breath and the release of tension in the body, are more open to embracing work which doesn't require so much of the traditional modern technical choreography yet, uses the shared principles of Limón's work. Of course, they continue to create works which push the envelope of dance theater productions but I do feel there is a change in the horizon and that more pieces are coming out with a demand for more dancing. This is where I feel my work, having gone through the Limon tradition, is beginning to close that gap which began to widen back in the 1960's and has permeated just about every corner of the world.

Because of this heritage, Contemporary dance has been able to perpetuate itself into the future of dance. In other words, the harmonious balance of principles necessary to allow the body structure to release itself to gravity, is an inheritance of great significance. It is my belief that much of Contemporary dance of today owes a debt of gratitude to the Humphrey/Limón lineage for providing the foundation upon which breath and release could stand in order to continue the development of today's generation of movers and creators.

I am grateful to have, in my possession, a part of that tradition and the foundation upon which I am able to project myself forward in this new world of modern contemporary dance. It is in this vein where I wish to direct part of the focus of this paper. Discovering

myself at a point where I can contribute to the creation of the connective tissue which could serve as a bridge between a past, a present and a future in dance, is a responsibility I do not take lightly. I wish to move forward with a purpose in the method I employ in my class. Therefore, the organization of my class structure, the method by which I share the movement concepts, the constant search for new ways to demonstrate the myriad of possible variations which can be generated from the simplest of thematic movement material, is a source of energy which nourishes my desire to place the AML in a position to continue evolving.

To achieve this, it is important examining the point of intersection, between Limón and my own trajectory in dance and how it has given me the perspective by which to be able to identify the elements in his work impacting my own development as a dancer, teacher and choreographer. The information gathered is done so with the desire of revealing the depth to which these elements have infused and shaped my work today. It is unclear how long the gestation period lasted between these two movement systems yet, it is from this point of departure where they began to interface and, eventually, give birth to the transformation and expansion of ideas shaping the AML today.

At the merging of these two systems, I was bringing an assortment of anatomical structures within me: the physical, competitive and, sometimes, aggressive application of sports, as well as the use of hands stemming from my tactile connection to the different balls used; the higher plane of aesthetic sensibilities in dance such as the modern technique of Lester Horton as well as the highly structured training of the Matt Mattox jazz style, each and all reinforced by my training in classical ballet. Even though the catalyst for the AML transition began upon entering the Limón company, it was clear the somatic history I had



brought with me, contributed to the profound influence of the character of my movement vocabulary.

Each set of systems in my physical history, required much use of the pelvis. To varying degrees, each demanded a particular characteristic use. As my work developed, the demands on the pelvis became more and more specified and sensitized. This development came about because of the effect of all the diverse physical activity from childhood to the moment of coming into the world of the José Limón movement principles. Once having been exposed to these new concepts, those past influences took on a different energy, consequently, reshaping the existing dance paradigms. I came into the world of Limón with my personal movement palette, I left with new perspectives which recalibrated the tonality of my body language by redefining the role of the pelvis.

This revised definition, had to incorporate an added awareness of the body's need for caution when moving. The element of survival seems to have permeated my subconscious, specifically upon my arrival to Limón. Unknown to me at the time, was the fact that past injuries were playing a very significant role in my response to any movement coming from classes I was taking, repertory I was learning or choreography I was creating. I would not characterize this response by using the word fear yet, I would say I was very conscious, at times cautious, of how my body was executing each movement. I took special care in finding ways to minimize the pain in my knees.

Years later, without having been aware of it, I realized I had created a mechanism by which to alleviate the wear and tear on my legs as well as minimize their pain. This permitted me the freedom of experiencing the full depths of a fall which, in turn, opened the doors to a more expansive suspension. It was during this period where I feel the evolution of my plié

emerged as the main component of my entire body of work. In order to allow freedom and weight to the pelvis and, consequently, the skeletal structure as a whole, I needed to create a resilient plié sensitive enough to be able to respond to any change in speed, falling weight, landing from jumps, turns and additional weight of a partner. The plié became my safety net and the apparatus by which I could freely explore the boundaries of movement without having fear enter into the equation. As I continued with my movement explorations, I would later find out how involved my plié would be in the formation of the character of my movement vocabulary.

The collaboration between pelvis and plié now had begun to set roots into the groundwork of my class structure and choreographic output. This bond might not have been possible without having gone through the process of learning the Limón principles of movement. It was this journey which compelled my body to transition from survival mode, to a calm sensation of being home. This sense of security freed my instinct to roam around in search of a way to allow Limón's repertory to flow through me. As a consequence, the movement resonating within me was awakened from its subterranean dormancy as it slowly surfaced and began to translate the secrets of my past before dance.

More remnants from my somatic history began to dislodge themselves from years of neglect as they emerged into their creative potential. Day by day, one class construction after another and overflowing into my own choreography, my hands began to reveal themselves as they gestured their way into existence. As I moved forward on this perpetual learning curve in dance, the knowledge it brought continued to inform and inspire new ways in which to articulate that which was constantly trying to surface from within the buried treasures of my life's past journeys.

It is at this juncture where I feel I must shed more light on a revelation: performing the repertory of the José Limón Dance Company granted me a very unique perspective. I say repertory because it was the very first information I received upon entering the company. Before the Limón audition and before being accepted, I had never taken a Limón class. In fact, I did not become acquainted with Limón's concepts and principles of movement through taking class, reading about or watching a performance live or on video. I went to the audition without knowing anything about the man and his work.

This statement is of great significance because through having learned his choreography, I was able to meet the man. In his art, I perceived my world living in New York City. On stage, through his eyes, I confirmed the blindness of jealousy. Through his gestures and physical mannerisms, I was a witness to treachery and deceit. I experienced the innocence of pure love, in its death...and reflected on death, in its noble surrender to life.

In performing each choreography, in living each role, I was able to experience the fall, the suspension, the shift of weight as if I had been given the opportunity to participate in my own private conversation with him, on stage. The steps reflected moments in my life, as my life resonated in each movement.

It is through this interchange of unspoken words between his choreographic works and my interpretations of roles he created, which speaks to the bond we silently shared across the distance of time and space. I never met José Limón. He died the year I began to dance. Yet, in spite of this irreconcilable fact of life, my connection to the man and to his art, continues to resonate down into the roots he helped nourish.

These performance experiences encompassed the philosophical, conceptual and physical implementation of his movement principles as they were reflected in his creations and in the performance of his choreographies. Having taken only a couple of technique classes during the rehearsal period of that first season with Limón, it was from the stage where I, subconsciously, got introduced to the principles of Limón's work. It was the stage which not only gave me direct access to connections within the body/performance experience, it also gifted me with insights I would not have had otherwise.

I entered his world of movement through a passageway which started on stage, under the lights, in costume, performing his creations. At the other end of that passageway, I exited onto a Limón class where I began to experience what I had danced onstage. But now, now it had been broken down into components of my actual experiences on stage. My understanding of the principles came about not from the ground up but rather, from the top to the bottom. In performing his works, it was if I was allowed to learn from the greatest teacher in the world. Only later, was I able to make the connection of having learned the logic guiding the class structure and the principles generating his movement content, from my teacher – the stage.

What had begun as a maze of incongruent pathways in my preparation for performing his repertory, had now shifted in perception as I was able to reproduce the mechanisms within my body with which to navigate my way through the class and towards a more profound understanding of Limón's movement principles. As a result, these perspectives, along with the concepts which informed them, later gave rise to the emphasis, the character and, consequently, the architecture of my own classes.

This unique perspective has remained with me until today. It is the reason I structure my classes as I do and it is the reason why the content is directly related to what the dance student experiences at the end of class. Since my initial exposure to Limón began on the stage and then continued onto the classroom, I wanted to, at the very least, recreate that experience in reverse. I have always contended that my classes are like rehearsals in preparation for a performance. By introducing the choreographic movement material stripped down to its most basic elements and presenting it in a slow progression within each successive exercise, I was able to give the student the possibility of inhabiting the movement for a longer period of time before having them perform it at the end of class.

Looking back on the sequence of events which have served as catalyst for the retrieval of sense memory connections from my somatic history, to the lived experience of injury, continuing with the instinctive response of mechanisms to counter those injuries, to the stimuli altering the flow of my life, and on through the genesis of hand gestures defining the character of my classes - I have become aware of the fact that all were lived experiences as I moved from one environment to another. Each road I took, connected to the next one I had to take. Behind me, I now see the foot prints as they wind their way through the landscape of my life, leading directly underneath my feet. Each step had a story to tell yet, since I was looking forward, I could not see where I had been. Now, after many years of weaving my way through the world, I have managed to pause to look back. As I retrace my steps to the point where it all began, I can now see and feel where I am today.

In my research, I have come across several writers who have had an effect on me to some degree or another but none have impacted me more than Tim Ingold. His writings explore many areas within the realm of anthropology yet, it is his examination of human

movement along paths, through environments where true knowledge is obtained. The human story will only gather meaning for a person when they themselves have lived it.

This theme resonates deep within me because my life, as well as the lives of many I have worked with in dance, has taken me along many paths. Many times each of us has crossed and re-crossed these paths until the tracks we have left on the earth's landscape have created a mesh of lines through which our awareness and knowledge of the world has come.

I have referred to his writings in moments when my story has crossed and inhabited his. In this paper, we have crossed paths several times.

In the discovery of meaning in past events, Tim Ingold wrote (2011 p. 154):

*For stories do not, as a rule, come with their meanings already attached, nor do they mean the same for different people. What they mean is rather something that listeners have to discover for themselves, by placing them in the context of their own life histories. Indeed it may not be until long after a story has been told that its meaning is revealed, when you find yourself retracing the very same path that the story relates. Then, and only then, does the story offer guidance on how to proceed.*

I am now able to begin formulating the process which gives voice to the organic movement sensibilities within me. I begin to recognize the need to articulate, with more clarity, all that has been stored inside and is now making its way through me and into the dance world's consciousness. As this process continues to surface, it is apparent, that the two paths - Limón's journey and my own - more than intersected, they inhabited each other's space for a period in time. His presence in mine served as a catalyst for all the somatic information brewing inside, just waiting 'in the wings' to make its entrance into the present.

As with all journeys, there comes a time when the path ahead must be taken alone, and so it was with ours. The experiences which had informed my life, insisted on coming through me and out into their own. It is this emergence of my life's somatic history which has fueled the divergence from his brief, yet catalytic presence in my world in dance, yet not before having left an irrevocable imprint on the very essence of my own movement principles.

The quintessence of dance shared in that ephemeral yet, fateful encounter in time, was and is, the distillation of what I, humbly, wish to share through my work in class. By virtue of having traversed through life in different times and in diverse environments, the unique experiences which informed our individual paths in life and in dance were, simultaneously, similar and different. The underlying reasons for dancing and creating is a passion we shared yet, it was inevitable our paths would diverge.

Sharing her thoughts on Limón's wishes for his technique Carla Maxwell wrote (Dunbar, 2003):

*He did not want his technique codified; he wanted it to grow and develop. There is no rigid, set Limón class and no two teachers will impart the movement principles in the same way. José was always encouraging people to find the dance that was in them; to find their own way and trust the creative process.*

Clearing my own path was not an aberration, but rather an act of reverence for the man whose foundation in dance continues to sustain mine. It is from this foundation where my own personal roots have sought their nourishment. It is also from this same source where my movement creations have surfaced in affirmation of the somatic history they were derived from.

In truth, I have wrestled with the idea of placing a classification such as Alegado Movement Language on my work in the classroom. The alternative was not better – Joe Alegado teaching Limón Technique. It would be a misleading statement advertising a class as being a Limón class when the only similarities would be the principles of fall and recovery, of suspension and of breath. Yet, even though I recognize my movement vocabulary to be very distinct from Limón's, it was still an unsettling feeling knowing I had to distance myself from the Limón family. I, in fact, have always referred to my work, when communicating to organizers or anyone who would want to know, as possessing the spirit and principles of the Limón tradition.

My work, cannot and should not be considered Limón. Out of respect for the man, his work and his belief that a dancer should discover his own way, I am determined to honor his legacy and his belief as I follow the direction set forth by my own kinesthetic impulses. In moving forward with my work in dance, I remain constant in my adherence to the movement philosophy which guides every creation whether it be in class or for the stage – the search for the most organic, direct line of entry into a world of movement which could best express the world around me. Using the principles and concepts of the natural fall of the body in its surrender to the inevitability of the earth's pull, together with the will and desire to descend into the bowels of the earth, brings a gratification in knowing the recovery from such a depth, endows the emergent movement with the power of hope as it ascends to its life affirming suspension. It is within these two extremes where the realm of life is contained and embodied in all its human manifestations.

This, in essence, is why he and I have bonded and yet, even though we shared a common Mexican heritage, suffered ridicule for the color of our skin, promised ourselves we



would work on the English language in order to be better than those who ridiculed us, were both tall in stature and both loved the use of hands and arms in our work, we had differences in our background which would, inevitably, surface through our art and further define those differences between us.

For me, it was sports, sports and more sports plus, a myriad of other inherent factors stemming from the nature of life in the South Texas beach town of Corpus Christi. A sleepy town, with remnants of the hippie culture making its way south into our surfing environment with the Beach Boys, Santana, Woodstock still playing in our heads.

Within our family, music and dance never entered into our lives except for the *Posadas* – nine days of religious observance from December 16 to 24 – depicting Mary and Joseph’s journey into Bethlehem in search of a place of shelter. In these *Posadas*, we would follow a procession of people down the streets of our neighborhood as everyone would pray and sing Christmas carols in Spanish. This is the only memory I have of my family in connection to music. It is also the only time I could hear my mother’s beautiful singing voice, a voice which would only surface during Christmas.

The only other manifestation of music in my life, was my constant need to bang out rhythms on my lap or on the dashboard of my father’s old Ford whenever a popular song would come out on the radio. Most always, the songs which inspired this improvised drumming were from Motown artists such as Marvin Gaye, Smokey Robinson, The Temptations, to name a few. Seemingly, nothing in my life before dance was preparing me for dance.

For José, having been born in Mexico, having music in his life by way of his musician father and having been exposed to the Iberian culture imported from Europe at such an early age, contributed to a childhood much different from mine.

During the first seven years of his life in Mexico before moving north into the United States, conflict and tragedy coexisted with the beauty and bliss of memories of a childhood full of music, dance and public festivities.

As described by Limon himself in his handwritten autobiography and transcribed by Ann Vachon (1996, p. 9)

“There were concerts, dramas, ‘zarzuelas,’ and the miraculous ‘cinematógrafo.’ There were variety music hall nights, and on these I remember glittering Spanish dancers, with sumptuous black coiffures, topped elegantly by incredibly high combs, with crimson roses nestling in them, costumed in sequined iridescence. The electrifying pound of castanets, the magnetic intricacy of the steps and figurations, the verve of the ‘taconeado’, the flurries and cascades of ruffled petticoats, all these moved me to a pitch of excitement which I could neither understand nor explain.”

This textured past already rich in dance and music, combined with his eventual arrival to the United States where he developed a love for painting and continuing onto his journey to New York City, were all essential ingredients which gave impetus to his journey into dance.

Many people were experiencing their own paths which, eventually, led them to their life in dance. I came to realize many of the former members of the Limón Company lived situations of their own which were instrumental in preparing them for the different paths they took after leaving the company. Some, like Risa Steinberg, Jennifer Scanlon, Alan Danielson

and others, have gone on to teach in the Limón tradition and maintained a close relationship to many of the defined parameters of the traditional Limón technique class yet, there were those, like myself, Jennifer Muller, Doug Varone and others who had a compelling desire to create, who took this tradition and evolved it by incorporating their own personal human experiences, shaping and reshaping the outcome in a continuous search for creative fulfillment.

Jennifer Scanlon, former dancer and associate artistic director during the time I was in the company, expressed the fact, during a telephone conversation, that she had no desire to choreograph. Even then, as I remember my work in her classes, she always did what she needed to do to challenge the dance students while daring them to enter her world of physical instinct, an instinct which embodied the essence of Limón's spirit. Watching her from the wings on stage, was always like imagining Limón dancing through her.

This, for me, seemed to form a pattern, one in which the dancer, who did not care to choreograph, would be the teacher who would go on to teach in the Limon tradition. Those dancers who created, evolved their classes through a need for expanding their own choreographic horizons.

There are the exceptions, Alan Danielson, for an example. He choreographed for his own performing group yet, taught a traditional Limon technique class. I could imagine, though, a situation where a choreographer creating his own works, would create in the Limon tradition and not feel compelled to find his or her own voice. This, of course, is possible. I neither agree with it, nor do I disagree yet, I do feel it to be unfortunate that a person would both create and teach in the Limon tradition.

Each of us in the Limón family traveled different paths through our lives to arrive to the place where we inhabited the same space, at the same time as José Limón. For that, we feel fortunate and, in a way, responsible for the light we carry with us and for the right to keep it alive. Each has their own personal evolution to add to the equation so, therefore, the light we carry can mean different things to different people.

In my case, I believe the dance students who wish to share this journey with me in class, do so knowing they will experience a human connection made possible by this light and its power to illuminate body pathways darkened by tension and fear. In creating a safe haven for learning, we will begin our dialogue with the earth in our ‘pas de deux’ of sublime surrender and resistance – the cornerstone of modern dance. The students will know to expect an organic and enriching union of movement and music which will take them, seamlessly, through a progression of movement elements designed to be the creative springboard from which all the choreographic movement will come from. Bringing the physical, technical and performance tools together, will always be a goal for each class. To transform the movement and musical content into performance artistry in preparation for that final transformation to the stage, will be always be the ultimate goal. Above all, I believe the students will feel the presence of Limón’s spirit as it continues its search for new ways to express itself.

By defining the factors which have contributed to the similarities and the differences between the work of José Limón and my work, I will strive to shed light on how these same similarities and differences express the ultimate show of respect to a philosophy of movement. On one hand, there are the enduring qualities which form the basis of a philosophy rooted in the principles of organic movement as it manifests itself within the traditional concepts of modern dance. On the other hand, that same philosophy is serving as a

catalyst for explorations and creations which are pushing boundaries out into a future of unknown potential.

## CHAPTER 2 - THE BODY BEFORE DANCE

In youth, the physical body is in a constant state of growth. It is during this formative period of life where physical activity is at its most important. Gone are the days when parents would open the doors to the house, tell their children to go play but to make sure to come back to wash up for dinner. These days, children have to be lured out of the house to do even a minimal amount of exercise.

As children growing up in the 1950's and 1960's, before the advent of internet and social media, such a life existed where children would leave the house after lunch and return before dark, exhausted and hungry. In South Texas, the weather was extremely hot and humid. Back then, while people in the northern part of the United States played in the snow, South Texans walked around in shorts and sandals. The entire year allowed for playing outside. During the summer, though, since air conditioning was not a prevalent technology, the neighborhood residents spent much of their time outdoors.

For the children of the neighborhood, a typical summer day, as an example, would be gathering around the telephone pole on the street corner, a neighbor's front porch or at a school playground. Each location had its specific function: the telephone pole – used as home base for a game of tag; a neighbor's front porch – hide and seek; the school playground – for whichever sport was in season.

All of these games and many more, were physical in nature. Each required a specific set of skills. For example, to play tag, the participants not only had to be fast but very quick to change directions. The fact that someone was trying to catch you meant you had to utilize

deceptive ways to create the illusion of running one way when, in fact, you would be changing directions to go another way. The person doing the chasing had to be fast and quick as well. In addition, they had to be perceptive enough to, not only follow each move the runner was making but also, to be able to improvise movements which were, sometimes, determined by the obstacles on the street. This required a muscular structure in support of a core able to accommodate changes of directions, jumping over bushes, avoiding passing cars and the occasional pedestrian who happened to wander into the playing area.

Other examples of the games played in those days were: hide and seek, mother may I, jump rope, hop scotch, musical chairs. All of these games required coordination, rhythm, running for speed and quickness, jumping, landing, stopping suddenly, plus a strong core and the lung power to allow all this activity to be possible.

These children's games were an invaluable source for building a strong foundation in a young person's physical growth but it only served as a backdrop to the total physical and mental preparation provided by sports. These two activities, working in conjunction, made for a fundamentally sound anatomical education. As with children's games, each sport had its similarities as well as its differences. It is in some of their shared traits where the roots of this somatic information projected their influence upward towards a strong foundation from which to propel the body's physical trajectory into the future and into the world of dance.

The aspect of sports and dance which is a constant throughout each is a leg strength connected to a grounded pelvic core. These characteristics allow each player the ability to run, change directions quickly, jump, run backwards, sideways, in circles, very much like the qualities inherent in children's games. Yet, there is an even more important quality in sports

which manifests itself in the art of dance and has similar roots in children's games. In sports, the ability to defend is of utmost importance. The position of the body and what it must do from this position is where the comparisons to dance begin to take a shape.

To defend, a player must have a very strong sense of center. It is in keeping the legs bent and the pelvis directly in front of the offensive attack, where the defender will have the most success. In a defensive stance, a player must lower his center of gravity in order to have the potential of utilizing his connection to the earth's core to change directions quickly, push off on jumps, or to maintain an immovable position.

In Modern and Contemporary dance, this relationship between pelvis and earth is very similar to that of sports. It is the source of our strength and power from where we project our bodies through space. In the AML movement principles, this relationship to the earth's core accentuates the extreme depth to which a fallen body must go, before it can recoil and catapult itself out as an expression reflecting the depth and weight of its origin. Establishing a line of progression from dance to sports becomes even simpler when confronted with the task of identifying common denominators.

Of the three sports I played, American football is the most aggressive and violent. The mere fact that it is a contact sport already distinguishes it from the other two. There are positives which can be extracted from this sport regardless of its violent nature. In football, as it sometimes is in dance and in life, primitive strength and power is needed to attack. In dance, there are times when we are asked to project this same quality. It is not necessary to have played football to be able to make the body do this yet, it certainly adds to a forceful movement when a dancer can retrieve a sensation from muscle memory as well as make the



psychological connection needed for inducing the driving force behind a powerful thrust of the body.

Another aspect of this sport which brings relevancy to the similarity to dance as well as its inclusion in this paper, is the act of holding the football in the hands. The contour of the football is what distinguishes it from most other sports yet, it is this shape which gives the act of throwing, its distinct character. To throw the ball accurately and with force, one must do so in such a way as to make the ball spiral through the air with minimal resistance, in the same way a bullet rotates out of the barrel of a gun. This rotation increases the possibility for distance, accuracy and force.

The action of the body in the moment of throwing the football, is a coordinated effort between the shifting pelvis, the movement of the upper torso as it brings the arm back to the necessary point of torsion and the final thrust of weight forward creating the power for slinging the ball to its target. The success of the throw is dependent on all these factors yet, if the key element is missing, the entire process will be for nothing. This responsibility belongs to the last finger to have contact with the football as it leaves the throwing hand – the index finger of the throwing hand. This tactile connection and the action generated through the release of the ball, is what can send the ball accurately to its destination. This whole process, when distilled to its basic elements, informs the body and becomes the source material for the future, in the moment of needing to create movements for the hands.

Such is the attention to detail required to make a successful throw, much in the same way a movement in dance, a look, a mannerism in the body, a gesture can make a powerful

statement in performance just by following the nature of its origin, through the body and outward into space to the line of perception by its audience.

How does this connect with a thesis paper based on the movement language utilized in the AML methodology? The hand gesture is one of the most striking characteristics in the AML. The relationship to sports, specifically those which utilize balls, has been a very integral part of the process in dance. The impression this connection has made in the creation of dance movement has been lasting and profound. Later in this paper, the confirmation of the connectivity between sports, balls, dance and the hand gesture will surface bringing with it much more clarity. For now, it will suffice to initiate a discussion concerning the physical character of the hand gesture and its historical connection to sports and balls.

In continuing along this line, the handling and throwing of a football, as will be the case with other balls used in the following two sports to be examined, requires a very distinct tactile relationship to the ball's surface. This fact, together with the necessary coordinated effort of different body parts, makes for a unique dynamism. It is in the muscle memory of such an intimate connection to each ball's shape, which in reality are impulses from the brain, where inspiration surfaces and reveals a multitude of future hand gestures. Rooted in the original hand connection to a particular ball, this muscle memory enters the reservoir of movement vocabulary and will remain there until called upon to provide content for future dance class structures as well as source material for choreographic creations.

The sport of baseball presents an altogether different set of complexities. Baseball is not violent, confrontational and it does not require brute strength. Even though these qualities exist, they are not physically projected onto an opponent's body like football but, more so,

towards the baseball itself. The major element in this sport is the duel between pitcher and batter – the pitcher being the player who throws the ball and the batter the one who is trying to hit it. The pitcher’s objective is to overpower the batter with either the force in which he throws the ball or the cunning use of deception. The batter’s objective is to hit the ball as hard or as strategically as he can in order to advance the team’s goal of scoring runs.

Of the two roles in this duel, the pitcher’s ability to outsmart the hitter is the most important aspect of the game. Part of the arsenal in a pitcher’s repertoire, is the fast ball. It is commonly accepted that one of the most difficult things to do, in all of sports, is to hit a ball the size of a normal fist, traveling at speeds of between 80mph to 105 mph. Here is where the connection to the AML begins to increase in focus.

The pitcher’s throwing hand and its tactile relationship to the ball is unlike any other in the world of sports. There are a number of ways to grip the ball which, when thrown well, can determine the speed and the trajectory of the ball as well as how the ball behaves while it is traveling towards its target at home plate. The grip for a fastball, as well as for the other pitches, will vary from person to person. When a pitcher can master the delivery of his pitches, his chances of winning the battle against the hitter increases. This highly refined relationship to the ball is an art form which parallels that of the hand gesture in dance. The expressiveness of the entire hand comes from the need to access the diverse positions of the fingers and palm at the moment of gripping the ball before the delivery of each pitch. This is also true when speaking of the other two sports yet, in baseball, the constant repetition of these hand positions over many years, has produced an internal memory for the duplication of numerous hand gestures utilized in the AML today.

In all of sports, basketball comes the closest to the qualities in dance. In comparison to the other two sports, it is the one in which most of the game is played in constant movement. Aside from the stamina and leg strength needed to be in perpetual motion, a basketball player must be agile, quick, have jumping ability, be extremely coordinated, and possess a great handle. To have a handle, a player must master the ability to control the dribble, in other words, the bouncing of the ball off the floor, to the degree that wherever the player wants to go, the ball will go with him. This connection is yet another example of a tactile, highly sensitized relationship to a ball. At one point or another, each of the players in a basketball game will have the ball in their hands, whereas, in football and baseball, only a few have direct contact at any given moment.

Even though basketball players use their dominant hand to shoot a jump shot (a shot requiring the player to jump in the air before shooting the ball), the players who can use either hand equally well, have the advantage in a game. This means their intimate connection to the ball's surface is double the contact experience which, in turn, takes the coordination process to a complexity level of unbelievable proportions.

In relating this to dance, the tactile hand connection to balls used in sports has provided an abundant source of hand gesture material. Many years have gone into observing how each gesture stimulates a different body part to move. The domino effect created by each successive body part joining the coordination process, initiates a momentum of impulses of sublime complexity. From a simple gesture, emerges a convulsive storm of pathways energized from a source point and directed out into space in a, seemingly, incongruent explosion of opposites. This cacophonous activity of hands, arms, legs and torso has an

organic purpose which may only be revealed once the entangled movement has decoded itself and made its way to its desired destination.

According to Sarah Stackhouse, former Limón dancer, speaking of José Limón (taken from Dunbar, 2003):

*He accomplished a multi-layered simplicity through his profound musicality, skill with counterpoint and his fully dimensional forms ... in the rhythmic drive and patterning and in the spatial designs with dancers linked together, hand in hand in lines twisting through various contours; in circles with repeated step figures; and in unison movement which draws the dancers into a harmonious unit.*

Dancers are not always asked to use the entire body to express themselves.

Incorporating hands and arms into dance training is important if dancers are to consider themselves as having a fully integrated body capable of expressing through the execution of a wide variety of possibilities. In basketball, the high degree of total body awareness required to handle a basketball, comes from years of practicing within the coordinative properties inherent in having to be ambidextrous.

Having this skill is not imperative in the other two sports and, because of this, it is the one quality which elevates basketball to the level of art. Experiencing a bond between basketball and dance is more than a recognition of their shared traits but, more so, a connection rooted in the transcendent mastery of all parts of the body in quest of reaching a goal – in basketball, the highly trained individual talents of five players all perfectly coordinated in a flurry of seemingly improvised movements around the basketball court, with the express purpose of out maneuvering the defense in order to the achieve their goal of scoring; and dance, the creation of movement using multiple body parts as musical and

expressive instruments for the transmitting of an idea, image or emotion which can visually and viscerally endow a choreographic work with life.

Both sublime in their expression of the human spirit to create and excel.

. . .

Since I was a little boy, playing sports was the dominant activity in my young life. I have only two memories of my childhood which had not nothing to do with sports, the rest are recollections of times playing throughout the year. When we didn't play, it was either because of sickness or bad weather. When I say bad weather, I am referring to hurricanes because even when it rained, we would play indoors. Hurricanes had a way of knocking down power lines so that playing indoors in the dark was not an option.

Each sport had its season, each had its unique sounds and smells. The one similarity between all three was the smell. All balls were made from leather, even the glove we used in catching baseballs was made of leather. The distinctive sound in baseball when the wooden bat would hit the leather ball, is a sound like no other in sports. The collision of bodies in football is as clear and identifiable as any in the world of sports. The same could be said of the sounds in a gym when a multitude of basketballs are bouncing on the wooden floor and rubber soled sneakers from a hundred different feet are squeaking and squawking in a chorus of dissonant voices not unlike the symphony of screeches coming from thousands of black crows at dusk at the end of a South Texas day.

Many boy's dreams consisted of getting good enough to play professional sports at some point in the future. I was no different yet, unlike some, my natural athleticism distinguished me from most others. My athletic prowess was well known around the city where I grew up. Even though, I was a star player in the three sports I have focused on in this paper, the one I was predicted to succeed in was baseball.

Pitching was my specialty. It was my arm strength and my ability to throw a baseball which made it possible to become an exceptional pitcher at the tender age of fourteen. In football, I was the starting quarterback on all of the football teams I played for since the beginning of my time in organized sports. This meant I was the designated leader of the team and the only player responsible for throwing the football. In other words, my right arm was the part of my body which set me apart from many of my teammates as well as my competitors. This wonderful instrument was to be my ticket to the next level in sports.

On one summer day, early in the morning, at the age of fifteen almost sixteen, it all came crashing down. What was once a special arm, an arm which could deliver victory after victory, was now a normal part of my body, a distant memory. Not being able to raise my arm to throw a ball, a stone, nothing, rendered my right arm much less than normal. It only took one year for the neck injury, coming from the blow to my head in the truck collision that early morning, to emerge as the reason for the disintegration of my lifelong dream in sports. Its first victim was my right arm yet, slowly, the distortion of the bones in my neck caused by that monster made of metal, became the most problematic physical issue in my body affecting everything in its path. According to my instinct and the confirmation by doctors, the whiplashing effect on my neck, was the source of many, if not all, of the injuries to surface from that point in time, to this very day.

Even this setback could not totally keep me from the sports I loved so much. I could not throw as I used to but I was able to transition to different positions in each sport because of my natural athletic adaptability. Fortunately, these other positions did not require too much throwing with my right arm. When I did have to throw, I did so in very unorthodox ways. Still, I continued to excel, in spite of this disability. It became apparent, though, sports would no longer be a viable option in my future.

As I wandered through life in the last few days and months of my teenage, my connection to the reality that was sports, was slowly disappearing. Before allowing it to totally regress into a distant memory and in one last effort to reclaim past glories, I joined the basketball team of the local Junior College I was attending. Basketball, being the one sport where throwing a ball with my right arm was not a requirement, gave me the opportunity to breathe the air of a life long ago lived. After eighteen long months of not playing any sport, I was back playing the game I loved. For a moment, I was home again, in my world.

Until it came crashing down on me yet again.

This time, the fact that I came down on an opponent's foot and tore the ligaments to my left ankle, was even more devastating than what I experienced in the car accident because before, I was younger and I did not fully comprehend the ramifications of the neck injury. Now, it was very clear. I would have to live a different life, a normal life, without sports.

As I hobbled around the college campus on crutches, I made my way to my academic classes in a dazed, soulless type of existence. Being that I was nearing twenty, without sports in my life and experiencing my second injury, the future seemed bleak. What seemed like



another stab in the back by a Universe intent on denying me the rights to happiness, turned out to be the beginning of a transition which would lead me to a world like no other. A world where, since childhood, my instinct had been promising me I would go.

## CHAPTER 3 - DANCE AND MY BODY

What happened next seemed to presage the emergence of one of the dominant characteristics of my future movement vocabulary. The depth to which this last injury had taken me, was the only place from where I would have been able to feel the bottom of the world as I knew it. It is from this dark and desolate abyss where I responded with a yes to a question from a friend, “Would you like to help me with my choreography for the Spring Dance Concert?”

The weight which gravity had drained out my body and deposited in the soles of my dragging feet, now seemed to be freed from its prison at the sound of these strange yet, enticing words. Choreography? Dance? It was this moment I would, later, be able to identify as the turning point in what would become my salvation from a world without sports.

The introduction into the world of dance was uneventful or, better said, the events within this new beginning do not remain in my memory. I am sure they were of significance since I continued on this dance journey even after the ‘Spring Dance Concert’. My positive response to that fateful question, positioned me at the foot of the bridge between sports and dance yet, it would be difficult, if not impossible, to know whether I would have crossed over to the other side, had it not been for the epiphanous moment when the doors to my inner world flew open, revealing the infinite possibilities on the other side of that bridge.

The key which opened those doors is of an origin unknown to me yet, what I am sure of is its value once I entered this new world. It is for this reason I shed more light on my affinity to sports and, particularly, to the balls used in each because it was through this

tangible sense memory with the different shapes of these balls where I gained the tactile perceptivity necessary for interpreting a special moment during a dance performance. It is quite possible no one else was able to distill the meaning within this specific moment yet, for me, it was as if it was created for my eyes only.

A few weeks after that the ‘Spring Dance Concert’, the dancers were treated to a performance by the Bella Lewitzky Dance Company. I remember only two things from this concert – Sean Greene, the male dancer who moved as I had never seen anyone move before and a solo performed by Bella Lewitzky herself. The one moment which stands out above all in this performance is the ending of Lewitzky’s solo where she slowly, very slowly, walks backwards towards the stage left wing with her right hand extended out, reaching to the opposite side of the stage. As the music winds down to an almost inaudible whisper, Lewitzky’s hand is nearing the edge of the wing. Both music and hand, interwoven in a duet of timeless beauty, exit slowly into the darkness and forever imprinted into my consciousness.

At that very moment, I knew I wanted to live in this new world, where something as simple as a hand gesture could be so transformative, so powerful. As mundane as this moment on stage might have seemed to the other audience members, for me, it was the key for unlocking my innermost thoughts and feelings. The hand gesture on that prophetic night, forged a bond within me which, to this day, traces its lineage back to the little boy who would fall asleep, every night, with a ball in his hands.

From that point onward, everything became a blur. All I knew was that I wanted to dance. At that time, I was not aware of my need to replicate that moment on stage. The passing of time, together with the power of hindsight, allowed me to perceive the trajectory of that hand gesture to its present application in all my movement creations. Subconsciously, what remained with me from that evening at the Lewitzsky performance was the moment of being mesmerized by a simple hand gesture. Without defining it for myself or even being aware of it, I wanted to discover how she was able to do that. I desired this with a passion. A part of me longed for the intensity I had felt in sports. In dance, I felt I had found what I was looking for. Most of all, I wanted to recreate the magic I witnessed that night. In the deepest, most secretive corners of my being, I sensed it to be my calling.

As if my subconscious pleas to the Universe were being heard, an angel of dance came to me and gave me the gift of classical ballet. Nancy Sulik, owner of one of the ballet studios in my hometown, gave me a scholarship to take any class I wanted. I, of course, took as many as my schedule would allow. Between college and part time work, I managed to squeeze in five to eight dance classes per week. One thing led to another and each transition seemed to catapult me into yet, another level of awareness. There was no specific goal in front of me other than the immediate one at hand – how can I do this pirouette better; how can I transition more fluidly in my adagio movement; how can I land softer after a big jump. There was no future and definitely no past. All I wanted was to get better, now. I was so immersed in my daily dance tasks I did not realize I was beginning to gain fluency in this new language.

Days turned into weeks, weeks turned into months when finally, I managed to step outside of the whirlwind of my daily life and I realized I was improving and wanting more.

Dance was on my mind and in my body throughout my day and, most likely, in my sleep. In college, I could not concentrate. My brain had no space for the information being given to it in my academic courses. I decided to drop all my classes and dedicate more time to dance. Now, it was only dance and part time work at a furniture warehouse delivering home appliances.

Again, as if the Universe was waiting for me to make a decision, another transition awaited me. A fellow classmate in the ballet academy introduced me to a world that lay beyond what I had been experiencing so far in my training. This new world existed in another dance studio, in another part of town.

Two people, two distinct angels of dance were the ones responsible for creating this oasis in the middle of the culturally deficient desert we were living in. Larry and Bettye Roquemore, after spending most of their professional dance careers in New York on the Broadway musical circuit, decided my hometown was the place to raise their little daughter. To say our community was fortunate in having them share their talent, would be the understatement of understatement. They brought with them a higher level of technical expertise, choreographic talent, discipline, and professionalism. Although, these qualities were apparent from the beginning, what was not so obvious was the effect of having a male as a dance teacher.

After so many years of training in sports with young men and being coached by strong male figures, I was, once again, feeling the presence of a similar energy. Not taking anything away from the high level of physicality exhibited by my female dance counterparts, having a male dance teacher was a gift. The masculine yet, dignified presence of this man in

my dance life cannot be overstated. Fortunate only begins to express his impact on my dance career.

My mind exploded upon seeing his work for the first time. Not only was the level of the ballet program higher than the other studio, the dancers he and his wife had trained in such a short period of time, had personality to go along with their technical prowess. I was beside myself. The level of excitement was mixed together with confusion as I had a decision to make. Do I make the transition to another studio or do I remain with who got me to the point where I am?

The next day, I returned to their studio and experienced what turned out to be the deciding factor. Mr. Roquemore began teaching a Matt Mattox jazz class for the advanced dancers. Having worked with Matt Mattox while in New York City, he brought his extensive empirical knowledge to the students. Again, I was blown away. The day before, when watching the ballet class, I was left with a sense of excitement knowing this level of dance existed in my hometown. Watching the Matt Mattox class, did much more than that.

Upon seeing the students move to the beat of the drum Mr. Roquemore was marking for them, I experienced a shift inside of my being. It was as if my center of gravity had taken on human qualities and found itself gesturing towards earth, paying homage to it with every deep lunge and every plié. The forceful accents by a fluid yet, powerful pelvis, took me back to a time in sports when bodies would be flying and falling through space, attacking, retreating, in a primordial confrontation with gravity. This transference of consciousness was subtle in its intensity yet, seismic in its eventual effect on my future in dance. For the first time since beginning to dance, I was transported to the arena I knew best – sports.

The positions of the body, the approach to technique was all coming from the little I had gathered from my training in ballet yet, there was an element which had been missing from all the classical technique I was learning. The missing factor was the primal connection to the ground. What I was seeing and experiencing as I watched Mr. Roquemore lead the class, was a relationship to the earth which I had always known in sports but was missing in my ballet training.

In this class, the plie was more grounded. The attack in movement was sharper. More and different parts of the body were being utilized. Ribs, hips, head, arms and legs all were being integrated into movement which resonated deep within my somatic memories in sports. Intuitively, I knew this was my next step. This was the place I needed to be in order to connect with the part of me which, secretly, longed for the physicality of sports. I was now in my new home.

The transition from one studio to another was not an easy one. What I had gained from my introduction into classical ballet, was invaluable. Being able to see the path before me may not have been possible had I not experienced this initial training. It was clear, though, this new road was leading me to other areas in the world of dance which required my full attention.

In this new space, not only were the physical demands of the body much higher, the capacity to absorb more difficult information, was constantly being tested. Between what the body and mind was being asked to do, came the world of creation. Mr. Roquemore nourished my desire to create. He provided time, space and, above all, the dancers for my beginnings in choreography. The dance education I was receiving was covering many areas and each area

was built on a strong foundation of technique, professionalism and high aesthetics. The lofty standards were set forth by the demands of the directors and the dancers followed tirelessly and obediently with the utmost respect for the art of dance and its leaders.

With each layer of my dance education came the realization that this path in dance was beginning to take on a focus and a promise of a future for me. After two years of working with the Roquemores, absorbing the qualities which had placed them in very high regard within the regional dance community, I began to entertain the possibility of expanding my avenues. The timing could not have been better.

Ballet Hispanico, a newly formed modern, jazz and flamenco company from New York City, was touring through several cities in the United States and Corpus Christi was one of many stops. After seeing the performance, I visited them backstage. Upon meeting the director, Tina Ramirez, I asked if I could take company class the next morning. After taking class, I was extended an invitation to join the company in New York City.

My journey in dance was now taking me into a future I was open for yet, not sure if I was prepared for. I accepted the invitation. And so, began my life as a professional dancer. What was once a dream reserved for the athlete in me, was now becoming a reality in this new world of dance.

I was going to New York City.



## CHAPTER 4 - NEW YORK CITY

The trip to the ‘Big Apple’ was the beginning of many firsts - the first time flying on a plane; the first time seeing so many lights flying over Manhattan; the first time experiencing snow; the first time traveling on a subway; the first time working as a bus boy in a restaurant; the first time having to walk miles to return to the apartment after a long night at work; the first time getting injured while dancing.

My first professional dance job was cut short by an injury which happened when I began to rehearse with Ballet Hispanico. Upon my arrival to NYC a couple of days after Christmas, I had to begin working with one of the most difficult choreographers in New York City. Talley Beatty was commissioned to create a new work for the company but because of a scheduling problem, he had to begin creating even though the company was to be away on a short two week performance tour.

Being that I was the newest member of the company and since I had not learned the repertory, I stayed behind to work with Mr. Beatty. His approach to choreography was based on gut instinct. He would try several ways to do a phrase of movement but, inevitably, the movement’s success depended on whether the dancer could make it work. In other words, I imagined he knew exactly what kind of power and energy would be required for a particular phrase of movement and if the dancer could come close to his vision of what it should be, the movement belonged to the dancer.

I would often see Mr. Beatty stare off into the distance, past the walls of the studio, past the buildings across the street and into a distant past when his body could do anything he

asked of it. I imagined him reaching out to the memories which remained to him, as if summoning the ghosts of younger versions of himself to come forward into the present to show these young dancers how to do it. I imagined these dialogues with his past because, invariably, he would get out of his chair, as if in a trance, and proceed to show us how it should be done. The power he was able to will from his body was extraordinary. He was in his late fifties when he worked with us yet, he showed us glimpses of how powerful a dancer he once was.

He moved fast, in spite of his advanced years. His movement was difficult. And because I had never done modern before - hinges to the floor in a matter of one second and turns on one knee with a leg in arabesque were foreign to my body. Nevertheless, since my background in dance was strong, I was able to copy his movement, despite the fact I did not know what I was doing technically.

Through the entire choreographic process with Mr. Beatty, I gave him 100% of my energy, my concentration and my body. I never let up in rehearsal. At the end of the creation period, we said our goodbyes. To this day, I believe he paid me the ultimate compliment when he said 'Thank you'. I do not believe I am a victim of an over active imagination when I say, he had that look in his eyes. The look he had when he would stare off into the distance in silent conversation with ghosts from his past. When he said thank you, it was if he was thanking the part of me, that once lived in him. I made his choreography mine and his face radiated gratitude.

Aside from thanking me for my work, he asked if I would be interested in working with the Alvin Ailey company sometime in the future. He said I should not be satisfied where

I am and proposed to talk to Alvin about me. At the time, I had not realized the true meaning of a Talley Beatty endorsement. Later, it became apparent a few words from this man were worth their weight in gold.

Working with him during those weeks of creation and being a bus boy at the restaurant at night, extracted a toll from my body. My knees developed tendonitis, an issue which continues to plague me today after almost forty years. I labored on through weeks of rehearsals with the company, through performances in the city and tours around the country. Inevitably, the moment arrived when I had to admit to myself, I could not continue with these painful knees. I left the company and returned to Texas after less than one year in the dance capitol of the world.

Little did I know at the time but a very important and decisive lesson was beginning its journey from its point of origin, through to the recognition of its value in the future. No amount of knowledge had the capacity to be transferred from one source to the other unless time and the environment could be negotiated and be allowed to experience it. As Tim Ingold puts it "Indeed it may not be until long after a story has been told that its meaning is revealed, when you find yourself retracing the very same path that the story relates. Then, and only then, does the story offer guidance on how to proceed." (Ingold, 2011 p. 156)

This life experience happened during my first dance related injury. It brought with it memories of my two sports related injuries as they hovered over me like somber clouds casting shadows on an otherwise bright and sunny South Texas environment. Still, I was determined to overcome this temporary setback and return to the world of dance I had already begun to cultivate. It was clear, this time in New York City, even at a distance, was providing

me the incentive and the nourishment my injury needed to heal. My positive attitude knew no limits.

Meanwhile, my two angels of dance in my hometown, provided me with a support system built on love and care and the opportunity to choreograph while my family was the foundation which grounded all of it. My recuperation period lasted several months, shorter than what had been proposed by the doctor. My preparation for my return to New York City was in place. Talley Beatty's recommendation got me a work scholarship at the Alvin Ailey American Dance Center and I was off into my next adventure in my dance journey.

A few days after arriving, I immediately got into my schedule at the school. My work scholarship consisted of morning duties cleaning the toilets, dressing rooms, studios and administrative offices. Upon finishing my tasks, I could take any of the dance techniques being offered at the school. Ballet class was the first class of the day and everyone was required to take it. It was clear, though, the greater emphasis was being placed on the Horton technique since this was what Alvin Ailey was basing most of his creative work on. As was the case with me, I thrived in the Horton classes. In that period of time, I believed Horton was what best allowed me to express myself.

Within a couple of months, I was invited to join the Ailey II company. Not only could I stop having to clean, I was also given a weekly paycheck. The daily schedule changed drastically. From taking three or four classes a day, I was now only able to take a morning ballet or Horton class followed by all day rehearsals.

Talley Beatty clearly knew what he was talking about when he proposed I work with the Ailey organization. The movement was physical, very challenging and the subject matter in the choreographies was closer to my history growing up in a predominantly Hispanic and black neighborhood. Most of the music in the repertory was new to my ears yet, some of it was directly linked to my youth. Because of this, as well as my affinity for the lines and power generated in the Horton style of moving, I felt at home during rehearsals and performances.

After two years with Ailey II, I auditioned for the main company. The company was looking for two men and a woman. I was one of almost four hundred dancers in the audition. After a few days, six dancers remained. I was one of them.

I have often thought of why things happened as they did. Each time I have thought about the moment in the final stage of the audition when my right knee let out a loud cracking sound, I have wondered what it would have been like to have been an Ailey dancer, traveling all over the world, performing Ailey's repertory, being celebrated by Kings and Queens, Presidents and celebrities. But, it was not to be. The traumatizing effect of being the last of six dancers remaining after hundreds had been sent home and then, being carried out from an Ailey audition on a stretcher, placed in an ambulance and taken to a hospital, was a wound my body and mind had to live with for a long time.

The five inch scar on my knee became a daily reminder of yet another setback in my dance journey but, it also became the symbol for the effort it was going to take to recuperate and get back into condition. New York City and the life in dance I had already discovered to be my passion, was waiting for me. Nothing was going to stop me in this journey. I became a

vegetarian with the intent on allowing my body to heal in the most natural way. I jumped into my therapeutic program with one thought in mind – get back to New York City. My confidence level was higher than in the previous injuries. I wanted to continue in my search. I was hungry.

When I first began to dance, my love for the stage and for performing was awakened. After dancing with Ballet Hispanico and Alvin Ailey II, I had begun to experience my passion for performing in the world of modern dance. This world within a world stimulated more questions than answers. I did not know what the questions were yet, I could sense my somatic history had no reference point from which to draw conclusions other than the acknowledgement of having experienced the raw, visceral connection to sports. My instinct was whispering inside my head, urging me forward, beckoning me to search for the answers to questions modern was placing in front of me.

From the moment I had the surgery, to the day I returned to New York City, four months had passed. The speed of my recovery surprised everyone, especially the doctors. My level of excitement for my return to this new world of modern dance was growing daily. I was rolling with the enthusiasm of life.

Then, the pain returned.

The excitement withdrew into optimistic caution. This cautious optimism retraced its steps backward from where it came and ended up in a state of confusion wondering what had happened. In the end, the pain forced me to sit in front of a desk as a receptionist in a jazz

dance school on Broadway where, daily, I saw hundreds of dancers pass by on their way to dance class.

Sitting on the outside watching as dancers are in a studio moving and sweating in class can be dispiriting. It is during these times when a person, who is injured and having to refrain from doing what they love to do, has to find a way in which to channel all the pent up energy and, sometimes anger, in order to move forward with hope and remain with a good attitude. All the good energy which had accumulated in preparation for the return to New York City, was now being used in trying to stay positive and productive with the physical therapy sessions.

This injury was clearly different from the other ones. This time, my mental state began to weaken and I could feel myself falling into a pessimism which was working against the healing process. Even though I continued with therapy, the progress was coming too slowly. It was during this state of mind when I reluctantly answered an audition call for dancers for the José Limón Dance Company.

The company was searching for a man and a woman. Entering the space where the audition was being held, I was hoping the negativity which had been following me around for weeks, would remain outside the door. Instead, it sneaked in past the hundreds of dancers with numbers pinned on their chests. As everyone enthusiastically warmed up in preparation for the first stage of the audition, I could sense my cloud of skepticism searching for me. I managed to evade its grasp by putting on a face of detachment bordering on indifference. It did not work. After trying to warm up in the midst of all those dancers, the insecurity over my operated knee overwhelmed me. I walked out and left the Limón audition behind me.

A few months passed during which I not only had to recuperate from my knee injury but I also had to rebuild the foundation upon which my confidence had always stood on. Day by day, the strength and focus slowly returned and with it my love and passion for dance. My recovery from the vacuity of my daily existence signaled good days ahead. And, as my confidence level was doing battle with my insecurity, the Universe felt it necessary to recreate the scene of my last defeat – Limón Company announced another audition.

This time, the directors were looking for two male dancers. At this point in time, I was close to being whole again. The knees were better and stronger. My physical therapy sessions were showing results as I was able to minimize the pain in the knee. The moments when the pain did return, were soon resolved by my daily pep talks with the six inch scar on the operated knee, reassuring it that everything would be alright.

It turned out, not everything was right. I could not find the Limón studio. I walked up and down several blocks looking for the building. After an hour of this, I finally found it and went up on the elevator of the old building where Limón organization had taken over an old sewing factory. The elevator doors flew open revealing the dance studio right in front of me. As a matter of fact, in order to get to the other side of the studio, I had to cross in between the auditioning dancers and the directors and company members. I did not care. I can honestly say, I was pissed off for not being able to find the studio but, more so, because my knee had gotten swollen from all the walking.

So I did not care that I was walking in on an audition. I walked across the studio, put my bag down and started to change my clothes. After changing, I slowly laid down on the



floor and started to warm up. Thirty minutes later, fairly warmed up, I stood up, looked to the directors and waited. They waved to me to join the others.

I'm not sure what must have been on everyone's mind but, years later, one of the associate directors told me that the moment she saw me enter the studio, walk across, change, and start to warm up, without caring that the audition had already started, she had decided she wanted me in the company. Of course, it did not hurt that she liked the way I danced.

One week later, after four rounds of auditions, I was in the José Limón Dance Company.

## CHAPTER 5 - THE JOSÉ LIMÓN DANCE COMPANY

Entering into a rehearsal period with a new dance company can be an intimidating experience yet, learning the Limón repertory had a way of calming any fears or anxiety. The works radiated an aura of reverence and calm in the way the directors and company dancers taught the choreography to the new members.

Having this type of open and generous environment was an important element in my healing process and my learning process. Even though this is the atmosphere which is closest to my nature, I came to realize years later that, through osmosis, the period of working with the Limón company was, indeed, the major influence on why I chose to infuse that same energy into my classroom and rehearsals. Slowly, my work with the company, as reflected in each rehearsal, in the connection with my fellow dancers, was establishing itself as the foundation for the time when my own work would need to stand on its own legs. For now, there was much to do, new choreographies to learn, friendships to nourish, dances to perform.

The rehearsal environment continued with an openness and a generosity of spirit yet, it was intense and demanding. The new members had to learn several choreographies. The works to be learned for the 1980 New York City Center season were: ‘A Choreographic Offering’, ‘The Moor’s Pavane’, ‘The Unsung’, ‘There is a Time’ and a piece by Doris Humphrey called ‘Shakers’.

Each choreography carried with it a difficulty and a responsibility. The individuals in the process, from those who taught the repertory to those who learned it, acknowledged the singular opportunity of being involved in living, breathing works of art. Of all the pieces

being prepared for performance, 'A Choreographic Offering' and 'There is a Time' seemed to best illustrate the unique characteristics of the fall and recovery principle inherent in Limón's works. For dancers, like myself, who were not familiar with the technique behind these works, each movement was a discovery on how not to push but, more so, to patiently wait and let it come to you, in other words, to coax it out of the body. Since weight plays a major role in all of Limón's works, to endow a movement with the quality of having emerged from the earth's core, gives it a humanity, a depth which resonates even more when its journey outward towards a point in space, is infused with the weight of its origins. These two extreme points, these qualities can be found in abundance inside these two choreographies.

Of the two works, though, it could be said 'There is a Time', by nature of its subject matter, has more of a sense of pathos running through it. Because of this, there are more moments of movement density as compared to the more lyrical 'Choreographic Offering'. Both offer profound lessons in the calibration of movement nuance yet, the time spent in surrender to gravity, gives 'There is a Time' the distinction of being more earthbound.

One of the most important and memorable lessons acquired in all of my dance career happened while on tour performing 'There is a Time'. After arriving late to the theatre, putting on our costumes and immediately going to the stage was our only option. There was no time for warming up. As we stood in the opening circle of 'There is a Time', waiting for the curtain to go up, one of the veteran dancers saw me struggling with the fact that I was not sufficiently warmed up. As we held hands in this circle of humanity, she whispered, 'Breathe, let your spirit warm you up.'

At that very moment, her words had not made any sense but I soon discovered, as the curtain went up and the music began, that in entrusting myself to the moment I, instinctively, sent a breath flowing through my entire body, dissolving the tension which my mind had so adamantly insisted on protecting. Releasing this tension, allowed my body to experience the true weight of my skeletal structure making it possible to settle onto the earth, creating a bond which I would, otherwise, not have experienced. Being closer to the ground, being more receptive to its energy, I was able to calm myself down and warm my body from within.

It was one of the most fulfilling and, definitely, one of the most memorable performances of my dance career. Present, is what comes to mind, I felt alive.

In the opening circle of 'There is a Time', I learned one of the greatest lessons of all. I learned surrender. Not the surrender in the total relinquishing of power but, rather, the surrender to the idea that total resistance to the fundamental force of nature that is gravity, is a battle we will never win. The key to unlocking the secrets of dance and life lies in embracing our relationship with the forces of nature. In reality, total resistance to gravity only strips us of our humanity, leaving us invulnerable to the power of the moment, to the primeval source of life. Therefore, in leaving ourselves open, we can begin to unravel the mental wiring which has entrapped our daily lives and our dance, distancing us from our primordial right to an alliance with the earth.

We, as dancers, begin our technical training with the desire of reaching a level of competence which will allow us to execute movement successfully. In classical ballet, especially, we approach the execution of movement from the perspective of resisting gravity,

to the extent of, depending on the teacher, pushing ourselves away from the earth, creating a barrier to a potential flow of energy.

This act of resistance is so ingrained in our everyday ballet training that it takes on an air of presumptuousness. We do not question it, it is law. The end result is how we, in fact, distance ourselves from a very important and essential energy source. The earth not only serves as the stabilizing force anchoring us to the ground by way of its gravitational pull on our physical bodies but also by the power of visualization in creating a mental root system, providing us with a reservoir of strength and energy harvested from such a visualization.

Throughout my entire dance education up to that moment on stage, my body was programmed into thinking that to dance, was to resist gravity. The belief was that the eternal struggle between earth's pull and our human bodies, was a battle we must always try to win if we are to dance, or even to exist on this earth.

But, a whisper was all it took. A breath in just the right moment in time, together with the visualization of its journey to the necessary tension points in the mind and body, was enough to release that which was preventing me from experiencing true alignment of the body's skeletal structure and the natural distribution of weight in its return to earth. The distortion of the mind's disjointed thought processes had interfered with the body's connection to the stage itself. Unnecessary muscle stress was robbing the body of its true weight that evening, making it difficult, if not impossible, to bond with the floor, much less, warm up.

Our late arrival to the theatre on that day, started off as a premonition of a bad performance waiting to happen yet, in reality, it set forth a series of events which led to the catalytic action of allowing surrender into my world of dance and, subsequently, into my life. This, in turn, created the momentum for the intuitive need of the mechanism able to support the surrender of this new found weight. It was the birth of an altered perception of my plié. And for that, I have Jennifer Scanlon to thank. Yes, the *whisper* was what started this exploration but as for how to get that feeling back again, it was Jennifer. Her advice for loosening up an old injury in the ankle was to simply, breathe. Breathe into the injury, don't tense when you do plie, let the oxygen enter it as you plié and bit by bit, you will have your plié. She was right. My ankle got better and I was able to demi plié deeper than I had ever done so in my life. It was the beginnings of the apparatus which, in the future, would be at the roots of my evolution in dance. The acceptance of surrender in my dance would have been short lived had it not been for the gradual implementation of this mechanism into my body culture.

To this day, my preparation for stage is an ongoing reaffirmation of my connection to the earth. From there, I go forward, searching for integrity at every level of my warm up process. In seeking complete body release and a total awareness within that release, I am giving myself to the surrender of my body to the ground so that it may give back to me some of its power for my push through onward into my journey in dance. This preparation is a meditation, a physical dialogue with the stage floor, in an attempt to open the lines of communication for an interchange of energy.

Within the context of this communication, I seek to establish a mobile root system which can stabilize me, free me to inhabit a movement and the risks that may come with it,

free me to live in any place, at any given time. Then and only then, can I experience true value and presence in this somatic journey on stage and in life. “In wayfaring, by contrast, things are instantiated in the world as their paths of movement, not as objects located in space. They are their stories. Here, it is the movement itself that counts, not the destinations it connects.” (Ingold, 2007, as cited in Ingold 2011 p. 156)

Such is the journey when navigating the labyrinthine byways leading to a full realization of any dance piece. One such piece is ‘Unsung’, Limón’s paeon to eight Native American Indian chiefs. This work is the embodiment of the physical, mental and spiritual nature of movement. Danced in silence, with only the rhythms of breath and of the feet striking the floor, it was the most physically demanding piece to perform.

I remember one performance waiting in the wings to go on stage. Each man did a solo after which the others would come on to escort, assist or, otherwise, help them off stage. I was Geronimo, the last of eight Indian chiefs. The beginning of my solo was the most difficult part. As simple as it was, doing it well was exhausting. Getting through the first part was the biggest barrier to overcome, an affirmation of life over matter. Because this piece was physically challenging, it became a true test of the dancer’s mental strength. Breaking down the walls of one’s internal limitations, can open the doors to fleeting moments of euphoria and, as transient as these moments may be, they are potent and endowed with a power to carry one through the most difficult of times and the most challenging of solos.

Such was the case, each time, waiting in the wings to do battle with the inner thoughts and forces walled up inside this encasement we call our body, our mind. And such is the stuff of life. Two of my most memorable lessons learned in dance and germane to life, took place on the stage. For this reason, it will always be my belief, that to know the true value and

beauty of dance, is to experience it and live it on stage. The greatest, wisest teacher I have ever encountered, is the performance stage. The heightened state of being, experienced there, is the only true arena in which the dance student can put to test all they have learned in the studio. As stated, by V. N. Vološinov in his extraordinary work of 1929, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, when referring to language as not being passed on from generation to generation. Language “endures as a continuous process of becoming. Individuals do not receive a ready-made language at all, but rather they enter upon the stream of verbal communication; indeed, only in this stream does their consciousness first begin to operate” (Vološinov 1973: 81).

Were we to transpose the words ‘language’ with dance and ‘stream’ with the performance stage, then we could infer his words to mean - only on the performance stage would a dancer’s “*consciousness first begin to operate*”. Dancers do not “*receive a ready-made*” phrase of movement, instead they “*enter upon*” the performance stage and into the only environment where the movement takes on weight and significance. Before this point, the movement passed on from teacher/choreographer to student/performer, exists as a “*continuous process of becoming*” and has not begun to be, simply because the dancer has not yet lived it on stage.

And herein lies an integral component of my thesis, in its simplest form. A main component in the method behind my class is to align the student with certain signposts, in a way, providing coordinates for reaching a path. Moving towards that path and then finding it, the student has, in effect, created his own path by virtue of having lived it. As a teacher, the time and effort used in creating movements for class exercises is always applied to forging tools from sense memory of moments on stage with the hope that students will then use these



tools to navigate through and create their own reality in dance and in life. For it is in the application of those tools and the capacity of inhabiting movement within an environment, where dance takes on the qualities of life as both are being lived, not just copied and reproduced.

Put simply, after the learning process in the studio is complete, the reaffirmation of life as it is being experienced on stage, is the organic next step. As expressed by Tim Ingold, “The process is rather like that of following trails through a landscape: each story will take you so far, until you come across another that will take you further” (Ingold, 2011, p. 154).

The learning process within the José Limón Dance Company continued. From the initial contact with the dancers, the directors and, very importantly, the repertory, I transitioned into the actual taking of Limón technique classes. Upon entering the company, the repertory was my first encounter with Limón’s movement. I was thrown into the lion’s den, in a manner of speaking. Because of this incredibly busy period, there was very little time for consistency in taking classes. Now was my opportunity to learn the principles from the bottom up.

What I came to realize was that the qualities used onstage performing the company’s repertoire had a compelling effect on the way in which I was able to take the daily Limon technique classes. Each movement seemed to sculpt a pathway of energy leaving in its wake, traces of a story, my story. For those moments, I could feel I had lived there, even if for a fleeting instant, I was there. At the time, I was not conscious of any such attempt on my part yet, I could not deny the sensations running through me while taking class. It was as if I was moving in slow motion and could see the traces of my own movement in space. Pliés were

sinking deeper, fulfilling themselves, suspensions were living longer, hand and arm gestures were more articulated. Granted, hindsight takes on a different shading once a person passes a certain point in time yet, there is no doubt, a shift was taking place and I was holding on for the ride.

The ride lasted for a few more years during which there were more New York City seasons to prepare for, more tours, more residencies, more guest choreographers, more of everything, especially much more of New York City itself. The pathways we travel in our journey in this world are always in service to the next one. It could not have been said better as when Ingold wrote, “Indeed Wayfaring always overshoots its destinations, since wherever you may be at a particular moment, you are already on your way somewhere else” (Ingold, 2007, as cited in Ingold, 2011, p. 156).

My moment in New York was coming to an end. After almost ten years of creating a ‘meshwork’ of lines all across Manhattan and Brooklyn, I was on my ‘way somewhere else’. Not only was my instinct tilting the ground I was walking on, shifting me onto another direction, but the pathways of others traversing through mine, created seismic shifts from which I was not able to regain my balance. The breaking point came in the form of a shadow from below the human stratum of existence. Its blackened outline racing through Central Park searching for prey. As I sat on one of the many slopes in Manhattan’s park by day and human jungle by night, more shadows raced by my line of vision as if trying to outrun the incoming twilight. Squinting in an attempt at separating what was real and what was imagined, the percussive soundscape created by running shadows trampling on dry grass, came to a sudden stop twenty feet in front of my slope. In the entanglement of black shadows enmeshed in the obscurity of dusk, life took its last breath.

Death had crossed my path, taking New York City's fascination with it.

## CHAPTER 6 - EUROPE: LABORATORY FOR DANCE

*In Wayfaring, the thing is a movement alongly in the world,  
creating itself endlessly in the process (Ingold, 2011, 156).*

Transitioning from having lived in a world of ghosts in New York City, I was thankful of Europe's embrace of this 'wayfarer'. Up to this period of time, my work had remained in obscurity outside of the United States borders. There was no conscious desire or plan to put myself out there as a Limón specialist because, in reality, I was not yet there. I was fortunate to have been able to grow inside of the Limón family but, in reality, I was still the little brother who had just recently gotten rid of the training wheels to my bicycle. The information filtering through my body coming from all the input during my Limon experience, was making its way through my body where, eventually, it would be setting its roots into my own movement foundation as it would aspire to create a synergy which was to transform how my body recalibrated and interpreted any somatic information passing through it.

It is difficult getting a sense of when this process completed itself. It would not be until later when I would realize that a personal movement evolution would not have been possible without this filtering process having deposited the essence of Limón's movement principles into the already existing movement foundation created by my physical history. In tracing it back in time, I remembered its origin. The whisper which led me to surrender my tension and fear on that evening before the performance of 'There is a Time', was the true origin of my alliance with gravity and Jennifer was the giver of the gift which has continued to give to this day. The years having lived inside Limón's repertory, granted me access to this

tradition yet, I know I had to have earned it. The only way to be worthy of such valuable knowledge was to have put it through the test of time and, against the pressure of opposing forces made up of social trends and fashions within the dance world threatening to delegitimize any roots reaching into traditional modern dance. As I found myself experiencing another transition in dance and in life, gravity just waited, waited patiently until I was ready.

First, I wanted to dance, to teach, to experience a new part of the world I had only gotten to know through two performance tours with Limón. So, after my departure from the Limón Company and before going to Europe, I make a quick stop in my hometown where I find out my mentor and his wife have retired and gone off into the country to live on a ranch in the hills of Central Texas. The void created by their departure, somehow, sweeps me up and deposits me right in the middle of the ‘culturally deficient desert’ I used to live in.

Two years later, I find myself still there. After having formed a small dance company with old friends, after having created choreographically uninspiring works, after the disillusionment of not getting sufficient government support, I leave the desert on a plane to Europe.

Arriving, I hit the ground running. Through the activity of my teaching in workshops, festivals, dance companies and institutions within a close knit network of several countries and organizers in Europe, I managed to increase the perimeter of my sphere of recognition. With each year that passed, the people I met, the countries I lived in, the dancers I worked

with and the teaching work which sustained me and my desire to travel, the evolution of the dancer, teacher and choreographer in me, began to take place. It was a slow process, one whose origins may not be able to be discovered unless a few boxes of old videos are dusted off, digitalized and screened to see what changes were happening and when they were happening.

The one true barometer of the direction my work was taking, could be said to be my choreography. Even though the choreographic side of me would have to stand in the shadows while my teaching would take center stage, creating remained my first love. Through circumstances which were, sometimes, dictated by the economic climate of the time, choreography had to wait patiently for the right moment. Teaching became the go to source of income and the means by which to move through Europe.

The growth of my teaching network may not have been possible, or at the very least, may not have happened as fast were it not for the parallel growth of the dance festival I became a part of in Vienna, Austria. The Impuls Tanz Festival, formerly the Internationale Tanzwochen Wien (International Dance Weeks Vienna) had its beginnings in 1984.

From its origins with six teachers, twenty classes and a generous amount of dance followers, the festival grew yearly to the dance festival behemoth it is today, thirty three years later. A major part of my teaching network throughout Europe can be attributed to the growth of Impuls. Therefore, with each layer of expansion through the years, came more and better dancers. This was significant because the influx of stronger, more seasoned dancers awakened the choreographic fire inside of me. Inevitably, regardless of whatever economic

climate existed, the need for creating overwhelmed any reservations I might have had about working for no financial support.

The desire to create was becoming stronger. I needed to find an outlet for this energy. The outlet found me. What began as a short choreographic project in Bratislava, Slovakia in 1988, turned into a collaboration which has lasted till today. The initial creative period generated many choreographies which have been performed through the years by several generations of dancers from the Bralen Dance Theater.

Working with this small, amateur dance company was significant for being the breeding ground for many of my movement creations. In reality, the dancers were the true reward. There were a few but two, in particular, stood out among them all: Katarina Vlnieskova and Mariana Paulikova. Of the two, Katarina remained the one I most connected with. I am not the only who says it but, if there were to be a female version of myself, it would be Katarina. I have always maintained she danced my work better than I ever could.

As I make my way through this period in time, I feel a sense of appreciation knowing I had dance mentors in my hometown, a person who I never met yet, who gifted me with the ground beneath my feet where I could set my roots in modern dance, a dancer sent from the stars to dance on earth, but also, the wisdom and instinct to accept and share these gifts with the love and passion we all have for the art of dance. Many more have entered this landscape, each on their way to fulfilling their own paths, paths which have and will continue to have a direct effect on the surface of interplay between each and all of us.

While arguing for the importance of movement from place to place, Ingold states (2011, p. 152)

*That matrix is, in effect a tangled mesh of paths of coming and going, laid down by people as they make their way from place to place ... The integration of knowledge ... takes place ... along the paths that take people from place to place within the matrix of their traveling.*



## CHAPTER 7 – CLASS METHODOLOGY

There are constants in the movement progression of each successive exercise which form the basis for movement in the Alegado Movement Language. These constants are: *the use of breath* - to release the tension in the body making it possible for the skeleton to have its true weight, *the fall* – with the skeleton shifting or falling, *a generous plie* - the muscular structure must prepare itself to protect the body by using its strength and elasticity to protect the body from the fall, *the recovery and suspension* – again, the muscular system must be pliable enough to spring back up from a fall and thrust itself to a suspension of the body weight.

I have just stated the constants which must exist in the movement progression of each successive exercise and I began with these principles because these are the elements in my dance class which I must be able to feel and sense in the music before making my selection. My choice of music will determine the direction and complexion the class will take. I know what I want, when I hear it. I cannot say what movement will surface for a particular kind of music I choose but, all I know is that the music has to move, to dance. It must possess a special character, the character of the principles. It must reveal something unique. I want to find music which will create a sensation of possibility inside of me, a possibility of adventure, of mystery.

My search might reveal twenty musical possibilities for class. Out of those twenty, I will feel fortunate if I can end up with two. If I am extremely fortunate, I will remain with four pieces of music which have the potential of taking the movement on four individual journeys. Each of these musical journeys will be forming the soundscape of a class whose

goal is to help me in - creating movement components which will guide the students to an understanding of the principles; maintaining the presence of the principles while I create and develop movement themes; determining which piece of music has the potential of bringing all the developed thematic material together and take it into its final transformation – the choreography at the end of class.

. . .

The creation of class begins one of two ways: play the music which I have selected for the very first exercise and improvise or, if I have not yet found the right music, begin the hand improvisations in silence. Either way, the process of creating class always begins with the hands.

For the hands and arms to feel the freedom to travel through space, it is imperative the body is removed of the tension which can block the flow of oxygen, especially the tension built up in the articulations of the body. Once this tension free environment is achieved and the arms are allowed the freedom to move through space, the impulses sent through the body can have a more direct impact. The hands now have the power to affect change by initiating a movement or, by being the beneficiary of it through an impulse from a different body part.

Depending on the day, depending on the environment created by the music I have chosen or the silence before hearing music, my hands might feel like drawing circles in space by simulating the cleaning of a table: one hand, then the other, then both the same direction, then each going opposite directions. On another day, a sport memory might surface bringing with it hand gestures replicating the spinning of a basketball on one finger while the other

hand is tapping the spinning ball around its axis. And yet on another day, the hands might want to simulate the movement of planting a small tree by digging a hole, taking the dirt into each hand and then releasing it by letting it trickle back where it came from.

These initial gestural musings are only three examples stored in the somatic movement vault of my past. Each of these sets of gestures can form the basis for the thematic material of a class structure whose level of difficulty will be dependent on what the hands do from those simple beginnings onward.

If they are to form the basis for a beginner class, for example, then the hands will keep the simple activity of cleaning a table with a circular motion or spinning a basketball or digging a hole in the ground. To add more texture to the initial gestures, the beginner might be introduced to one or two more basic arm and hand movements which are utilized for most of the beginner level classes.

If they are to form the basis for an Intermediate level class, then the hands might, as an example, keep the same activity of cleaning a table with a circular motion but, what was done before in unison for the Beginner level, is now done in canon. When the canon of hands and arms is the initial spark, this creates an asymmetrical reaction in the body which then creates deviations of patterns and energies sending impulses to different parts of the body which, in turn, sends other impulses to other parts of the body telling them what to do. During the span of this progression, the pelvis is gliding along as it assists the rest of the body in fulfilling the progression of thematic hand/arm material begun earlier in the class from its basic components.

In applying this process into an Advanced level class, a canon of hands and arms is but one aspect utilized. The gestures of the hands become more complex because what was done before by two individual hands moving at the same time in the same direction in a Beginner class and in canon for an Intermediate class, is now becoming a duet of hands, one dependent upon the other to complete an evolution which rises to an even higher level of complexity and coordination.

In adding this partnering of the hands to a phrase of arm movements that not only includes canons of hands but can also include canons where each hand is doing something different. This, in itself, creates a coordination nightmare for anyone. Once the dancer begins to execute these hand and arms gestures and the variations derived from the initial thematic material, on top of a foundation that, itself, is going through its own pathways and functions then, we are taking this asymmetry into a multiplicity of divergent energies. This foundation I speak of is, of course, the pelvis on down through the legs and feet. This, truly, is a subject in and of itself. It will be covered in time. For now, though, it is important to review an element used in the AML and in the Limón technique as well as in other modern techniques and styles – the spinal column as it relates to the use of the torso.

The release of tension throughout the entire body is a prerequisite for all parts of the body when desiring to experience well-articulated movement generated from a source point and onward through a sequential process based on the power of momentum. It is especially important when referring to the spinal column. In freeing the spine from tension, the head can now have more and better communication with the pelvis, more specifically, the coccyx or tail bone. This relationship of head and pelvis, is applied to some techniques in modern

dance, it is important in the Limón technique and it is very important and integral to my work.

In observing other modern classes, the relationship between head and pelvis is not as often required. An example would be in the Cunningham technique. The curves forward and tilted to the sides, are long and often extending outward to the point of having to use a muscular effort in maintaining the curve. The pelvis, in this shape as I can imagine, must be needing to tilt forward to a certain degree in order to compensate for the torso extending outward. This suggests to me that the torso area may be in a state of negative tension in trying to maintain the outward extension of the curve - negative tension referring to unusual or, sometimes, unnecessary muscular use in order to maintain the shape of a part of the body which is resisting the natural pull of gravity. Were it to be positive tension, then the muscular effort exerted would be for augmenting the shape of that body part which is in surrender to the pull of gravity.

In observing other Limon classes, the curve is higher in the spinal column than it is in Cunningham's work. In addition, there is less use of the back muscles in trying to maintain the curve. Having said this, I have witnessed a class taught by Risa Steinberg, a former member of the Limon company. The extension of the forward curve is not as pronounced as that of Cunningham's yet, I did notice an overarching shape, especially to the sides, which suggested an additional use of muscle to create this overarching effect.

In my work, I ask the students to allow gravity to take the head and torso downward so, naturally, there is no muscular effort needed to hold a shape other than what is needed of the core to support the weight of the torso being off center. The head rolling down the front,

to either side or even tilting back as it opens upward, should correspond directly to the pelvis falling down to the earth in its own surrender to gravity. Whether rolling downward or opening upward, the sequence begins at the top with the cervical vertebra, more specifically, the atlas (C1).

In order for this coordination to work, both pelvis and head must have a destination, a point at which they each reach bottom at the same time. For the pelvis, its bottom is the earth by virtue of the demi plié reaching its maximum depth. For the head, the point to which the head rolls down might vary from person to person but, generally, its journey downward leads to the area between the ninth and eleventh thoracic vertebra. It is in this area where the energy from the earth, rising up through the legs, entering through the coccyx and traveling up the lumbar vertebra, meets the head in its downward fall. It is at this point where the forward and side curves of the torso are created and where they make their second home.

To know the point of meeting between these two opposing energies, is to enter into a world where modern and contemporary dance begins to distinguish itself from other dance forms and techniques. It is in understanding this phenomena where we, as dancers, can transform an idea such as the opposition of energies, into a life affirming philosophy of dance and of life.

These opposing energies are essential as they are the life forces which, when activated, make possible our mobility as human beings. It is in the acceptance of gravity and the conscious resistance to it, which identifies us as human. Without our ability to negotiate the balance between these two opposing forces, standing up to walk is not possible, much less dance.

With reference to dance, these two opposing energies are, in fact, utilized constantly yet, not always spoken about. For the AML in referring to the torso in curve, this point in the spinal column is integral to the coordination process. In its simplest manifestation, the combined weight of the pelvis and head falling in unison, hitting bottom at the same time, is directly and proportionately related to the muscular resistance required to support the plie with elasticity and strength in the moment of impact on the floor.

This, in a nutshell, is dance and, in essence, life.

The forward curve, which is based and shaped on top of the point, between the ninth and eleventh thoracic vertebra, at the point where the torso and the head are at their heaviest, is only possible if a third energy source is present allowing the full weight of the head to exist. Arriving at this point is not just a matter of rolling down the spine with head leading and the visualization of the opposing energy traveling from the center of the earth up through the feet and legs and continuing into the coccyx and up through the atlas and out through the top of the head, it is also imperative that another action be involved so as to create a trio of energies. Of the three energies involved, one is a mental image of light flowing upwards through the spine. The other two concern weight and of the two, only one of them is real weight involving the head and torso, the second one is the visualization of weight falling down through the coccyx duplicating the pull of gravity downward.

Without this visualized weight falling downward, the pelvis has no true reference for stabilizing itself. Were it to deviate from that perpendicular fall towards the earth's pull, then this would suggest that the visualization process is not achieving its desired purpose. Instead, the pelvis would no longer be falling but rather, it would be moved off its course by the

contraction of a muscle or muscle group. Concurrently, it is in the opposing energies traveling up and down the spine where the spinal column can achieve its perpendicularity. When this is achieved, then the head can have a true reference point for the gravitational pull to the center of the earth, continuing its descent with the pelvis as they both meet at the bottom of the plié.

Seeing this from another perspective, every negative effect on us as human beings has the potential of dragging us down and minimizing our desire to turn things around by converting the negative into a positive. The physical manifestation of this negative effect is the head facing downward as our body sags with the weight of its weakness. Gravity is taking us down.

Our instinct for survival takes over and we resist this negativity. We choose life and so, therefore, we pick ourselves up, we straighten our sagging, drooping body in resistance to this difficulty in our lives. We survive to live another day.

Dance is a constant reiteration of the struggle between these two forces. To stand, to move in space, to jump, to balance on one leg, to turn, to do all these things we must resist the force which wants to take us down. We must survive. We try not to fall. The attitude we use to negotiate these two constants in our lives and in our dance, will determine how we move forward.

In ballet, as it is with all living beings on earth, these opposing energies are in constant activation yet, the attitude and nature of our resistance in ballet renders us invulnerable to the force of gravity. We resist it and we distance ourselves from its reality so,



therefore, our lack of acceptance makes it less possible we will manifest any outward appearance of weakness. We are strong, we are resisting, we are better and stronger than the force of gravity. That is not reality. It is an incredible sight to behold, the ballet dancer winning the battle with gravity. If it were not for the superficiality of the relationships in the ballet narrative, perhaps this battle with gravity would have more of a humanity.

In modern dance, the early 20<sup>th</sup> century dance pioneers wanted to strip away these superficial representations of life and reality. They chose to personify the two forces in nature which made life what it was. Gravity could, in fact, bring you down. It could take you to the edge of the bed and make you sit with stooped shoulders wondering how you would get through the day. It could slam you to the floor. It could. But, the resistance to it pulls you out of the hole, out of the water, and back into the light of day. It straightens you up. It wills you to think about tomorrow.

In effect, the rolling down of the head, sequentially down the spine, beginning with the atlas vertebra, is the sweet surrender to the reality we live in. The plié and its strength of will and sensitivity, is our choice to live in this reality, and to live well. Anything that happens in the periphery, should not bother this dynamic, this belief, this conviction. One hand can shoot out in a diagonal, the other hand sculpts a circle in the air, each of them taking off in different directions taking arms, elbows and shoulders with them. Yet, in spite of all this movement thrashing around us, our head, pelvis and plié remain calm, strong and supportive.

If we can find a balance between surrendering to the depths of the reality we live in, yet trust in our will to survive to see another day with desire and passion, then we will be able

to go fearless into the night knowing we can trust. If we can dance with this sense of fearlessness, then we can begin to take chances in our dancing, we risk where, normally, we wouldn't – all because of the knowledge we have deep inside, that we trust our balancing of these two energies which are in constant opposition to each other.

It is for this reason I want the content within the class structure to reflect the reality of our actual body weight falling to the earth so that our survival instinct can kick in and do what it has to do in order to survive the fall, a fierce, violent fall if necessary. Every element I include in the class is there for the purpose of achieving a goal – the goal of awakening our passion for expressing what is in the deepest, most secret corners of our being while, at the same time, discovering the tools and mechanisms which can allow us the freedom to express this passion.

Providing an open channel through the spinal column for the head to initiate the process of rolling down and up the spine, is the breath of life because it must be present within us when we are going down, as well as when we are shooting up to a suspension. Because of this, being aware of this open channel in the spinal column is a process I prefer to have the student begin while on straight legs. As the fluidity of the head moving up and down the spine increases, the fluidity of the hands and arms working their way through the pathways of the thematic movement material, can have a clearer passageway to work their magic. This is done for the purpose of allowing the mind and body to remain calm while the meditative rolling up and down of the spine is incorporated into the layering of the thematic hands. After the essential element of spine awareness is introduced into the body, it is time to find out how hands and arms might be affected when the body enters into the next layer of focus.

The releasing of tension in the body allowing freedom and mobility to the arms, legs and head serves another purpose: the equally important aspect in the progression of layers within the class structure as the skeletal system is now able to experience its true weight. It is at this point where the muscular system comes into play by supplying the necessary strength to hold the skeletal system together. The muscles must be finely tuned to the task at hand because too much tension applied could result in a body unable to move fluidly, too little tension could be the reason for a body collapsing to the floor. It is for this purpose that the muscle fibers be calibrated to such a fine degree as to strike a balance between the opposing energies needed in the creation of a system which can support the body's total weight.

In striking this balance, the stage is set for the special piece of the puzzle in this particular triumvirate of characteristics helping to define the AML. The plié now enters into its role as facilitator of what has come before it: the hands which have activated a movement sequence; or the hands which have been activated by an impulse generated by a domino effect through the body; the body whose skeletal structure has been freed of unnecessary tension. It is time to test the combination of the two elements - the arms and plié – when activated simultaneously.

The question is whether the hand and arm movements will disrupt the elasticity, strength and sensitivity of the plié or, whether focusing only on the execution of the plié can disorient the coordination of the hands and arms. Each aspect is observed while the dancer's ability to multitask is tested. Maintaining the independence and integrity of each element of the pelvis/arm coordination is essential as the arms interweave within the parameters of a plié with weight distributed equally on two feet.

If the plié is the facilitator then, the pelvis is the motor, the bass player with the pulse of the earth, it is in the coordination of these two elements where this collaboration manifests itself as the identifying force characterizing the AML.

This dynamic is only as valuable as the following step in the structuring of the class, allows it to be. The shifting of weight from one foot to another is information the alliance of plie and pelvis will have to digest and translate before its true value becomes a reality. The skeletal structure should be allowed to fulfill its potential of providing power resulting from the momentum of its falling weight to earth and its rebound back out into space. The plié, being the facilitator, must now allow the shifting of the pelvis and the independence of the body's extremities the freedom to exist in quality and harmony with each other.

As minimal as it may seem, the coordination of arms and pelvis on top of two feet, without sacrificing the integrity of either, is one thing; to accomplish this coordination on one leg as the body is transitioning in space, increases the level of difficulty and invites the element of unnecessary tension in the form of fear and insecurity. At this point, alleviating the elements of fear and insecurity becomes the highest priority. Regardless of the level being taught, this anxiety constricts and restricts forward progress. The journey towards comprehension, execution and mastery of any movement at any level in the classroom is of utmost importance. Therefore, finding a solution to a problem involving insecurity and fear, must be addressed.

In relationship to my work, I have found repetition to be key. This is how the progression of the thematic movement material in my class gains importance. By introducing movements stripped down to their basic components in the early stages of the class, the

repetition of these exercises allows the student the opportunity of becoming acquainted with the basic material when running it through the process of slowly applying it within the context of working on two feet. When descending into plié, rising to relevé or the falling of the torso off center, the student again experiences the execution of the arm and falling torso coordination within the secure foundation of standing on two feet.

This prepares them for the following layers where the shift of the pelvis along the floor gives the student a sense of the potential of power generated from the momentum of the pelvis falling through space. Eventually, the inclusion of the torso in this equation will involve the execution of a number of off center variations, including swings of the torso from side to side, while the pelvis is moving through space. In adding this element, we can begin to appreciate, much more, the difficulty of multitasking and coordination as it enters into even higher levels of mental and physical expectation.

In repeating the movements involving all of these added elements, the student becomes accustomed to its potential power therefore, minimizing its danger as well as the fear of falling. Additionally, the choice of music used for a particular exercise, has the potential of providing further support when applied in such a way as to use the powers of visualization by relating certain characteristics in the music directly to the corresponding muscle group responsible for a specific movement task. This visualization and its application, could lend the necessary support by allowing that musical/physical movement, to come alive.

An instrument such as a cello, for example, playing a certain chord, could be the key for opening the door to a wealth of hidden powers. The same idea could be applied, possibly to an even higher degree of efficacy, to a string quartet. Connecting the image of the muscles

used in the act of a plié, to string instruments such as violins and cellos, could provide some assistance when using the supporting imagery. In addition, since the music for each class is selected beforehand, it is rarely the case where the movement is already created before the music. The majority of the times I am creating class, I am doing it after I find the music. I will listen to the music and create all the different layers in the moment. So, concerning the music supporting the movement, since I will be creating the movement according to what I hear, I will create movement which is musically motivated so, therefore, movement will be naturally supported by the music.

On the rare occasion that I create movement before finding the music, the movement will have been created in silence, to the music in my head. If I can find a piece of music which duplicates that feeling I had, then I am a lucky man. If not, I live with the music I find and, eventually, make it work.

In providing a musical support while executing the movements, the student is aided in discovering a natural, organic rhythm which can help them in gaining confidence. With each layer introduced, either involving thematic arm material or additional movement influenced by this thematic material, the parameters of each new layer of the class structure begins to expand. Layer by layer, repetition after repetition, the student has progressed with the movement and is, eventually, not overwhelmed by it. Through the years, through trial and error and much observation, when the brain is placed in an environment of safety and well-being, it responds positively in its capacity to absorb new and more difficult information.

Taking this progression even further, the capacity to multitask takes on an added degree of difficulty when the transfer of weight, the use of the torso and the inclusion of the

thematic arm material is incorporated into the equation. On top of the shifting pelvis, is the head coordinating its descent as it rolls down the spine joining the pelvis at the bottom, by a very receptive pli . A hand shooting outward like an arrow and returning to where it started, done in canon as both hands playfully follow each other in space around their host, can redirect, reshape and reset the character of the original thematic movement material without it losing its integrity. Any small alteration such as these two hands executing a simple movement in canon, can exponentially increase the difficulty level of a class, generating complex harmonies as they swirl around the axis of the body like bees swarming around their queen.

My movement is released from within by the music. It is the source of inspiration, whether it is manifested in a soundscape or by the music of silence.

On imagining every living being and their paths through life, according to Torsten Hagerstrand (Ingold, T. 2011, p. 80)

*... 'the environment' reappears as an immense tangle of lines ... every constituent ... including humans, plants, animals and things all at once as having a continuous trajectory of becoming ... one could think of the tips of trajectories as sometimes being pushed forward by forces behind and besides and sometimes having eyes looking around and arms reaching out, at every moment asking 'what shall I do next'? The entwining of these ever-extending trajectories ... comprises the texture of the world – the 'big tapestry of Nature which history is weaving'.*

The observance of this dynamic is consistent throughout the different levels of my work in the classroom – from the beginner level, all the way to the advanced levels. Since the creation of a class, most always, begins with playful improvisations of the hands, and being that each hand has a life of its own, it is essential that every part of the body remain in a high state of alert because at any given moment, the unpredictability of the hands can go off on

such divergent tangents which can initiate a domino effect of actions in the rest of the body. In this respect, the body must remain receptive and in ‘a continuous trajectory of becoming’, with each body part asking the other ‘what shall I do next’?

The principles constituting the structure of a beginner class are the same regardless of the level. The relationship between pelvis and arms remain a constant. The arm movements and their evolution are introduced as variations of the movement themes, then applied to the already existing progression of each stage of each class level, determining the level of difficulty and complexity. And with each class, most specifically the lower to middle levels, comes the insecurities and fears, as well as the methods by which to solve them. Once solved, the quality of the movement takes on a vitality and humanity which comes from a body and mind translating and transforming the elements of life and of dance, into a genuine expression of passion and light.

In the training of a dancer, this progression should have its moment of completion, its fulfillment. For some dancers, it will be rewarding taking the class process and having it culminate with a choreographic sequence incorporating all the elements of each layer of the class structure. Yet, for other students, the fulfillment of the class process will need to go further into the realm of the performance stage where the journey in dance, as reflected in life, follows a trajectory from its beginnings to the moment when dance is the reflection of life, on stage.

This examination has taken me to places where I have unearthed clues and beliefs coming from the voices of others who have provided me with insights into the value of the knowledge I have gained and have been able to share.



As a reflection of a belief on the validity of my own work, Ingold wrote (2011, p. 171):

*To copy the gestures is to follow the same advice that would be given to a novice practitioner in the performing arts as in any craft. Novices learn through repetitive practice in which they are required to copy exemplars shown to them ... To copy from a master means aligning observation of the master's performance with actions in a world that is itself suspended on movement. And this alignment calls for a good measure of creative improvisation. There is creativity, therefore, even (and perhaps especially) in the maintenance of an established tradition.*

The values I carried with me had always sustained me in moments of doubt. As a student and as a performer, I was of the belief that to do another person's work - their movement material - was a challenge and, in a sense, a feeling of honor. To absorb that person's movement to such a degree as to imbue it with my own presence, was a passion of mine. To go even further, my extreme joy at being able to interpret the music, was a love which excited me to no end. In the words of Doris Humphrey when she referred to Pavlova and Nijinsky, "They did not dance to music. They were music." (taken from Dunbar, J. 2003).

I want to be the music.

Now, in these times we live in, having this as your wish, relegates one to the age of dinosaurs. I, for one, would much rather be a dinosaur. I want to be the music as I want the music to be heard and seen through my dance.

## CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSION:

Deconstructing my somatic history has served the purpose of better identifying the components from each stratum in my life and in dance which have had an impact on the evolution of the Alegado Movement Language: the movement of my youth and how it was rich in resource material from which to draw from; every person, every student and every teacher coming into my life and how they played a significant role; the effect sports had on me in the shaping of the very important characteristic of the hands and pelvis; the different dance techniques entering into my body, having an opportunity of being absorbed into the mainstream of somatic information during that very important period in New York City; the laboratory of explorations in Europe where I conducted my experiments in dance; all of these have contributed to my growth.

Going through this self-investigation has proven essential to the reassessment and the redefinition of my work in the face of contemporary dance paradigms of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. With my roots in modern dance extending into the traditional techniques of the past, I had come to think of my work as becoming somewhat antiquated. Even though I have considered myself as having my finger on the pulse of today's contemporary dance world, the strength and validity of those roots were being tested. If for nothing else, this investigation has breathed a breath of fresh air into beliefs I have long held close to me and which were in danger of entering into a state of inertia.

Now, I am moving forward with a renewed confidence in my convictions in the classroom and in the choreographic realm. Invigorated, I stand firmly with my feet on the foundation which is nourishing my work in dance and which continues to rekindle my belief and my passion for the preservation of the humanity and the light missing in the world of dance.

My own work, is a reflection of this belief and passion for the world of interpretation whether it be movement or music. Therefore, delving into an investigation which could shed light on this very subject, became more than a paper to inform, it came to be a reaffirmation of the very fiber and texture of my world in dance and in life. Excavating deeper, I came to realize my connection to the work of José Limón, had left an even more profound impression on me than I had already imagined. Not only were my own movement principles influenced by the synergy of our meeting but also, my sense of humanity was given a clearer voice.

It is in the generosity of spirit inherent in the works of José Limón as well as in the very foundation of his movement principles that I pay tribute to the life of the man whose presence in mine, nourished my work, giving me the resources with which to tap into my reservoir of movement, housing all the imprints of children's games, the sports of youth, the stories in hands and all that my life has encompassed.

Thoughts on the nature of humans inhabiting each other's worlds Ingold writes (2011, p. 161):

*The life of every being, like the rhizome of a plant, issues forth into the world as it proceeds ... The lives of inhabitants ... are not inscribed upon the surface of the world but woven into its very fabric. As they meet up with one another and go their various ways, their paths converge and diverge to form an ever-extending, reticulate meshwork.*

Just as profoundly, the threads which have made up Limón's story and mine, have been woven into such a meshwork as to seem undistinguishable from each other. In reality and truth, the fiber is and remains one we share yet, the fabric which has emerged is as distinct and unique as the times and environment we grew up in.

The ground where I stand and where I have sowed the seeds of the principles of my dance, is nourishing me in my desire to create movement which reflects the world of my time on this earth. This is all we can and should do, give a voice to all that is inside in order to say firmly and clearly to all who can hear, see and feel – this is how the music danced in me; this is how movement played its music through my body; this is the story resonating within me.

After all is said and done, all we really want is to communicate.

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