The Beauty in the Unbearable: 
Creation of *Visceral Awakenings*

By: Taylor Augustine

11 April 2011 

Thesis Advisors: 

Nada Diachenko and Erika Randall, Department of Theatre and Dance 

Committee Members: 

Marie Boyko, Department of Integrative Physiology 

Toby Hankin and Erika Randall, Department of Theatre and Dance 

Theodore Stark, Honors Representative, Department of Theatre and Dance
## Table of contents

Abstract ....................................................................................................................... 2
Introduction .................................................................................................................. 3
Creative Process ......................................................................................................... 4
Weaving the Details .......................................................................................................
  Timeframe .............................................................................................................. 19
  Sound Score .......................................................................................................... 20
  Costuming .............................................................................................................. 21
Future Modifications ................................................................................................. 22
Conclusion .................................................................................................................. 24
Works Cited ............................................................................................................... 26
Abstract

*Visceral Awakenings* is the creative movement product of experimental research I explored as a senior BFA dance student. This research primarily investigated choreographic devices and movement invention techniques that I used to fabricate a performance dance work encompassing historical narrative, abstract narrative, and biomythography. The choreographic techniques applied to this work built a creative process yielding an expressive atmosphere representative of the emotions I experienced in my biographical moments of grief.

Using abstract narrative, historical narrative, and biomythography as guidelines to structure my work, I synthesized a cohesive, emotive storyline of a broken individual lost within a shifting timeline of the mourning process, eventually finding the footsteps that lead her back to her future. This troubled individual is not only performed and danced by me, but is me—*Visceral Awakenings* is a compilation of stories inspired by the traumatic stories of my life and focuses on my personal journey of swimming through the pain. Elements like the sound score, staging arrangements, and costuming were all decisions inspired by these concealed stories of my own mourning processes. Photographs, films, and historically significant landscapes also inspired components of *Visceral Awakenings*.

The application of creative techniques such as improvisation, chance procedure, and gestural narrative helped translate my life experiences to a language of dance movement. The movement technique is a hybrid form, integrating information from my diverse dance training. *Visceral Awakenings* unveils the universal lessons that can be mined from moments of tragedy in a
human life while also revealing the process of beauty and growth possible within an experience of grief.

Introduction

My choreographic work has always been inspired by biographical events. *Visceral Awakenings*, a concert dance work I constructed for the proscenium stage as a BFA dance student within the Department of Theatre and Dance, is different, however, because it does not just retell stories from my life, but creates an atmosphere of the emotions involved in specific biographical experiences. The process of extracting an emotional setting essentially allows me to fine-tune my choreographic preferences and master the application of narrative within dance. *Visceral Awakenings* is the physical manifestation of my research concerning the integration of historical narrative, abstract narrative, and biomythography, a concept of expanding biographical narrative to a universal level. From this research, I am developing a definitive creative process for myself—the construction of emotional atmosphere—as well as inventing new movements and techniques to contribute to my dance portfolio. *Visceral Awakenings* is a product validating this innovative process.

The evolution of dance weaves through many genres and eras. Though the dance community is small, its family tree is intricate and expansive, with technical lineages and movement theories occurring simultaneously with adjacent influences. Through this timeline, the application of narrative within dance has developed from fantastical plots in ballets, to a complete lack of narrative, to abstract narrative, to biomythography, a signature element to the creative process of Blondell Cummings in dance (Albright 187, Masson
“Expression and Imitation”). “Cummings spoke about her desire to appeal to multiple cultures, to transform her personal interest into an experience that many people could relate to” (Albright 189).

*Visceral Awakenings* is influenced by my biographical stories and uses my personal experiences to communicate a universal interpretation of grief, explored through intense sorrow and the suffering of misfortune. The work is set in a distorted timeline and explores the relationships of individuals bonded by the common experience of death, layered with my individual journey.

Creative Process

The process for creating *Visceral Awakenings* involved the experimental application of many tools and devices accumulated over the last three years in research of choreographic techniques. My studies have included the deconstruction, analysis, and replication of techniques and theories I learned from various professors, the Internet, historical environment, and personal experiences.

The construction process for this work was diverse, and substantially relied on improvisational techniques, generated from data collected while studying under Toby Hankin, for the first 4-5 weeks. I used these techniques to capture elements of unfiltered movement. This theory is similar to the concept of “stream of consciousness” speaking, allowing whatever is initially stimulated, whatever is resting on the cusp of the mind to release without active processing and editing.

The first few rehearsals involved the teaching of three movement phrases. One phrase was composed of free flow, indirect focus, and a sequential use of the
body. Another was an assortment of strong, accented leaps infiltrated with floor work. The third was a stationary gesture phrase, built through single movements provided by each dancer.

The gestures were created from a storytelling process, a technique I learned, and slightly modified, from my compositional studies with Doug Varone. Split into groups of three, the dancers were instructed to share a moment that they, independent of societal rubrics, considered to be a tragedy. These explorations were recorded, and I later extracted the movements that were most intriguing to me. Some shared personal experiences, some shared fictitious stories, but, ultimately, we began to create a pool of movement that motivated personal investment from each dancer.

This allowed the movement to adopt a symbolic meaning and emotional action for the individual dancers, similar to how Doris Humphrey used gestural emotion and repetition in her work *A Day on Earth* (Randall “Doris Humphrey”). The movement phrase I contributed to the gestural bank involved the loss of identity. When generating the material, I was thinking of my name, Taylor Corbae Augustine, and how both my middle and last names have been changed—they are not truly representative of my ancestry. Within the phrase, I continuously mime an erasing action, which I initially associated with the unwelcome edits to my name. But, when performing this phrase on stage, the erasing motion became an attempt to remove myself from the experience of tragedy. This gesture is repeated multiple times throughout *Visceral Awakenings*, signifying the continuing desire to escape the pain.

The dancers rehearsed this material, with no notes or direction from me, for two weeks. It was a necessity that the dancers were confident and
comfortable with the material and phrasing before graduating to the next level of
the process—if there was any hesitation in the sequence of movements, the
improvisational directions would not have achieved an emotional exploration of
the same depth.

My first instructions were to disregard the structure the material was
composed within, and find a different, organic pattern of movement befitting to
the natural qualities and tendencies of each dancer. I wanted to see individual
stories, individual voices, and individual struggle—while I believe there are
recognizable characteristics to all tragedy and my task was ultimately to expose
these, I also believe that every individual experience is incomparable. As
planned, there were no two similar phrase rearrangements. Timing, accents, and
qualitative decisions were all of the dancers’ intuitive responses.

Then, to practice musicality and explore the range of qualitative options, I
directed the dancers to fall into their initial and primary reactions to different
music. If the music was soft, how lightly could they move? If it was mixed with
a jazz bass, how slyly could they connect the steps? Music genres ranged from
classical piano works of the Renaissance to popular love songs of today. I
wanted to drive the dancers to explore and create a different dance persona for
each song; I felt the best way to do this was to allow them an opportunity to
investigate their primary movement responses. I was thrilled when this
exploration began to elicit certain emotions, but emotions that were results of
kinesthetic responses and embodiment of the emotion of the movement rather
than the emotions of the auditory stimulus.

I then prompted the dancers to perform their variations in a structured
improvisation. They could enter and exit as they wished, vary level of the
material, change tempo, and play with qualitative decisions. The only stipulation was that one dancer had to be on the floor and one had to be standing at all times. We practiced this score three times per rehearsal for three weeks. I recorded these experimental reactions and used many of the chance formations and spatial relationships of the dancers from these videos. This exercise is a derivative of the I-ching chance procedures used by the neo-dadaists and Merce Cunningham (Masson “Neo-dadaists”).

Inspired by some of the intriguing architecture forming in the improvisation score, I designed a second score incorporating the highly investigational spatial and architectural outlines developed by Doug Varone within the structure of Neo-romanticism (Masson “Neo-romanticism”). Dancers were prompted to migrate through the space in a connected amoeba and collectively decide to melt into a formation of support and structure. One dancer was required to remain outside of the group and investigate ways to climb across the forms of bodies or suspend himself or herself momentarily upon the structure. These improvisational settings led to many of the lifts and catches later used in the final product, like the soaring cartwheel lift from the wings.
Studying video archives, specifically the work of European choreographer Jiri Kylian, also played a large influence. I analyzed his work on principles of asymmetry, unison, dynamic flow, and physical architecture. I brought these concepts back to the studio and experimented with my dancers the different methods of application possible. The movement exploration process required for this work was similar to a series of experiments within a laboratory, only the experiments involved the human body in motion, not chemical compounds, and the laboratory was a dance studio.

I began by studying, more specifically, *Bella Figura, Black Bird, Falling Angels, Petite Mort, Sarabande, Tar and Feathers, and Wings of Wax*, works by Jiri Kylian. I concentrated primarily on his use of unison and the intriguing manipulation of architecture, the placement of bodies within negative space. From Kylian’s repertoire, I specifically investigated the asymmetrical spacing of dancers in *Falling Angels*, the expansive and flowing nature of movement in *Bella Figura*, and the contorted, molding of the body in *Tar and Feathers*. These concepts were directly translated into the spacing configuration used in the final scene of *Visceral Awakenings*, where the entire chorus of dancers repeats a circuitous rocking motion. Movement from *Bella Figura* infiltrated the construction process of my solo material and the contortion of *Tar and Feathers* inspired many of the recurring gestures.

I found myself concentrating on Kylian’s work because we share a similar movement history. His first movement language was ballet, as was mine, yet his work plays with contortions and the release of the center not traditionally found in ballet. My most recent movement training has been in the modern vocabulary, with training from Omar Carrum, Nada Diachenko, Michael Foley,
Gabe Masson, Erika Randall, and Doug Varone, and I was interested on how to integrate my new and old languages in movement that was engaging and inventive—Kylian’s movement served as a helpful reference and provided a diving board for my exploration.

Also within this process, I relied heavily on different forms of media for content inspiration as well as movement inspiration. During a summer rehearsal, I had all of my dancers watch The Boy in the Striped Pajamas, a film displaying the horrible nature of the Jewish death camps in Nazi Germany. This film stirred many complex emotions and extreme reactions. After completing the movie, the dancers moved into the studio, and without discussing or saying a word, began building a movement response as they digested what they had just seen. They also each wrote a letter either to a character of the story, as a character of the story, or to themselves. One dancer, Johnny Stewart, connected so strongly to the young, innocent character of Bruno that his written response was transcribed in the hand of Bruno.

“Mother,
I’ve gone to see my friend Schmol. He can’t find his father so we’re going on an adventure. Don’t worry, I watched a video of Father’s about the camp... it’s really very nice. I’m sure we will go to the café and perhaps play with Schmol’s other friends. I’ll be home soon... you have nothing to worry about.
Love,
Bruno”

This response helped build a duet between Johnny and fellow dancer DeShawn Marshall. The relationship shared between Bruno and Schmol inspired a dynamic between these two dancers that precariously balances the trust of camaraderie and the fear of betrayal (The Boy in the Striped Pajamas 2008).
In movement, this is spoken through an intertwined series of gentle catches and falls as well as strong throws and pushes.

I chose to share *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas* with my cast because it forces emotions of intense sorrow, and the setting is not fictional; the death camps existed and are a tragic time in human history. One of the final images of this film involves a shot of the large door leading into the gas showers. There is no longer any noise coming from the other side of this door as Schmol, Bruno, and hundreds of others have suffocated on their last breath. This scene is a lot to swallow and stirs the mind and the soul. I have not experienced anything as horrific as the death camps, but sharing a film about them was an extreme way to begin working with emotions of grief.

A later summer rehearsal involved a movement interpretation from a series of black-and-white photographs from Paul Himmel (Himmel 2, 15, 16, 71, 79). I selected the photographs based on my personal interest in the relationship of bodies, juxtaposition to environment, and solemn facial expressions within each picture. The dancers were divided into three groups, each with a different photo. As a group, they were instructed to collectively create a movement response based on the series of photographs they were given. Many of the montage scenes revealed in the beginning of *Visceral Awakenings* were originally constructed from these photographs.
I then dissected and studied the recorded footage from all of these phrases. I marked certain movements I was drawn to and certain aesthetic decisions. Based on the kinesthetic chemistry and the qualitative affinities between dancers, I divided the group of eleven into small duets, trios, and quartets. A few of the dancers were more comfortable moving within a smaller kinesphere, and became a linked chain, which provided landscape to the scene. A different pair of dancers shared a similar flow of movement, and their synchronicity was much too engaging to avoid.

On a biographical layer, each group expresses a particular event in my life. The quartet is the manifestation of the loss of my godchild—my aunt and uncle and I are essentially trapped within our own space, linked together and holding tight for support on one another as we let our ideas of the beauty of the child grow, represented through the accumulatively growing movement material of dancer Sarah Currie. The duet of Mollie Wolf and Brittney Kirkpatrick was inspired by my relationship with my best childhood friend. We have been supporting one another since her mother passed away, a woman I affectionately called Mama Linda, when we were just four years old. Together we’ve battled
everything between the loss of her mother and father to my high school shooting. No one seems to understand my trail of sorrow like she does. This duet displays the comforting warmth and supple nature of our friendship through sinuous partnering and fluid transition.

The trio, danced by Keely Ahrold, Tara Molloy, and Ali Mills, is not as deeply rooted in a specific event as the other vignettes are. Rather, this group of women performs the precarious and nauseous emotion that often finds me in moments of mourning. They enter with a whirlwind of turns, stirring the energy of the space. Before anything is allowed to settle, they are scrambling with their arms extended, searching for balance as they strategically place themselves on the crumbling ground beneath.

I never shared these personal stories with my dancers. I wanted them to invest in the work using their perspectives, and they did. Each group adopted a story for themselves, allowing a couple of minutes for their voices to speak their version of loss and suffering. The trio of women became a relationship of sisters, mourning the loss of a parent. The quartet was a family struggling over the ostracizing of a child. The duet of men exemplified camaraderie and struggle of soldiers at war. And the duet of women showed the story of the wives left behind, keeping a strong face and behaving as though the stitches of their world are not about to rupture at the seams.

The dancers’ interpretations of the movement did not match the stories I created it with, but that is fully acceptable. I never wanted them to know the specifics of my journey. The fact that they were dancing stories of emotional distress was success in my eyes. To me, it meant that the emotional atmospheres I was constructing in my experimental process were working—they were
creating experiences involving grief. The more stories that could be interpreted from the work meant that the representation of the emotion was becoming universal.

While in the middle of the creative process for this work, I became very attached to the film *A Single Man*, directed by Tom Ford. Apart from the impressive artistic qualities and nature of this film, I created a very strong bond with the main character, George, and his story of tragedy. The disjointed filming techniques seemed to perfectly complement the fragmented timeline I was developing. I began to analyze what elements of the movie were so effective and how I could manipulate them to function within my work. Paralleling some of the filmic devices used in this movie, I adapted moments of stillness, sound, and the desire to articulate and fill minor details. This is specifically integrated into the scene where my character walks along, what I often referred to in rehearsal as “the ladder”—I am alone, imperceptive of the world occurring around me, and investigating the differences in each level of grief.

Within the lonely journey along this ladder, however, my character is continually supported by a large group of bystanders, who themselves are bonded through sharing an experience of grief. Together the chorus leads and carries my character through each rung of the ladder and holds me at the top.
until I am prepared to take the last few steps on my own, accepting the nature of 
loss.

This acceptance was catalyzed by one of the most influential quotes in *A 
Single Man*, spoken in one of my favorite scenes of the movie. George meets a 
flirtatious, young and handsome man, Carlos, outside of a liquor store. They 
share a cigarette during which time the endearing Carlos attempts to ask George 
on a dinner date. George refuses, expressing he will be going out of town—
hidden within these words is the revealing of his plan to commit suicide later 
that evening. Carlos does not understand the somber and dark tone in George’s 
voice, but explains to George that “[s]ometimes even awful things have their 
own kind of beauty.” This comment stirs and flusters George. Confused and 
pensive, George asks for one more cigarette from dear Carlos to continue their 
conversation before the scene fades (*A Single Man* 2009).

The revelation that tragedy, death, and grief have a universal beauty 
opened a new door of opportunity for *Visceral Awakenings*. The work was 
exploring dark and difficult topics, but I wanted to create an experience for the 
viewer that was more complete—it did not need to settle in a particularly joyous 
place, but it needed to settle somewhere. This scene revealed the answer, what I 
was waiting for at the top of the ladder: acceptance. Recognizing the event, 
accepting the inability to change the past, this is where the beauty in the tragedy 
lived.

And the word “beauty” cracked many assumptions I had unintentionally 
been dragging through the process with me. The archetypal qualities of that 
word led to the decision to replace the dress from my closet with an over-
embroidered, decorative gown. I was originally using a casual, red dress from
my wardrobe to represent the growth of my character from before the tragic experience to after, but the decision to use this simple sundress was a result of the loud color—I enjoyed the symbolism of the fiery red. But as the “beauty” of the journey grew, the size and embellishment of the dress also had to grow.

Though I wanted to create a story and specific characters within this work, I did not want to spoon-feed the audience or even give the audience all of the details of my experiences. This theory of choreographing is referred to as abstract narrative, and was first introduced by Kurt Jooss in 1932 in Germany in his work *The Green Table*, a ballet with a strong antiwar narrative (Hankin “Strength and Lightness”). Pina Bausch, also in Germany, used abstract narrative to allow her audience to extract details from the theme of her work but to finish the stories with information from their personal lives (Masson “Pina Bausch”). Her repertoire of work includes application of elements from Einstein’s theory of relativity, emotion through the humanist lens, and nonlinear
time representation via montages (Masson “Pina Bausch”). I used the theory of nonlinear time representation through montages in the opening of *Visceral Awakenings*. There are four images that are shown, varying in length of time, in a sequence of dramatic lighting and blackouts. To me, these are glimpses of memories. Each of these scenes occurs again at a later time in the piece. The opening montage served as a foreshadowing and visual preparation for the abstract narrative to come.

The utilization of narrative in dance continued to expand, and was reinvented again by Blondell Cummings. Cummings’ theory is known as biomythography: a way to translate personal biography through vernacular relatable to the general public (Albright 179). This device permits artists to use flavors of their personal lives while still making material perceptible on a universal scale.

Though I used biographical experience to motivate my movement material and the theme of *Visceral Awakenings*, no scene exists in the work that is concretely my story. Everything is spoken, through dance, based on the emotional atmosphere my personal stories created for me.

Apart from the biographical influences, there is also a very strong historical influence embedded within this work. Original inspirations for the emotional themes and subject matter were created in my personal response to war, specifically concerning the D-day battles at Normandy. The memorial center there is eerie and stunningly beautiful all at the same time. The precise alignment of all of the crosses created the beginning formations for the original stage spacing. And the streams of white that stand out against the bright green grass inspired the presence of white wings in the stage space.
The white space was also conceived based on the notion of the “light at the end of the tunnel.” This concept is often associated with perceptions of passing over or the moments one experiences just before death. Spiritually this occurrence carries very profound connotations. From the perspective of dance theory, the importance of the stage space is grounded in the work’s connections with Neo-romanticism. The set was not necessarily symbolic, but it was very much representational (Masson “Neo-Romanticism”). The white space was not a symbol of my character’s journey, but instead represented the external space of persons lost. White is, also, a color heavily correlated with heaven and angelic ideals. The white can be interpreted as the “other” peering into the dark and twisted process before them.

Also, as a student of Integrative Physiology, my studies include an intricate systemic of the human body. By obtaining a very precise and detailed
image of my body and how it works, I ultimately have more creative access to the detail of my own movement process. I can picture scenes to a finer degree of specificity and mold them to my standards. My knowledge of anatomy provides a unique vocabulary with which I can communicate movement specifics with my dancers. I often integrated my metaphoric dance language with an anatomical and mechanical language of “how to.” In the opening scene of *Visceral Awakenings*, three dancers walk very slowly through the space. I directed them to glide, float, walk on glass but I also broke down the moments of muscular control during the transferring of weight to keep the walk as even and smooth as possible. Also in this opening scene, I am on the floor in stillness for almost 5 minutes. My understanding of cellular processes while breathing helps me think about all of the motion occurring within my body while I am resting on the floor. This thought process allowed me to remain an active dancer on stage without moving, and prevented me from becoming just dead mass in the center of the space.

The physiological perspective also provides a way to think about the integration between primary body systems. Some functions of the body are still unknown in their detail and process. These properties are known as emergent properties and include functions like dreams and emotions (Silverthorne Ch.1, 4, 8, 9). Scientific theory cannot yet explain these properties, and thus emotion is something that is best understood kinesthetically. An experience of anger is often accompanied by the tensing of the musculoskeletal system. Extreme sadness triggers the overproduction of the lacrimal gland, forming tears (Marieb 463, 484). Socially we have created labels for these emotions, but we really have no alternative ways to describe them using words. If you were to ask someone to
describe anger, chances are they will begin stumbling for another word in their head while their fists inherently clench and arms begin to jolt. It is for this intrinsic kinesthetic understanding of emotion that my research can only be explored through the human body, in the context of dancing.

Weaving the Details: Timeframe

The seamed together sections of *Visceral Awakenings* were driven by a contorted and rearranged timeline. When one witnesses a tragic event, like a car crash, time is distorted and often unrecognizable. As the anticipation of the catastrophe sinks in, the moments before the event are uncharacteristically long. Time freezes in a sense. The worst emotion to tackle is accepting that there were no plausible actions that could have prevented the accident. The time immediately following is a whirlwind. People swarm. Grief sets in. Days pass by, void of any spark in sensation. The piece is representative of this distorted time spectrum through the relative connections of adagio material to allegro. One of the first movements of my piece involves the chorus of dancers panning their gaze across the stage, watching the spectrum of time pass. Silence envelops the stage for a moment, dragging time with it. A single dancer finds the senses to move again, but slowly. This movement impetus, however, builds quickly and spirals upward in vivacity until the stage is suddenly empty again. The work cycles through this process multiple times, in various forms. My character eventually reaches a place of acceptance and acknowledgment, slowly settling before the urge to speed through time seizes again.
One of the elements I discovered within *A Single Man* was the sound score. Every song but one, used in the final concert material, came from this movie. I used the process of trial and error to reveal the best sound score timeline. The only song not from this movie came from the new CD of classical, experimental artists, Apocalyptica. Together the songs created a beautiful atmosphere and one that held great biographical value to me.

There is a specific scene in *A Single Man* that transported me to one of the labeled tragedies of my life. The main character, George, is sitting at home waiting for a phone call from his partner, who is traveling to visit family for the weekend. When George answers the telephone, there is a forced comical edge to his voice—he’s worried about his partner, knowing on some level that everything is not alright, but pushes for a wave of laughter instead, the easier
reality. But just as he feared most, the man on the phone was calling to tell him there had been a fatal accident. One of my main reasons for selecting this sound score is the parallel of emotion I experienced just a few months prior to watching this scene.

Almost one year ago, there was a glider plane accident right outside of Boulder. I was watching the news with my sister and like most days, nothing on the television was particularly good news. But a live story began scrolling on the bottom screen, reporting the plane crash—I became immediately anxious. I had to leave the living room as an unexpected sense of nausea began seizing me—on some level, like George, I knew something was wrong. I had no way of recognizing the stimulus for these visceral attacks, but later that evening I learned one of my childhood friends was operating the glider plane. The maddening curiosity and drowning sense of anxiety are beautifully captured in Abel Korzeniowski’s sound score for Ford’s film (Korzeniowski “Becoming George”).

Weaving the Details: Costuming

The dancers are in a series of neutral separates, giving the impression of nudity. Within the frame of the piece, the dancers often transition between very human moments and human characters to unemotional architecture and landscape. The neutrality of the costuming allows them to do this without causing confusion. The nude images also give a sense of rebirth. In film, the state of naissance is often achieved through water and nudity. I captured elements of water through fluidity of movement and represented nudity through
the neutral costuming. They have all achieved this sense of release and regrowth, while my character has not yet reached that point.

Instead, my character is dressed in a black slip. This is appropriate for multiple reasons. The visual cues correlate, as there is a formal gown in front of me implying that I have just shed a layer of my clothing or that I am prepared to step into the dress. The socially accepted norm of women wearing slips under formal attire neatly ties together a relationship between my character and the gown. Slips are undergarments—an item that is deemed socially inappropriate for public attire. In its own way, the slip is more chastised than the appearance of nudity. There is a raw emotionality to wearing undergarments in front of a crowd of people—it is revealing and allows the viewer to make assumptions about what remains beneath the last layer. Nudity in public differs as it “bears all.” There are no places to hide secrets or insecurities. With the slip, I am exposing more than I am comfortable with, but I still have a small layer to hide my deepest fears and maintain the slight mystery to the details of my emotional state. Also, the relationship of the slip and the dress suggests a moment of interruption. The layering process of preparation has unexpectedly been disturbed. This parallels the emotional journey of the characters. Emotions are swelling up and seeping from this character of mine, and as much as I try, I cannot hide from them.

Future Modifications

If I could continue to make edits to this work, I would expand on the large group sections. I find the intricate network of bodies moving together, at different times, in specified patterns, very intriguing. More clarity within a large
group image would help communicate the emotion of universality. I began to find the most captivating moments to be the ones of articulately designed architecture. With more time, I would have explored more of my options with human structure and the duality the human bodies could have played within the work in transitions from human to landscape.

I would also give a greater focus to the end of the piece. The final moment, running away from the dress, can easily be perceived in multiple ways. One way is to see the character running away from the dress and not being able to deal with the pain. As fellow student Lyndia McGauhey observed, “when something is too sad, too hard, or too heartbreaking, we have no choice but to save ourselves by running away” (McGauhey 2). Another perspective is to see the passing of the dress to the others as a way of laying the lost to rest, similar to how we pass our deceased to cemeteries. The running at the end could then be seen as the attempt to catch up with where the normal projection of life should be, an attempt to escape the perpetual pain of the process. Both perceptions are completely valid, but I have yet to decide which message I prefer. With more time, I could dissect each option and truly explore which message I want to convey. I could then edit the ending to specify and more clearly communicate the message I choose.

Also, the dress is the symbol of the event, the person lost, and a part of my character. For me, the dress holds all that existed in life before having to deal with the tragedy. Whether she was a happy young teenager, an exuberant girlfriend, or an optimistic personality, the dress is everything that existed in the “before.” I fear the dress because accepting its existence means accepting the
tragedy and all of the inevitable changes and sacrifices that go with it. By refusing the dress and avoiding it, I can pretend to live as though nothing is wrong, though the dress continually appears, showing that something indeed has changed, that things are now very different. I believe this relationship may have been more clearly established if there was an elongated scene with my character and the dress in the space, so that I could explore what movement vocabulary would be created in the emotion of this setting. I could also communicate more clearly the growth of my character if I used multiple dresses of different sizes, some that fit and some that do not.

With the support of the community and the healing of time, my character does eventually become strong enough to touch the dress on her own initiative, to remember the life, and to realize that it does no longer exist. I cannot put on the dress because it will not fit. I have grown too much and as much as I may desire, I cannot return to who I was before.

Conclusion

The physical body proves the best plausible medium for expressing and exploring human emotions. To accentuate and express these indefinable emergent properties, the body must move beyond pedestrian standards. Dancing is the most logical and effective way to do this.

The integrated techniques accessed to yield this work are highly innovative. Following the wise words of CU alumna Hayley Muth, I found a process to dance in a way that “I’ve never seen it . . . before” (Muth 39).

Emotional exploration is a raw process and forces the choreographer to search internally for the journey. Some acquired devices I utilized to attain the
appropriate atmosphere of biography and emotion within movement included abstract narrative and biomythography. These choreographic outlines, combined with historical and media influences, aided in the production of *Visceral Awakenings*, an explorative, creative work on universal processes of coping with tragedy.

We have all experienced tragedy—it is an inevitable aspect of life. There is no scale for rating a tragedy, or none that I am willing to accept. Like many experiences in life, the degree with which someone is affected by something is relative. I have no intention of comparing stories of tragedy, nor did I create *Visceral Awakenings* to fish for pity. I wanted to create a work that secretly explored the deeper meaning of overt events in my life with my audience, using art as the vehicle of communication. I wanted the emotional atmosphere of my experiences to conjure memories of their experiences, acknowledging that grief is a process everyone encounters. These labeled tragedies became definitive moments of growth, and I began to discover the beauty to be found within events deemed unbearable.
Works Cited


