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Themselves Becoming: A Dance Film Exploring Authenticity in Movement

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Peer reviewed|Thesis/dissertation

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SAN DIEGO

“Themselves Becoming”:  
A Dance Film Exploring Authenticity in Movement

A Thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements

for the degree Master of Fine Arts

in

Theatre and Dance (Dance Theatre)

by

Lisa Frank

Committee in charge:

Patricia Rincon, Chair  
Liam Clancy  
Manuel Rotenberg  
Yolande Snaith

2015

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The Thesis of Lisa Frank is approved and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication on microfilm and electronically:

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Chair

University of California, San Diego

2015

## DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to all of my students - you encourage me to become the greatest version of myself. I continue to expand myself so that I can assist you in your learning, growth, transformation and expansion.

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## LIST OF SUPPLEMENTAL FILES

File 1. *Themselves Becoming* Still Shots From Film

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

“Themselves Becoming”:  
A Dance Film Exploring Authenticity in Movement

by

Lisa Frank

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

University of California, San Diego, 2015

Professor Patricia Rincon, Chair

“Themselves Becoming”: A Dance Film Exploring Authenticity in Movement is a dance study that investigates human vulnerability, authenticity and healing through the work of Authentic Movement, Reiki and video explorations. This investigation asks the question, “What is dance, and what can it be?” Through a series of one-on-one sessions with people from diverse backgrounds and of diverse ages and occupations, the research opens participants up to experience the possibilities of what movement is and can be to them.

# Themselves Becoming: A Dance Film Exploring Authenticity in Movement

## Research

I have come to know that dance is everywhere and that there is no exact answer to what it is. I believe that there are as many definitions and meanings of what dance is as there are people on the planet. There is a unique dance of each and every individual person, derived from how they move, how they experience their physical embodied experience, and what *their* movement is to them. There is an even broader dance that supersedes human movement, and that is the dance of the elements, the earth, the solar system, and ultimately the dance of the universe at large. Dance is movement and movement is breath and breath is life. Dance is life. In her *Reflections on a Metamorphosis*, Mary Starks Whitehouse speaks so clearly on this:

*It seems to me now that what I do is no longer dance, though it has moments of pure dance in it. It has turned into Tao, a way, a becoming. Movement, as I know it now, touches people in their lives. It opens up their individual sense of themselves and teaches them that they are humanly valuable to each other. It is the discovery of the growth process that is themselves becoming. The word 'becoming' moves, it is the movement aspect of eternity. Being is the essence; becoming is the movement of the essence. After all, it is Life that dances.*

This snippet had a very big impact on me as I began my Thesis process. I love Whitehouse's concept of *becoming* as the in-motion version of *being*, as if *being* were the image and *becoming* the motion picture. I also love Whitehouse's work in general, and of the many different ideas and practices I have been exposed to during my time at UCSD and in my life in general, Authentic Movement has been one of the most impactful. For

me the *being*, the essence about which Whitehouse speaks, is exactly what we mean when we speak about Authenticity. Authenticity is presence, honesty, openness, realness, freedom. In the world of professional performance and performers these words are often used and often sought after, but perhaps rarely felt. My own personal practice of Authentic Movement had given me more access to these feelings personally than most of the other practices I had worked in, so I had a very personal connection and belief in the vision and work of Authentic Movement, as well as its power to give practitioners access to self-awareness and connection, and all of the much sought-after qualities of experience listed above. When I was deciding what to do for my Thesis work, though I had no conception whatsoever of what the work would turn into, I knew that I wanted Authentic Movement to be a central component to my creative process.

One of the other amazing aspects of Authentic Movement is its capacity to be truly healing for participants. Throughout my time at UCSD I have delved very deeply and broadly into the healing arts - various practices whose sole purpose is to heal. Beyond my practice in Authentic Movement, I have deepened my studies and practice of Yoga, Reiki, Acupuncture (as a recipient), Thai Massage, Meditation, Structural Integration (Recipient), Jin Shin Acutouch, & CranioSacral (Recipient), to name a few, all of which can be classified within the Healing arts. What is the art of healing? This is a question I have thought about extensively, and a most relevant question as I was developing my Thesis research. Clearly there are many methods that have evolved over time which offer a path toward healing. For one, the need for healing seems to imply the existence of some type of injury or trauma that disrupts a preexisting state of balance, health, or homeostasis. Usually there is pain derived from these injuries, traumas, or

imbalances. For me then, healing is the process of changing a state of imbalance, injury, or pain into a new state that resembles the state of balance, health, or homeostasis which existed before the injury occurred. There are many, many different types of injury or imbalance that can occur for humans. They can occur quickly or slowly, as well as on different planes of experience, such as emotional, energetic, spiritual, or physical.

Perhaps the almost endless ways that a human can sustain injury is reflected by the almost endless methods which humans have developed to heal injury. How do the healing arts work? A common thread I have noticed throughout most of the aforementioned modalities is releasing from exerting control over one's body - i.e. relaxing - and allowing the body to heal itself. The power to heal itself is one of the body's most magical though very evolutionarily practical properties. For instance, one of the most healing of all the healing arts is the practice of sleeping. Sleeping is the ultimate state of releasing control over the body, and most of the healing work that anyone does in their life probably occurs while sleeping. Thus the process of healing in general is perhaps not so much about *doing* anything, but rather *desisting* from doing anything, even if it is just for this 15 minutes or 1 hour, so much so that the self has a chance to restore any type of damage that it may have sustained. I believe this is the healing element that I intuitively noticed about Authentic Movement. There is no thing the body *has to do*. It is not about exerting any type of control over the body. Authentic Movement is about honoring the body and letting it be one's guide. There is no pressure to look any sort of way or do anything. It is just time to focus on the body in the current moment, to get out of the way and let it do its thing. Healing can occur when awareness of self, body, mind, breath, patterns, habits, thoughts, tension, can become more clear and when time is

taken to relate to the body and mind in space. The outside witness allows this to be even more clear, even more tangible, and makes it safe to be seen and heard in this supported environment. This creates expansiveness and openness in the physical/emotional/psychological experience. My commitment to the art of healing has only grown stronger and deeper throughout my time at UCSD, and when I was in my early phases of Thesis development, I knew that in addition to using Authentic Movement in my process, I wanted my work to explicitly focus on fostering the art of healing for the participants.

Another line of questioning that I became committed to early in my process dealt with how I could make a dance work that was not exclusive. I was thinking a lot about traditional dance making and who gets to belong in dance communities, and who dance belongs to. When I think back, I have always noticed it, but during my time at UCSD I became increasingly and upsettingly aware of an ugly truth inherent in many of the dance communities I have been part of throughout my adult life -- the truth of hierarchy and exclusivity. In my life I have always dealt with it but perhaps I could not put my finger on it, but I started to really see and understand the damage that can be caused by unfriendly and uninviting situations that can be produced by an exclusive, self-contained, hierarchical group. It was during this time while I was discovering the negative side of belonging (or *not* belonging), that I decided to create an art-making experience that was at its core about inclusiveness. It began in my second year of this MFA program, and for the creation of *cannot be done alone* I decided that I was going to stand by my value of including everyone who was interested and signed up, and turn no one away. I found myself with 23 undergraduate students with whom I was to make a work of community

choreography. This value of committing to including everyone and everyone having a fair right of belonging was only strengthened by the beautiful experience I had with those 23 students during *cannot be done alone*, and I remained committed to it as I began my thesis research. However, I wanted to see if I could take this concept even further. With *cannot be done alone*, though I did not turn anyone away, I did still open my invitation to members of my beginning Contemporary dance classes, and so everyone at least had some experience dancing. With my thesis, I wanted to not turn anyone away still, but I wanted an even broader, more diverse group of collaborators. I wanted to include everyone -- people who had never been trained in dance, and people who were of all ages, backgrounds and disciplines. I wanted to explore what dance and movement could be created with people who hadn't studied ways of moving or with people who are not necessarily trained in any technical context. I wanted to evade any type of imposed pretense. I wanted to show how being embodied, being aware of the experience of being in the body could be art, could be something that goes even deeper than art, the things that most artists are seeking - perhaps truth or beingness or suchness or aliveness. I wanted to not just say it, but actually put it into practice, my belief, and the belief inherent in Authentic Movement that dance can and should be for anyone and everyone. So I added to my evolving research question and asked myself "how can I create dance that gives value back to the community that doesn't block or exclude anyone from the experience?"

Beyond the unattractive quality of exclusivity, I also began to notice that I responded with anxiety when I began to imagine producing a traditional performance work, and all of the pressure along with it. Regardless of how much I have tried in the

past to avoid these pressures, they have always suffused my past experiences with putting on a performance. I have grown less and less eager to perform throughout my time at UCSD, and largely in part to the growing awareness of and distaste I had been feeling from these pressures. Some of the specific pressures I began to see and articulate were the pressure to: please an audience and to make everyone like me, to be relevant/interesting/meaningful, to be entertaining, to be memorable and to garner recognition for my work, to receive criticism from myself and others. I began to realize that these pressures have always been there lurking, ever since I was a child, and they have always haunted and in fact even terrorized me! Where do they come from? Perhaps too large a question for this paper, but I am certain that anyone with any experience in the performing arts would easily understand. I found these pressures to be ingrained in the culture of production all throughout my time at UCSD, which is natural because these pressures are perhaps a natural and necessary part of running and maintaining a world-class Playhouse and big-budget Theatre program. Perhaps this was good for me to experience because, though it did create anxiety for me, it challenged me to be aware of what was going on and to finally acknowledge to myself that that is not what I want. I don't believe that those pressures are necessary, and I don't like the feelings they create within me. It challenged me to understand myself more deeply, and I am thankful for that. However, I did realize that there was something incongruous about trying to make a traditional performance, with traditional choreography imposed on dancers, with rehearsals and production meetings and the criticism and all of the pressure, when I already knew I wanted my work to center around Authentic Movement, healing, and non-judgment. Thus another limitation to my research emerged, and that was the need to

make a “work” that was as unencumbered as possible by all of the pressures of performance, that was not about being performative.

One of the most valuable lessons I have learned in these last 3 years at UCSD has been to take the time to discover what my values are, and then live them, and in so doing, my teaching, creative process, and my way of showing up in the world will all be a reflection of my personal value system. It was an important discovery for me when I realized that I did not know the specifics of what I valued, and from that moment on I began observing my life and my decisions and witnessing myself from a larger perspective to begin to uncover what it is that makes me tick, what it is that inspires me, motivates me, encourages me, lifts me up, sets me into motion. When I started seeing those tiny moments and fragments come up in life, I started to notice patterns: I like people; I am attracted to honesty, openness, and uncovering truth; I try to have honesty and realness in my own life and I am attracted to those qualities in other people. I relate to people who are honest even if their life is messy, or if they know what they’re striving for but can’t quite figure it out, or people who aren’t pretending to have it all figured out. I like this sensibility because I believe that is where we begin as children - we are okay with not knowing how it’s all going to pan out within a 5 to 10 year plan. Children are present. Children effortlessly embody Whitehouse’s concepts of *being* and *becoming*. I like adults who know how to still be present. I like teaching movement to adults who are either beginner movers or who are untrained movers because they are very present in their experience of their body moving in new ways. A trained dancer can do beautiful and incredible movement in their sleep or with their eyes closed, but are they actually being present or perhaps are their muscles remembering the hundreds and thousands of



times they have done that same movement over and over again. What I'm most interested in with my creative work and with my teaching and facilitating is to bring people into the present moment through the vehicle of their bodies and bring awareness to their body in new ways. What I love is when patterns get challenged, both movement patterns, social patterns, personal habits and patterns, etc... through the challenging and changing of patterns, we find growth and transformation. That is what I'm looking for with my work. Growth, transformation and personal discovery. By the time it was time to start thinking about my Thesis, I knew that I had to make a work that *originated* in every sense and capacity from my own personal values.

Thus through these primary motivating factors my main research question emerged and made itself clear: How can I create a work of dance which:

- uses Authentic Movement as a primary practice in the process of generation
- provides a healing experience for the participants
- is based upon a principle of true inclusivity, and is open to ANY person who is interested in participating, regardless of age, ability, or level of experience or training with dance or movement
- is not meant to be performative, in the sense that it is free from the pressures to please, entertain, garner recognition, change the world, be criticized, etc.
- originates and is dictated at every level from my personal values, as opposed to any superimposed values that aren't actually good for me.

Starting from this question, my process then basically unfolded. I decided to work one-on-one with participants as opposed to in a group. After I realized my research question,

a secondary question emerged, which was: how does a healing experience actually affect a person's quality of movement and embodied physical experience? I decided to "choreograph" a structure where I would meet with participants one-on-one and in which I could start to get at this question. My idea was to create three sections - during the first section, the participant would do Authentic Movement, witnessed by me, during the second section, the participant would receive a Reiki healing session from me, and during the third section the participant would do another session of Authentic Movement. In addition, I recorded the audio of interviews with each of the participants to get a sense of how the Reiki work affected each participant's movement. I filmed all of the Authentic Movement sessions as well. This was to create a record of and perhaps study any perceived change in movement quality, as well as to provide footage to work with when compiling the final result which would be shown during Thesis Works. Working with the medium of video was perfect for me for this project because it allowed for maximum freedom from the pressures of performance that I was trying to avoid, though there still was some amount of pressure required in order to participate with the production schedule and all of the technical managers, which I accepted as necessary.

I had no idea about how the final video product would turn out when I first began. I initially thought it might turn into more of a documentary form, which was about telling the story of my research questions more explicitly and showing the results, but as I worked I realized that though my research was very powerful, it was not scientific enough to really warrant that type of documentary exposition. The more I edited the footage I was enraptured with the footage I had captured of the movement itself. I experimented with overlaying the audio of my interviews, as well as my own recorded

thoughts, but I wasn't happy with the results. It seemed to reduce, not enhance the power of the moving images I had recorded with the camera. I also decided to do some recording with myself in a few different locations beyond the studios at UCSD. As I included the footage from the beach and the geodesic dome, I realized that the video was evolving into a form much like an Authentic Movement session itself (which I liked) - not necessarily going anywhere, not necessarily building to anything or saying anything, a succession of moments, moment to moment to moment - being and being and being becoming. The footage from the beach helped me to reference the larger dance which is life itself about which Whitehouse speaks.

With these sessions I choreographed, I wished to use my knowledge in dance and embodied practices to benefit people who are not dancers and perhaps do not have any sort of embodied practice. For me, dance is so much more than something to watch the professionals or the trained bodies do. I want to share what I know through a safe and experienced facilitation to provide people with some tools to be more tapped into and aware of their physical experience and sensations. I believe that by bringing awareness to the body and its sensations, one is opened up to a more dynamic and rich lived experience. When people tap into the knowledge of their own bodies, they have more tools to trust their own intuition, their own gut reactions, they get a renewed sense of trust in the self and that trust is far more valuable than any other's outside advice or opinion. I am also interested in the component of being witnessed in an open and non-judgemental environment, and what that can give people. Being able to have a moving and sometimes emotionally charged physical experience is something that is not available to people on a regular basis. Our culture trains us to keep it all in, and to fear expressing emotion. All

the emotions and the experiences of our days and our life are stuck within our body and held up tightly. When one is given the invitation to investigate oneself and one's emotions physically, a lot can come up to the surface that they didn't even realize was there. It helps to have a witness who is supporting them through that experience. "I see you, and I see that you feel, I see that you are experiencing, I hold the space for you to learn and listen to your inner awareness, your inner witness, your inner wisdom and expression."

I also feel very inspired by my own personal experience witnessing the effect that receiving Reiki had on the movement quality of the participants. As I mentioned, my process was not scientific in the sense that I can present data on the effect that Reiki had on the brain, etc. However, I can say that I witnessed a huge difference in the quality of movement in many of the participants as I witnessed the Authentic movement after the Reiki and compared it to to the one before the Reiki. I could perceive a general slowing down. I noticed a general relaxation of the sympathetic nervous system and a more pronounced presence of the parasympathetic nervous system. Everyone felt calmer, happier, and less anxious during the second session of Authentic Movement. I am excited and inspired by what I witnessed to continue with this work and see how I could deepen these results and share them with even more people in the community at large.

In general, I am very satisfied with how my work evolved and with how it turned out. I believe I accomplished all of my objectives and I believe the work had a positive, beneficial effect on everyone. From the person creating it (me) to the participants whose experience allowed them to get to know themselves more deeply and who in large part were exposed to something new and different from anything than they had ever done, to

those witnessing as audience - for they were able to witness the project participants in an honest, open state and were able to share in their personal and authentic portraits of strangers. The audience sees that dance is more than entertainment, perhaps more than art, even. Dance and movement exploration and embodied experiences can lead to so much more. It can be healing, it can be community building, it can be a vehicle for self-awareness which leads to more mindful ways of living and being in the world, which leads to more connection, which leads to more rich, honest, freeing experiences. This work can have a ripple effect out from its center into the world for even more people to be affected and who can benefit from their friends and loved ones taking the time to do something good for themselves and therefore something good for the world.

## **Process**

There is so much more to dance and movement than entertainment, art, and the ego. I wanted to explore more deeply my belief that people can benefit from being led through embodied experiences which are not at all concerned with aesthetics or appearance. I want to lead people through experiences that honor who they are and do not expect them to adopt movement that is unnatural to them for the purpose of looking a certain way. My goal for this work was to uncover and ideally avoid all the layers of pretense and expectation around what a dance artist's work *should* be. So prevalent in the world of "high" performance there is a hierarchy that is set up and agreed to which asserts that some movement is better or more beautiful than other movement. I wanted to make a work that asserts the opposite. I wanted to encourage the audience to become witnesses as opposed to critical judges, and see that all movement from a diverse array of

bodies can be and is beautiful, interesting, and meaningful. Even more, I wanted to discover a way for all of the people I was working with to gain something tangible and real from the experience of being in my research, and my work. It was my challenge then to create a set of specific guidelines for this work. My values combined with my experience around movement as a vehicle for expressive therapy, coupled with my interest and developing knowledge around the healing arts led me to “choreograph” a one-on-one session that an individual could participate in and not only explore my interests, but could also find some great value in the work for themselves. My intention was that they would be able to tap into a deeper sense of themselves for the 2-3 hours we spent together, and in so doing, experience a new way of being alive, of being with themselves, that was perhaps lighter, more free, less stressed, even if it was just for the time we were together. I invited the volunteers to come and be just as they were, without conditions, to exist and be authentic with themselves without conditions being placed on being-ness, or aliveness.

### **Description of the one-on-one sessions**

My work began with a process, which I choreographed into sessions that consisted of the following structural elements:

#### **Intention/meditation**

I led the participant through approximately 5 minutes of meditation to assist them in finding the present moment and to begin to become more aware of their body and the stillness in their environment. I encouraged them to focus on their breath and facilitated a meditative visualization exercise of a balloon located in their belly to help them deepen

the experience of witnessing their own breath. “With every inhalation the balloon expands in all directions, and with every exhalation the balloon softens and you become more relaxed and present.” My goal was to have them become a witness to their bodies own rhythm and movement, so that they could learn to tap into an inner witness while moving. If one becomes aware of the inner witness, it is my hope that it can be a tool that is used always, for self-reference or immediate feedback throughout life circumstances. After this brief work with breathing and meditation, I began the process of leading them into the Authentic Movement practice with my words while I held the space and the environment for them to explore their uninhibited movement.

### **Authentic Movement - Holding Space, Witnessing, Moving**

The first round of Authentic Movement lasted for approximately between 12 minutes and 20 minutes. The camera and I held the role of the witness, and I took responsibility for creating a positive and safe container within which the participant could explore their own movement impulses. I was careful to respect the space of the participant while he or she moved. I wanted to capture them and witness them while also being true to the form of Authentic Movement as much as possible and I really attempted to allow the camera to be a witness rather than an invasive instrument. Throughout this time the participant was in the role as a mover, while I was the witness, though in that role I was also very aware of my inner mover.

**Hands on healing (Reiki)**

After the first round of Authentic Movement, I invited the participant to lie down on a bodywork table next to the big windows in studio 2 in the Wagner Dance Building. Once comfortable, they closed their eyes and I began laying my hands on specific energy points and meridian lines on their body. I started at the crown of their head and worked my way down their body giving attention to any areas I was intuitively called to or that the participant had requested attention to. My intention during this time was to wish wellness and healing on the participant, and to help provide them with the energetic and spiritual support required for them to release any stress, tension and/or fear. Reiki is a formal directing and channeling of life-force energy, or “Ki”, for the benefit of the recipient, so that is what my intention was during the Reiki segment of the session, which lasted approximately between an hour and an hour and a half.

**2nd round of holding space/witnessing/moving**

Once I had moved through the entire Reiki session and had highlighted a full body scan of their body, I gently asked participants to proceed directly into their second round of Authentic Movement. Once they were ready to leave the bodywork table, they were in their Authentic Movement embodied practice. The duration of the second round of Authentic Movement was similar to the first - between 12 - 20 minutes.

**Closing observations, checking in and grounding**

In closing, I wanted to find a way to anchor them again into a state of groundedness, so I asked them to verbally share with me anything that came up for them during any part of their session. I took the opportunity to complete my task as witness as I listened and deeply concentrated on supporting them by hearing them state their



experiences. I wanted to be the witness-listener to provide a space for processing to occur, and to assist them in validating their experience, and not for the sake of reciprocal sharing or conversation. My role was to listen and aid the participants as they rooted their inner understanding into reality, to help them stand by what they felt, what they uncovered, and what came up for them emotionally, mentally, and physically during their session.

### **Creative Writing Inspired by the Sessions**

Below is a transcription of the creative writing I scribbled down while observing and holding the space for each of the individual participants. This text was a practice in generating yet another form in which to understand the embodied person that was before me. It gives a written snapshot of my experience of the participants' Authentic Movement sessions, whereas the film only gives fleeting visual moments.

#### **Alison Goodman, 54, Registered Hospice Nurse**

*little ball*

*feels satisfying holding feet*

*infant-like*

*release with breath, timing of nature*

*shortening front space... comfort*

*vulnerable and waiting*

*hanging neck release*

*connected to youth*

*playful but hiding*

*extending into back space, rolling in again*

*release into floor, outbreath - slight smile.*

*spine articulates*  
*opens chest*

*curling up around stillness*

**Courtney Trinh, 19, UCSD Undergraduate Student, Cell Biology Major**

*Gentle pause*  
*arms swing, hands touch face*

*hold structure and swing*

*turning*

*sliding, looking under*

*hair, another limb*  
*fingers lead, fingers graze*

*swimming surface*

*young spine on floor, falling forward*  
*toes crawl*

*twist*  
*look away*  
*toes lift*  
*torso floats up*

*fingers touch crown, slide down face to clavicle*

*spilling spine into floor*

*balance beam*

*hair like feathers*  
*fall*

*unwind/wind up*

**Isabella Neustadt, 22, UCSD Undergraduate Student, Theatre/Biological  
Anthropology Double Major**

*Swirling fingers*

*pausing*

*curving forward into the floor*

*rocking/leaning*

*slow curl up the spiral spine staircase*

*pushing from inside*

*turning - fingers through hair*

*limbs crossing*

*breathing harder*

*collapse*

*dance from a memory?*

*2nd time:*

*deep breaths to begin*

*sleepy face*

*wrists awaken*

*sliding skin and clothes*

*breath is there*

*finger tips soft*

*belly to floor*

*pelvis tips over head*

*feet flex and fall left*

*gravity again*

*spine lifts through skin, shirt lifts from spine*

*tip toe pelvis lift*

*hands*

*full hands contact*

*face to ceiling*

*foot perfection*

*elbow inside grazes face*

*pendulum legs, body softens*

*spine arches fingers reach out through window*

*pulling clothes*

*like waking, like morning bed*

*limbs extend to opposite sides*

*easier to be embodied, to be connected*

*hip crease cracks open*

*weight into hands into floor*

**Tracy Chow, 21, Recent UCSD Graduate, Economics & Math Joint Major**

*bird wrists fly away*

*into an off balance triangular pool of light*

*testing the floor, scooting backwards*

*she falls then catches*

*falling catching*

*into and out of the light*

*left side catches on something*

*hip crease leads for a moment*

*she falls back again*

*no bounce*

*once flying*

*now creature-like sidestepping and luxurious sliding  
almost not even there*

*like a cat*

**Jane Blount, 50, Dance Educator, Holistic Health Practitioner, Mother, Home-maker**

*blanket mornings  
wrinkles in cotton, laying on wrinkles, laying on humming*

*laughter, head/tail laughter  
jaw release*

*huuuummmmm*

*child swimming in her bed, playing in sand castles  
sea turtle*

*pelvis stays anchored*

**Esther Chong, 22, Office Administration & Communications, Extrovert**

*sensual but honest - like a dream*

*slow and aware*

*the Buddha sits*

*rise like the sun to your power*

*be free to be seen*

*supple neck, luxurious arching  
arms out like wings*

**Jo-Elyn Nourie, 73, Actor, Mover, Improviser, Writer, Retired Teacher**

*a flower in wind in sunshine  
a butterfly cocoon opening*

*spring*

*an infant porcupine*

*MOTHER EARTH - a young vibrant child*

*a peaceful storm*

**Jack Lampl, 63, “Jack of All Trades”**

*the power of innocence*

*warrior*

*creature*

*boulder*

*child*

**Harry Bui, 23, UCSD Graduate, Computer Programmer, Mover**

AM #1

sleeping Buddha watching breath from a distant space

a mover

spirit moves the breath moves the lungs

AM #2

wild man stepping

walks with earth and ancestors

his body knows this place

pause, stillness, strength in the quiet

humble warrior

**Rosalie Ellis, 20, UCSD Undergraduate Student, Pre-Med**

*trusting closed eyes and content on the floor,  
embodies curiosity even for the subtle*

*searching for an unowned space*

*what does this body know?*

*decisions made in this lifetime...*

**Jan Gist, 64, Professor & Coach of Theatre, Voice, Speech & Dialects**

*even a Wise Woman refuses to get out of bed sometimes*

*her breath leaves her momentarily as she practices her fall from grace*

*she is an earthworm, a little girl, a horse trotting, she is the never ending spiral found in  
all of nature*

**Marissa McInerney, 28, Dramatist, Expressive Arts Therapist, Coach & Educator**

*hands awaken  
breath opens up lungs and carries the spine*

*the perfect fit of ground  
for  
cricket wings and silent feet*

*a swan dive  
wipes it all away*

*receiving the light, bathing in the breath*

*rise up, Earth Mother*

**Lucia Valerdi, 66, Mother, Wife, Retired**

*spinal snake*

*bouncing tribal ecstasy*

*hips sigh and swivel*

*hips! shoulders and hips!*

*feet to floor  
rocking rhythm*

*freedom, transformation*

**Danielle Escalante, 37, Holistic Health Practitioner, Student at Pacific College of Oriental Medicine**

*subtle body*

*floor temperature reminds her of something sacred*

*sleeping beauty*

## **Production**

In terms of the creative process through which my final product came into existence, I chose to take the solo route on almost all of the elements of this work because I was interested in the challenge of being the creator, facilitator, healer, camera person, video editor, audio editor, designer and visionary of the whole process. It gives me so much satisfaction to know that I did this from start to finish and that it was all of my effort, brainstorming and troubleshooting that birthed it. Another reason that I decided to work on this without any collaborators was because of the personal and sensitive nature of the material. For example, I wanted to respect the participants personal space and not



have an extra camera person in the studio. Also, because it was so personal and meaningful to me on many levels, I wanted to make sure I retained control of all of the elements, and wanted it to be born from an intuitive approach that came out of my personal experience with these people, their stories, and the intimate moments that arose from their sessions. I knew that if I had a sound designer or video editor work on the footage, I would lose that personal lens of my own perspective - having been there through the entire process. I also knew that my intention with this work was not to create a traditional performance, and I wanted to keep that intention safe, and I knew it would be safe if I worked alone.

When I first realized that I wanted to make a film inspired by movement and healing arts using the practices of Authentic Movement and Reiki, I knew that the role of the camera would have to be deeply considered. I wanted to respect the space and process of each individual participant, and I definitely did not want them to feel like they were performing for a camera, so in the beginning of the process I chose to keep the camera at a distance to provide a greater sense of safety, comfort, and freedom for the participant. As I continued to work with people, I gained a more acute sense of the different participants' comfort-levels, and in some cases decided to move around the contained space with the camera to find new perspectives and to explore the proximity of the witness, so long as it was not sacrificing the participants' sense of safety. From the

beginning stages of this investigation, I knew that the camera would serve as a witness, but I also wanted to find a way to integrate the camera into the role of the mover, so that the audience would be witnessing and experiencing the “moving” camera, as well as the operator of the camera. Moments in the film when the witness (the camera) became the mover, which made the audience the witness were in the very beginning when the camera is sweeping and snaking across the surface of the hardwood floor, and again the camera moves with the human mover (me) holding it in the water and in the dome throughout the film. My hope was that this perspective would give the audience the opportunity to become a witness to the mover (camera) who was first the witness. Early into the film I set up the context that the camera was witness and watcher of movement, whether it was movement found in nature or the movement found in a human’s authentic moving experience. As the film continued, the movement of nature (ocean surf and tide) became more integrated as a through line connecting the moving people in order to give a particular essence to fluidity, change and motion to the audience as meta-witness.

I have always been an autodidact with regards to shooting and editing video, and in being self-taught, I had only my own observations and unique perspective, developed over time, to guide me in crafting a visual experience from captured footage. As I created this work, I learned that initially so much remained unknown about the timing, linearity, mood and message of the work because there was such a long “getting-to-

know-each-other” process that takes place between the editor and the raw material of footage. I felt that I needed to become intimately familiar with all of the material that I had captured before I could even begin sculpting and choreographing it into something that made any kind of sense and that spoke honestly from my values. I wanted the this work to reflect the deep honesty and vulnerability of my own process and of the the people who participated. Once I began to get a strong sense of what shots felt important, I started to understand where I needed to go with the film as a whole, and this has come primarily through my understanding of sequencing movement, motion, form and composition through my years of background in dance and performance. I began to find points of entry into the editing process, and I allowed my intuitive and kinesthetic sense to begin to uncover and bring forth the timing, flow and the focus of the film.

As I sifted through the raw, unedited material, I pored over each individual’s footage for hours looking for the most memorable moments to extract to include in the film. The challenge was that it was all meaningful, beautiful and interesting! My whole investigation is built on the very belief that all of the movement generated from the sessions is relevant, which I actually did believe, so how was I going to choose some moments over others? That is when I had to consider my preference and my personal aesthetic in order to begin to get anywhere and move on with the process of editing. As I edited each person’s footage down from 12-20 minutes to 5 minutes, I found it extremely

difficult to cut anything out, but then I had to dig even deeper and edit out even more to narrow the footage down to some of my favorite, and what I thought were the most poignant moments. From there, I had to organize these moving, poetic snippets of people into what was turning into a moving, morphing video collage of water, shots of the hardwood floor in the studio where the sessions were held, and of moments in the geodesic dome.

I chose to use music by the musician, Nihls Frahm to add even more depth, texture and environmental support. I had discovered Frahm's music over a year ago when I was initially searching for music for *...cannot be done alone...* I experimented with inputting one of his tracks into the editing I had done, and it flowed so brilliantly that I searched for more of his work and discovered that his tone and sensibility matched somehow so perfectly with the tone and context of where I was beginning to head with the editing of my work. After I chose the tracks that seemed to match the quality and sensibility that I was heading in, I actually began to use the music as my score to mold the rest of the film around it.

## Reflection

### **What was accomplished:**

I believe that I accomplished choreographing and facilitating a beneficial embodied experience for people. The one-on-one sessions provided a deepening frame for individuals to bring awareness to their moving bodies, but within a safe environment. I know too that I gave people the gift of experiencing presence without conditions being placed on them to be anything but who they genuinely and authentically are. I allowed them to be open, as I encouraged them to take an honest look at their living and breathing self. The Reiki & healing touch brought up a lot of emotions, memories, and personal expressions for people, because it allowed for a combination of stillness and of accepting support. I witnessed true vulnerability and honesty in people, as well as real change brought about by taking the time to go through this process. I also accomplished what I had set out to do, which was to use my experience as a mover and all of my knowledge as a facilitator of dance and movement, and turn it into something practical, something for people to use as a tool in everyday life.

### **The outcome and reward of this work:**

The greatest reward of this process for me has been to be in honest one-on-one conversations with people. Not just everyday conversations, but dialog about what it is they are witnessing in their own bodies. These individuals have shared with me very intimate and personal elements of their lives which I don't think would have come up if we had met in another context. All because I invited them to tap into their bodies, to take a look and see what they were feeling and experiencing in real time. They were able to

be present, were able to share and express very personal information while also navigating this new territory of self-investigation. The reward for me is in the moments that I was able to be present with each participant, and that these people were being completely real, completely authentic with me. I had created a container that allowed them to open up and they genuinely felt that and were able to, and I feel very proud of that. I felt so honored to get the opportunity to hear people's very personal stories and personal challenges. It was such a raw and beautiful experience - the kind of experience I have been missing through the lens of dance and performance because there are so many layers of culture and context on top of the real essence of life. I feel that most contemporary dance and alternative dance performance are really trying to get at that essence, but I usually feel that something falls short when I see these performances. Something is still false. What I'm interested in is getting to the most real and authentic expression that I can with people. To really see another. When that honesty exists, it is all that matters to me, it is the truth and the purpose for this life-dance.

**Where it is going, and where else it could go:**

I'm currently interested in the process of developing this work into a larger format that reaches beyond the individual one-on-one session and extends to include group work and community-building practices as well as alternatives to couples therapy for any relationship that would like to learn to deepen and strengthen their sense and practice of relating physically to one another. I have done brief explorations into facilitating group classes that involve the expanded elements of the one-on-one sessions, and what I have found through consistent feedback from these class-participants is that the opportunity to be engaged in an embodied way with oneself as well as others is very healing for many

people. Feedback from my group classes has led to another possible offshoot of this research (as mentioned above), which is working with couples with the intention to discover new ways of being together and using some of this embodied practice as a non-verbal communication tool and a fun conflict management tool. When you can let go of the words and the meaning of words, and you can get in touch with the self and the other through physical awareness, so many new frames of understanding can open up.

**What I have learned:**

I've learned that when given the opportunity to slow down mental activity through Authentic Movement exploration and Reiki energy work, people can become more physically present, experience a slowing down of their nervous systems, more awareness of their breathing, their physicality morphs into a softer, and more relaxed aspect of themselves. They feel more connected and grounded after their session. In observing all of these outcomes, I have concluded that these sessions are in fact, healing. Stress wreaks havoc on the body, and when the sympathetic nervous system slows down, the parasympathetic nervous system is allowed to do its job, it takes over and gives rest and support to the body, which counteracts stress. When these participants begin to have a stronger awareness of their breathing patterns, they are more likely to breath more deeply and fully, and notice when they are holding their breath or are breathing shallowly. Lastly, when the participants leave the session more connected and grounded, their nervous systems are more open to receiving information and dealing with it in a more calm and peaceful way, which opens their perspective and allows more awareness to the many windows of possibilities and opportunities to be present in their lives.