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Olivia Parker

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Senior Thesis: A Dance Film Portfolio

By Olivia Parker

Spring 2018

Upon graduation, I feel as confident, grounded, and determined as I have ever felt within the last four years at Loyola Marymount University. My college experience has not been a smooth one. Considering the obstacles that I have had to face, both mentally and physically, I am incredibly thankful for the fact that I am walking away from college with my head held high, and a bright future ahead of me. The last four years have challenged my self-confidence, self-determination and ability to be resilient. My Senior Thesis is a continuation and representation of the confidence, determination, and resilience that I have developed. The project is a symbol to myself that I can do anything I put my mind to, that I can create work without judgement and self criticism, and that my physical and mental impairments are not limitations, but gateways to new artistic realizations. I have learned that with resilience and an open heart, you can reach positivity.

Having grown up in the small town of Mystic, CT, attending college in Los Angeles presented significant risk for culture shock. Although I was warned this, as an 18-year-old I had no understanding of the possible repercussions that such a dramatic change of environment could have. Not only did I find it difficult to relate with the social standards shared amongst my fellow undergraduates, but the structure and culture of the dance department created an environment I was unaccustomed to.

While growing up in Connecticut, I attended various family run dance studios. By the time I got to highschool, these studios no longer challenged me. Ballroom presented itself as a genre that could facilitate growth. Private lessons allowed me to challenge myself at my own pace. Meanwhile, my high school dance department presented the opportunity to choreograph my own work. As one of two trained dancers in the entire school, I had extensive involvement in

dance productions, choreographing and performing the majority of the works in our student showcases. My confidence and determination at this time was unwavering. I was convinced that anything was possible, and put my whole heart into making my visions a reality. The lack of other proficient dancers allowed me to create choreograph freely, without competition. That said, I yearned to work with other trained dancers. For this reason, I was extremely excited to attend LMU's dance program. I was eager to be surrounded by other people who loved dance as much as I did.

What I did not anticipate however, was how the presence of other dancers would degrade my self-confidence, self-determination, and the belief that I could create any work that I desired. Due to rarely interacting with other dancers of my age and ability, my initial dance classes at LMU were quite anxiety provoking. The level of technique my peers demonstrated was intimidating. Unlike me, my classmates were all accustomed to the standard class procedure (warm up, going across the floor, final combination etc). This was nothing like I was used to.

My private ballroom lessons allowed me to work at my own pace. Being dyslexic, the high pace and intensity of the dance classes at LMU were overwhelming. I remember feeling embarrassed and anxious, constantly in my head. I tended to psych myself out prior to performing in class. This mental turmoil ultimately caused me to make mistakes or freeze up while performing. My poor execution only validated the self deprecating thoughts I had summoned prior to my turn. Auditions seemed impossible for this reason. Yet, regardless of the anxiety, embarrassment, and defeat that I felt, I managed to push forward and find ways to work around these thoughts.

What contributed greatly to my mental tribulations was the apparent reality that I was not able to execute technical tricks, such as extensions, that many of my classmates could. My range of motion was clearly limited, and at the time, I attributed this to lacking muscle and flexibility. Thus, I pushed myself, feeling as though I was an underdog, lacking technical training. I desired the beautiful extension that the media looked so highly of.

By the second month of school I felt a pull in my right groin. I pushed through the pain for a while, thinking that my body was not accustomed to the rigorous activity that a university dance department demands. I ultimately worked through the pain throughout Freshman year, anticipating that I would address it at home during the summer.

As I did not dance over the summer, I felt no pain in my groin, and disregarded the fact that it needed attention. However, when I returned to school, I was forced to confront reality.

I will never forget standing at the barre in Professor Scott Heinzerling's ballet class, unable to do a simple tendu. Tears streamed down my face as I was asked to sit down. I could not bear the idea of sitting out of dance for a few days, much less a week, month, or year. I walk out of class and balled, unable to hold back my emotions any longer. Dance Chair Damon Rago caught me in the lobby of the dance department and pulled me into his office. It was clear that something was seriously wrong. From there, I dropped all of my major movement classes, and proceeded to go to physical therapy three days a week.

I can still recall tracing the intricate cracks on the ceiling in the pilates lab as I glided back and forth on the reformer. It was torture to hear the music blasting from the studios. I was incredibly jealous of my classmates. Not only did my injury take dance away from me, but it isolated me from the dance community. My classmates were strengthening their family bond

without me. This jealousy only grew stronger as the months went past and my condition worsened. Within just a few months, I could not walk, sit, or sleep without severe pain, and it was clear that surgery was the only solution to relieve my discomfort.

For a dancer, my spirits were quite high during this period considering the situation. I held onto the idea of being able to move again without any pain. Yet, after my estimated recovery time, the pain persisted. Extreme frustration enveloped me during my first attempts at attending dance classes. I tried to convince myself that I was still recovering, and to be gentle with my body. Yet in the back of my mind, I knew something was wrong, as I had clearly surpassed my recovery time. I learned to suppress this frustration and treat my body with kindness in the classroom, and ultimately managed to complete all of my dance classes for Fall and Spring semester of Junior year.

Despite attending class, I was still an outcast. I could not fully participate in the classroom and perform to the best of my ability. It felt almost impossible to improve my technique without jeopardizing my physical health. This weighed on me tremendously. My hip injury had compromised both my social life in and out of the studio, as well as my ability to dance, a main source of therapy and joy. I was heartbroken. My mental health declined significantly, and I was diagnosed with Bipolar Disorder II in January 2017. Spring semester was one of the hardest periods of my life. I showed up to dance class with little motivation, and experienced various side effects from the numerous medications my doctor prescribed me in attempt to stabilize my mood. I recall four times at which I had to run out of the studio to go to student psychological services.

My ability to overcome this period of my life is a testament to my resilience. By June 2017 my mood had been stabilized, and I was adamant about attending the Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Company summer workshop. I enjoyed the experience tremendously. However unfortunately, by the end of the rigorous week of dancing, I was forced to refrain from participating. My hip was in pain once again. I finally accepted that I could no longer disregard it.

A month prior to my Senior year, I visited my doctor. Even before he entered the room, tears streamed down my face. I knew the diagnosis he was about to present did not bode well for my dance career. Yet, the diagnosis of hip dysplasia and hip osteoarthritis proved cathartic. Identifying my anatomical disparity brought clarity to questions I had been asking myself for years. Self-accusations claiming that my ‘poor technique’ was due to lack of work-ethic and dedication were abandoned. However, my worst fear had been realized, and the unknown of my future, and how dance would contribute to my life, was at the forefront of my mind.

Since the diagnosis, I have consciously isolated myself from the dance department. My grief does not permit me to attend shows or witness dance classes without being overwhelmed with emotion. However, I have decided that I do not wish to exclude dance from my life. I was aware that I had to transition myself into a mentality that approaches dance from a different angle than I have embraced in the past. It was the establishment of this perspective that brought about my Senior Thesis: A Dance Film Portfolio.

I treated my Senior Thesis project as an opportunity to reestablish my self confidence and artistic identity. It is a symbol of my resilience toward my hip dysplasia and numerous personal difficulties throughout the past four years. In addition, I intended to use my Senior Thesis as a

gateway toward developing a new relationship with dance. I designed the project to specifically delegate my role as a professional choreographer, and facilitate a process that allowed for artistic freedom, flexibility, and joy. Self-judgement, high expectations, and rigid planning was not permitted. I intended to force myself to go against my natural tendencies, which have been toxic to both my self-esteem and my creative process in the past. For an additional challenge, the project asked me to occupy the role of choreographer, cinematographer, and editor. By taking on each role, I would establish the self-confidence and understanding that I am not dependent on others to make my artistic visions a reality. My personal social circle is not a limiting factor. This project aimed to development my professional self by challenging me to carry out ambitious, original ideas independently, and to navigate the challenges that accompany them.

I began my project by attempting to gather dancers. My biggest fear was that no one was going to want to be in my Senior Thesis. This is part of the reason why I did this project. My isolation from other dancers in the department have made initiating projects difficult. I barely know the sophomore class, and still do not recognize any of the freshman. I questioned whether people would doubt my artistry if they had not seen me perform recently. Plus, if they knew that I was injured, how could they be confident in my choreographic ability? Would that turn them away? Would they be unwilling to embrace my choreographic process? How could I compete with other choreographers in the department that have developed followers and have had extensive exposure? These thoughts were derived from previous experiences when I felt that my ability to choreograph was limited by my social network. Therefore, getting past this mentality was a big step for me.

My search for dancers began by reaching out via text and facebook. Fall Semester of Senior year I no longer took movement classes and was not familiar with the schedule. I did not have the opportunity to approach dancers before or after class. I knew this was not the ideal approach, but I felt reaching out via text and facebook was forward progress nonetheless. I devised a detailed, yet brief message that enthusiastically asked them to be apart of my project. I knew that I wanted my pieces to be diverse. I knew I could facilitate this by working with a wide variety of dancers. Before reaching out, I thought about people I desired to work with. From there I created clusters of people in my mind, imagining how they would appear on screen and the genre of dance they would best execute. I recognized early on that this project, as a portfolio, provided me the opportunity to show my diversity. I am trained in a wide variety of genres and do not want to box myself into only one of them. Plus, I wanted to explore working with not only a variety of technical dancers, but number of dancers. Choreographing a solo is much different than developing a group piece. I wanted to show that I could do both successfully.

It was the middle of the Fall 2017 semester and I was becoming nervous. I had not made as much progress getting people involved in my project as I would have liked. Although some had expressed interest, I had not gathered enough people to solidify individual projects. I did not initially specify the number of films that I wanted to achieve. Instead, my goal was to create as many as I could given the time provided and number of participants. With this in mind, I set out to approach dancers in person. This was done intentionally, and at times, I ran into them and jumped on the opportunity. I approached every dancer I reached out to via text and facebook. Speaking with them in person allowed me to elaborate on my project and develop a personal connection. The key element to my strategy convincing people to participate in my thesis was to

emphasize its limited and flexible time commitment. As I intended to challenge myself to choreograph quickly, I proposed 3-5 rehearsals ranging from 1-2 hours, and a 6 hour shoot day within the span of two weeks. As I anticipated, this caught many dancers' attention. I knew the dancers that I was approaching would be heavily involved in other projects and that their time was precious. The only way that I could get them on board my project was to make it seem fun, and requiring little time commitment. I kept myself lighthearted and stress free as to hopefully encourage excitement from the dancers as well. Looking back, the process of getting dancers to commit was stressful and worrisome. However, with flexibility in mind, I kept faith that it was going to work out, and grabbed hold of any spontaneous opportunity that came my way.

My first piece was a solo choreographed for Kelsey Ito. Kelsey had approached me at the end of the Spring 2017 semester asking me if she could be in my Senior Thesis if I needed dancers. I was honored to be approached by her, and thus could not go without getting her involved. It was October, and by this point I had not successfully gathered any other dancers to participate in my thesis. Although I felt anxiety about planning other films at the time, I now understand that my process with Kelsey was pivotal for making my following pieces a success.

In addition to little time commitment, my pitch emphasized that the dancers would have significant involvement in my choreographic process considering my lack of mobility. What this translated to was slightly unclear however. I remember Kelsey and I standing in front of the mirror, both questioning how to start. Kelsey, like many dancers I have found, was hesitant to provide movement material despite my encouragement. Ultimately, I initiated the movement, adjusting it to my liking as she played it back for me. I did this for the rest of my pieces, creating the movement, but not executing it to its full version.

By the second rehearsal I started to recognize the benefits of working in this way. I did not have to remember the choreography alone. It was as though I had a second brain helping me hold onto the information. In the past I had difficulty choreographing purely because I could not remember my own choreography as I was developing it. I spent as much time reviewing as I did creating new material. Plus, choreographing on my own body has proved much different than choreographing based on other dancers. In the past, I could never abandon self-judgement and critique while choreographing myself. Using other dancers to execute the movement, I can focus on the movement and the movement alone. Critique of my personal execution and skill has no involvement. I also recognized that I am a visual choreographer, in that I can visualize motion in my head. I tended to choreograph while falling asleep in high school, but never knew how I could apply it to my choreographic practice. I have found that it lends itself to this process. I can initiate new choreography through verbal description rather than physical movement. For instance, if I see a traveling sequence that ends with an extension, I would guide the dancer through that vision, and we would discuss the possibilities considering the dancer's strengths.

The amount of material I can produce using this method is remarkable to me. I created an average of 45 seconds during each rehearsal I held throughout the entirety of my thesis. Never once did I choreograph outside of the studio. Every rehearsal I walked into the studio with nothing prepared. I put myself on the spot to develop new choreography. Some days were harder than others. I directly ask my dancers for help in these moments. Haley Loeffler, a dancer who I have worked extensively with over the past four years, expressed to me that depending on the day my mind tends to get stuck. My thoughts are not as fluid, flexible and experimentive as I need them to be to keep moving forward. During my thesis, she once again advised me to move

on and start a new section entirely. Separation will bring clarity. She is right, yet I continue to struggle with leaving a phrase unfinished. Haley is not the only one who has seen my mind spin around choreography. The limited rehearsal time and rapidly approaching shoot date surely put pressure on me during rehearsal, as I anticipated. That said, one must factor in stimuli outside of the studio as contributing factors towards blocking creative pathways. Some days my mind lacked colorful ideas, and I had to humbly ask my dancers for help. I developed a game in which each dancer provides a movement. I would shape each dancer's move to my liking, adding things such as traveling, rhythm, and gestures to flesh out the movement. My biggest discovery was using self generated rhythmic patterns to guide my choreography. I discovered that I can hear rhythm sequences woven throughout music. I used these to provide an outline for phrases when the choreography was not coming organically. I am ecstatic to have found this method as it allows me to capture rhythm, and dynamics that I could not otherwise achieve.

The development of Kelsey's video reigned truest to my original vision. We rehearsed for four 1-2 hour sessions before we set out to shoot. I decided the song, costume, and film location site last minute. I chose the song "Painting Greys" by Emmit Fenn, the day of our rehearsal. It was against my nature to decide something as important as the song with such little thought. However, this added to the element of flexibility and spontaneity of my project, which I wanted to fully embrace. I also found that spending a short amount of intimate time with the music just prior to rehearsal allowed me to choreograph from a genuine reactionary response, rather than an over analyzed one. Similarly, I chose Kelsey's costume the rehearsal before the shoot from items within her own wardrobe. Lastly, I discovered our site specific location two days before shooting

by investigating various parks within the Venice, Culver City, Inglewood, Westchester and Playa del Rey area. The spontaneity felt uncomfortable, yet realistic to a professional time constraint.

There were various things that I had to consider before shooting Kelsey's film. I knew that I was going to use my Iphone 7 Plus to shoot the film. Thus, I did not have to inquire about getting and learning how to use a typical film camera. Next I considered music. I have a wireless Beats Pill, that proved to be a spectacular way of providing music. It is small, yet loud, and easy to hide so that it does not get into any shots. As we were shooting outside, I also had to consider lighting. I wanted to avoid extreme sunlight, as it does not appear aesthetically pleasing on screen. Thus, we started shooting at 2:00 pm so that the sun was not directly overhead. What I did not consider was how fast the sun would go down. Within just two hours the lighting started to change, and if you look closely at the film, you can identify that the clips toward the end of the piece are slightly darker than the beginning. This was also due to our location being in the woods. We were surrounded by brush and trees that obstructed light, increasing the rate at which our light dissipated. Thus, the entirety of our shoot lasted two and a half hours.

I took about two months away from Kelsey's footage. I did this not only because I wanted a completely fresh look at the material in post-production, but I was slightly intimidated to start compiling what I had captured. During the Spring 2018 semester, I had the opportunity to enroll in *Editing for Non-Majors* in the School of Film and Television. It just happened that we had an assignment to create a music video. I recognized that I could apply Kelsey's video to this project, and most importantly, receive feedback.

As I edited, I realized that I had shot very few takes. Therefore, my choices were very limited in post-production. At the time, I was concerned about conserving Kelsey's energy, so

that she performed at her best while the camera was rolling. In addition, I was cognizant that we were losing light and that we had limited time to capture all of the material. I worked hard in post-production to create continuity. I found it challenging because, while shooting small sections of the piece, Kelsey would stop dancing at the end of the phrase being shot. This seems logical, as this is desired within the studio. However, in film, to create continuity you must show the very beginning of the movement before cutting to the next shot, which ‘continues’ this movement. By Kelsey stopping, I could not cut at places that I desired. I learned that I must instruct the dancer to carry into the next phrase. Looking back I wish I had also taken more close-ups, full takes, and shots from differing angles and heights. That said, I shot Kelsey’s piece freehand, and was mostly concerned about bending my knees and keeping my core engaged so as to limit the amount of camera jitter. Upon handing in my project, I was pleased to receive outstanding feedback from my editing professor, Lehr Beidelschies, who is a professional editor at Technicolor. I believe that this feedback was essential for building my confidence and validating my ability to successfully carry out my following projects.

The next film I started was with Eva Crystal and Haley Donabedian in December of the Fall 2017 semester. I approached these girls spontaneously one day, realizing they would be perfect for my project. Again, just a few days before our first rehearsal, I chose our song, “Us” by Regina Spektor. We started the piece, and by the third rehearsal, it was clear that there was no possibility that we would finish and shoot the piece prior to winter break. Together we decided to continue rehearsing in January.

Haley and Eva’s piece was one of two outliers of my Senior Thesis. With Haley and Eva’s involvement in Impulse, the Student Showcase, Senior Projects and other personal

obligations, there seemed to be little to no time for us to rehearse. Despite meeting to schedule rehearsals the day we got back from winter break, we had difficulty finding time to rehearse. I had attempted to distribute my pieces evenly over the semester, so that I could focus on them each individually. Haley and Eva's availability threatened that. Yet again, the situation asked for me to be flexible in order to make the piece possible.

For my birthday, January 5th, my father gave me the newest DJI Osmo Mobile 2, a gimbal for my Iphone. This stabilization device had the potential to make my footage appear professional. It would allow me to move around the dancers easily and capture different angles that I could not otherwise do on my own. Unfortunately, the DJI Osmo Mobile 2 had just been released, and my father had to pre-order it. This meant that I had to wait about a month until it would arrive.

At first, I decided to go forward with my project, with or without the gimbal. However, as our shoot date approached, and I recognized the complexity of the piece, I could not proceed without the gimbal. I knew in my heart that the quality of the footage would increase dramatically. Not only would the film appear to be professionally produced, but the gimbal would better showcase the dancer's and the choreography. Thus, I pulled Eva and Haley aside and told them that our rehearsals would resume only after the gimbal arrived. It was in our best interest to wait, although it would drag out our process. Initially I felt bad about not staying true to my promise of a short, low commitment project. However, considering the final product, I do not regret my decision.

Haley and Eva's shoot date ultimately changed three times. First the gimbal was to blame, then Haley got sick, and finally Eva hurt her foot. In no way was I going to force my

dancers to shoot. Not only does it go against my nature, but I wanted my dancer's to be present and focused on the choreography while shooting. Ultimately, our difficulty coordinating schedules, our dedication to perfecting the choreography, and our lack of possible shoot days made it so Haley and Eva's film was the last piece shot.

I did significantly more preparation for Haley and Eva's shoot than I did for others. Just before the shoot we discussed costumes. Again, I used what the girls had in their personal wardrobes. The only exception was shoes and socks. I had a location in mind in Topanga State Park near Eagle Rock that I had seen while hiking with a friend in Fall 2017. The park has brush, grass, dirt and rocks to navigate through. I was concerned for the girls' feet and ankles. Thus, I went to Target and bought white flat-footed sneakers and short ankle-height socks for protection

I revisit the Topanga State Park twice to scout out film locations. The park is quite vast. After four hours of hiking, I found three locations at which I wanted to shoot in addition to the one I found in the Fall near Eagle Rock. After four hours of hiking, I had little energy to hike up to Eagle Rock in search for the location I originally had in mind. As I had faith it was there, I felt comfortable heading home. The day before our shoot I decided to revisit Topanga State Park in the sole purpose to guarantee my original location existed. I was surprised to find that it was farther away than I expected. I realized that the dancers would have to climb about a mile, 30 minutes, up a steep hill in order to arrive at the location. I made sure to acknowledge this while planning the timing of the shoot.

On Monday, March 19th, we left school by 9:30 am to go to Topanga Park. It took us an hour to get there. I wanted to leave early because I was worried about traffic, and the amount of

time we would have sufficient light. I created a rough schedule to give me perspective on how much time I had at each location, factoring in the time necessary for hiking, breaks, and lunch.

Our first location was at the top of the mountain, near Eagle Rock. I made sure to give my dancers ample time to recover from the treacherous hike. Our lighting was perfect, and we were lucky to have a beautifully clear, blue sky. As the day progressed I started to realize that considering the amount of footage I desired we were not going to be able to shoot at the other locations that day. It pained me to tell the girls that we would have to schedule another shoot date. Yet, Haley and Eva were thankfully enthusiastic and understanding. Knowing we did not wish hike to this location again, we made sure to capture all of my desired shots. We got back to campus by 5:00 pm.

Two weeks later, on Monday April 2, we returned to Topanga State Park to film at the other locations. My biggest fear was inconsistent lighting. As we approached Topanga State Park, clouds loomed overhead. I knew that in post-production cutting between scenes that had different lighting would appear odd. I was worried that it would detract from the film. The clouds seemed to be moving, and miraculously, by the time we were ready to shoot the sky had cleared, and we had a blue bird day just like before. In addition, I was worried that the girls would appear differently in their costumes. To my relief, their hair and costumes were almost identical. Similarly to our first day, we left school at 9:30 am and returned by 4:00 pm.

The third film I started was a solo for Lilli Maples. My first encounter with Lilli was when we met to schedule our rehearsals. Haley Loeffler recommended her to me when I expressed to her my difficulties finding dancers. Thus, my first rehearsal with Lilli was purely to learn about her as a mover. It was for this reason that I did not decide on a song prior to our first

meeting. Together we developed a jazzy phrase. However, I quickly identified her discomfort executing the material. Once I noticed her natural tendency to be grounded, I was inspired to create a lyrical piece.

Working with Lilli was a unique experience because I could identify the techniques she had yet to learn from the dance classes at LMU. Not surprisingly, her process picking up choreography differed greatly from a Senior. As a result, I was asked to take the role of teacher in addition to choreographer. I understood from the beginning that Lilli had amazing potential, but the time frame at which I desired to create the piece did not lend itself to a strong performance. I told her upfront that I would not film until I felt she was ready. I did this not only for her own sake as a performer, as being presented on film is great exposure for dancers, but because there are numerous distractions on set. By drilling the choreography, I was confident that she would not be fazed as dramatically by the change of environment.

I was inspired to showcase Lilli on a deserted beach. In order to do this, I knew I had to get away from the Los Angeles City beaches. As to avoid the commute, I used Google Maps to find a deserted beach in Malibu. This meant that on our official shoot day, March 25th from 7:00am to 2:00pm, we drove to Malibu to a beach I had never been to before. Again, I called upon myself to be flexible and spontaneous.

Two days prior, on March 23rd, I took Lilli to an industrial street in Culver City. We took two hours shooting her walking down sidewalks, passing by barb wire fences, and strolling past run down shops. I anticipated using this footage to juxtapose the beach. However, in post-production I decided to omit this from the film. This was another example of flexibility and willingness to let hard work go when it does not align with narrative of the final product.

The fourth film I started was with Rie Fukushima, Haley Loeffler, and Maddie Gilbert. I have worked with Haley Loeffler and Rie in the past, and thus it was easy to get them involved in my project. Unlike the other films, “Orion’s Belt” by Sabrina Claudio was not a last minute decision. It was a song that I wanted to choreograph to since Spring 2017. I envisioned three dancers. Unfortunately, I had difficulty finding a third person that would mesh well with Haley and Rie’s styling. I attended Impulse in January with the intention to not only support my classmates but to identify any strong freshman that could fill this gap. I spotted Maddie Gilbert, and after the show I immediately asked her to be in my thesis. Two weeks later we started rehearsal.

Rie, Haley, and Maddie’s piece abided by my original vision of creating a work within a short time frame. In this case I had no choice. As Seniors, Rie and Haley had tight schedules and no flexibility past the dates we had set. Therefore, I was bound to five rehearsals, one of which was the day of the shoot.

Unfortunately, one of my dancers did not show up to one of the rehearsals. At the time I felt frustrated and disrespected. But I treated the situation with care, and made sure she knew that she was responsible for learning the material she had missed. I reminded myself that this happens in the real world, and this occurrence is only preparing me further situations down the line.

I decided to shoot Rie, Haley, and Maddie’s piece in the dance studio with permission of Dance Chair Damon Rago. I knew that the only way to transform the studio was to bring in lighting fixtures. I do not own any lighting equipment. Thus, I went my friend Patrick Alcerro, who is an alumni of the School of Film and Television, for advice. He connected me with another alum, Adam Akopyan, who was more than willing to provide lighting equipment and a

high quality camera. Patrick Alcerro suggested that with each film I produced I should incorporate more and more production value. At first this seemed like a wonderful idea. However, it quickly became clear that incorporating more elements into my project was too complicated. I could barely schedule shoot dates with my dancers, much less other film students. Initially going by Patrick's suggestion, I allowed Adam to film the piece. This was the only piece that was not filmed on my iPhone 7 Plus and was not shot by myself.

As this was officially the second piece that was shot in my portfolio, I reached out to my past *Dance Media and Film* professor, Mary Trunk, for advice. She too looked highly upon Kelsey's video. I specifically spoke to hear about how to best prepare for Rie, Haley, and Maddie's film considering that I was not going to be behind the camera. She advised me to create a shot list and to think of possible lighting scenarios prior to arriving to the shoot. Following our conversation I spoke to both Patrick Alcerro and Adam Akopyan about devising a shot list and lighting ideas.

We filmed on Saturday, February 24th from 6:00pm to 12:00pm. Giving over the camera was one of the hardest things I did during my Senior Project. I had extreme difficulty communicating what I wanted to capture on screen. As the Director, I was responsible for guiding Adam around the room during each shot. However, I could not communicate what I was thinking fast enough. While I am behind the camera, I can naturally move with the dancers because I know the choreography, and have a full understanding of the aesthetic that I am going for. With Adam's large camera, he was not able to move around the dancers with as much speed or agility. He also continued to get shots of undesirable objects in the background, which made for a difficult post-production process. Thankfully, Patrick came to help, and was able to

translate my vision to Adam, as Patrick is a dancer as well. We attempted verbal communication in addition to using physical touch to guide him, yet nothing seemed to achieve what I envisioned. We ultimately disregarded the shot list all together.

The fifth and final dance that I developed was with Tippy Dringman, Monica Williams, and Haley Smith. I thought this would be a great group of girls to work with considering their height and playful personalities. Interestingly, after approaching the girls about being in my Senior Thesis, one of their peers asked me if they could be involved as well. I was surprised to be approached in this way, however I felt this could be an opportunity to choreograph for four dancers instead of three. Thus, I accept her into the piece. Yet, every time I texted the group she never acknowledged my notifications. We scheduled a meeting to determine rehearsal times, and to my surprise, she showed up to the meeting. In that moment, I decided to include her as planned. However, as I walked into our first rehearsal, I got a text from her saying that she was overwhelmed and could not commit to my project. I am thankful that I had anticipated working with only three dancers. It was a reminder to myself, that who I decide to work with is important, and that I should take warning signs, such as lack of communication, into consideration.

This was the last piece that I choreographed, but the fourth piece I filmed. I completed the work within two weeks. I wanted to create a piece that was more industrial and commercial. At first I drove around LA, seeking alleyways and interesting venues to shoot at. However, I ultimately used Google Maps as a way of scouting out locations. This saved a tremendous amount of time. Despite having three different locations, we were able to shoot the entire piece on Saturday, March 24th.

My experience working with these girls differed in that we had difficulty establishing a dynamic that allowed us to play off of each other organically. I had difficulty choreographing this genre as my body was not as comfortable moving in it. Thus, I needed more involvement from the dancers. There seemed to be confusion of how to be involved, and how not to overstep. Ultimately, I worked primarily with Tippy to develop my vision. I have found that working in a group is much harder than with a soloist as you have to make material that coordinates with everyone's body. Plus, it is much easier to develop material with one person than with many. I found this to be true in my group piece with Rie, Haley, and Maddie. Haley tended to play the role of an assistant.

I am extremely proud of the final product of my Senior Thesis. Considering that I took responsibility for every production element of these films, I am ecstatic about the result. It is rare for me to be excited to show my work. I hold myself to high expectations, and rarely feel comfortable showcasing my art. This project was different. I was so excited by the quality of the footage. I was amazed that the combination of my iPhone and gimbal could produce such professional-looking work. The final product validated that I do not need professional equipment to create admirable work. One of the main reasons I chose to do this project was to prove to myself that I was not dependent on anyone to carry out my artistic visions. I am now confident in myself to be able to capture my choreography on film in an aesthetically pleasing way. I feel empowered and no longer feel invisible. This project has proven to be one of the most important steps towards my professional dance career to date.

I had a fire driving me to accomplish something grand. Only then, could I recover from my devastating diagnosis. This resiliency kept me focused and grounded. As I pitched my project

to my peers, I was equally convincing myself that it was possible. I took on a controlled, confident persona, as though I had done this a hundred times before. This project successfully instilled the confidence that I hoped it would. I finally took on the identity of Choreographer, the title in which I feel is the key to my new relationship with dance.

I am proud of the development of my editing skills. With each film I captured more and more footage. To be able to organize and sift through such a vast amount of footage takes organization and patience. I gave myself a finite amount of time to edit these films, which unfortunately translated to long hours spent in the computer lab. The tenacity and diligence that was required of me was significant. My passion for each work pushed me through the post-production process. I found joy and excitement alongside fatigue and frustration. However, the response I received from my peers proved to be one of the most rewarding things I have ever experience.

As my films were shown, my heart lit up when I heard my peers verbally react to my work. Kneeling in the center aisle of the audience, individuals adjacent to me leaned over and expressed their admiration. Seeing the shock and joy in my dancer's eyes was incredibly gratifying. I distinctly remember Lilli Maples approaching me, her eyes wide, almost in tears, asking if she could have a copy. The audience's reaction has given me the confidence to release my films publically. Numerous teachers have approached me, advising me to enter my films into a dance film festival. These comments and reactions has made me question if I should allow dance film to have a defined presence in my career.

As this was my first attempt at creating dance films of this nature, I have room for improvement. I would like to keep exploring ways I can choreograph without hurting myself. I

danced a lot more than I expected, and at times would walk away from rehearsal in pain . The group pieces especially demanded me to generate movement myself. Choreographic tools, such as creating rhythms and games, are methods that I would like to explore further. I feel choreographic tools have the potential to enhance my choreography. Communication relates to this. I had difficulty instructing many of my dancers. This process certainly improved my ability to communicate, however I feel I require more practice.

Although I wanted this to be an independent project, I acknowledge the benefit of having assistance. While shooting, I relied on my instinct to keep track of my shots. I attempted to have a shot list, however I never used it as it took too much time and effort to keep track of. However, this significantly affected my organization and shot options in post-production. In the future I would ideally have assistants to help keep track of the types of shots I capture, so that my post-production process goes more smoothly. In addition, I would like to gain more practice directing other cinematographers as I feel this would be an advantageous skillset in the future.

At the start of the 2017 Fall semester I visited the career office on a regular basis. The fact that I could no longer dance turned my career trajectory upside down. I felt as though I had no direction. The career office helped me narrow my focus on other possible career avenues. They taught me how to use LinkedIn to contact and set up informational interviews with alumni and other professionals. In the last year, I have set up interviews with professionals from Disney, Warner Brothers, Universal, 20th Century Fox, FX, Lionsgate, Create, A/V Squad and others. From talking with these professionals I have gained an interest in movie trailers.

In March of Spring 2017, I was awarded a part-time, paid internship with Lionsgate's Theatrical Marketing/AV Creative team. This department is responsible for story-boarding and

producing Lionsgate's movie trailers. Thus, three weeks after graduation I will start my internship with Lionsgate. At the conclusion of the internship, I hope to solidify a full-time position in their department. If a position is not available, I will seek positions within the Theatrical Marketing/AV Creative departments of other major entertainment companies. Movie trailers have become an interest of mine as I can directly apply my choreographic skills to the field. My dance film experience has prepared me for this career by developing my understanding of how movement and human emotion translates on screen. I am thankful to have found another medium in which I can harness my love for dance.

Ideally I would stay at Lionsgate for the next ten years to develop my career in the field and establish financial stability. This is of great importance to me because I am adamant about being a mother. I wish to raise kids in a stable, happy environment. Therefore, I would like a career that lends itself to providing for a family. I hope to be married around age 27, and a mother by age 29.

Although I wish to occupy a full time job at Lionsgate, I will not let go of my dance aspirations. Following graduation, I wish to start teaching at local studios. This way I can ease myself into the industry, and start making connections. Within the next year, I hope to have 3-5 dance assistants. This way I can teach higher levels of dance by relying on a healthy dancer to demonstrate my work. Having 3-5 assistants on call will allow me the flexibility to accept jobs at a short notice.

My goal as a dance teacher is to encourage students to embrace the joy dance can foster. I wish to relieve dancers of toxic dance environments, full of judgement and negative competition. I feel many have forgotten about the raw qualities of dance that makes it so special. While

teaching, positive and constructive feedback will be my only approach towards improving my dancers. Establishing a sense of community as well as self awareness in the studio will be a major focus of mine.

Working at Lionsgate will further develop my knowledge of film, and connections within the industry. This will be advantageous to my career in dance film. Following graduation I will enter my Senior Project films into film festivals. I wish to continue creating films such as these, and develop a renowned presents within the dance film community within five years. In addition to filming my own work, I would like to freelance as a dance cinematographer, choreographer, and/or editor for professional dance companies. I particularly would want to work for up-and-coming dance companies that need exposure. I would equally be gratified by producing reels for students and professional dancers.

A long term goal of mine is to integrate dance further into the American culture. By showcasing it on film, I hope to expose the public to the artform, and encourage them to support dance artists. The dance film industry has great potential for growth. I would like to make a major contribution to its development. I am eager to push boundaries and take risks to catch the attention of the public. Plus, the film industry is currently dominated by men. I would like to be an example for women to get involved in the entertainment industry. My aim is to set good examples, such as incorporating women into my production crew, as a way to encourage this movement.

Beyond ten years I hope to have the ability to travel around the world to showcase my films and capture footage in spectacular venues. I hope to also have the opportunity to choreograph a music videos for a major artist and choreograph for feature film. Lastly, I have

dreamt of establishing my own company in which I play the role of artistic director. I would like to establish a partnership so that I could focus primarily on my art work. The company would go beyond dance, incorporating elements that take advantage of our advanced technology.

This said, I do not seek fame. I simply want to have an impact on my artistic community and play a role in developing the public's appreciation for dance. My family will always come first, and if my career impedes upon my family's lifestyle or happiness, I will seriously consider adjusting my career path.

