

# Dancing/Integration: Observations of a Teaching Artist

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“The dancing does the teaching. The teacher points to that.”  
Steve Paxton

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*Learning (and perhaps contemplation?) asks people to stand on a foundation made of what they already know and bravely fall, supported by curiosity, into what they do not know. In dance education, this is not a metaphor. The learning process is public in the performing arts, and the focus on the body in dance can make even the most proficient students feel overexposed. I am willing to do whatever I ask of students because I am learning right alongside them. I continue to make dances because I have questions. Contemplative and somatic practices temper my inner perfectionist's need to answer them. My hope is that my own vulnerability promotes an atmosphere of risk-taking where art simply emerges...and we all point to it. Integration is a central and recurring theme, goal, and catalyst in my life. Creating conditions for integration is a contemplative practice. In my wildest dreams, integration might someday come alive as an experience in those who witness my dances. At this moment in my experience and study, **integrating is a process where differentiated parts find context-appropriate, well-timed, dynamic relationship(s) with each other and/or a whole that is undergoing its own transformation into a larger, more complex whole.** What are the relationships between my dancing, teaching, and contemplative practices that will act as catalysts in my development as a human being? This piece is an early articulation of some of the details of my research and embodiment of integration. It is also, in and of itself, an attempt to further integrate.*

**Keywords:** dance, education, contemplative practice, contemplative pedagogy, improvisation, contact improvisation, Integral Theory, integration, meditation, mindfulness, practice, performance, somatics, Laban/Bartenieff Movement Analysis, Body-Mind Centering, embodied anatomy

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## PRACTICE/S/ING

“In theory, theory and practice are the same. In practice, they are not.”  
Albert Einstein

### *Practice*

I believe in practice. I use a fairly simple formula: 1. Show up as I am, 2. Do and be in the thing, 3. Notice: what is, what happens, and how, 4. Talk, reflect upon, read and/or write about it, 5. Repeat. These steps can be done in any order and are influenced by Robin Nelson’s Practice-as-Research (PaR) epistemological model for practitioner-researchers in the arts. At the center of this model is *praxis*, which he describes as “theory imbricated within practice” (Nelson, 2013, p.37). In other words, theory and practice are “the same” and “they are not.” The “modes of knowing” (p.37) that surround arts praxis in Nelson’s model include *know-how*, or first-person, embodied, tacit knowledge (i.e., the dancing), *know-what*, or the articulation of the *know-how* made possible through reflection (i.e., choreographic and technical methods that led to the creation and execution of the dance are named), and *know-that*<sup>1</sup>, or the third-person, relatively objective knowledge traditionally valued in academia (i.e., writing about the performance of the dancing/dance, its contents in relationship to other dances in the field at large, and its location within various lineages). Each of these modes of knowing is an in-road to the others. Each of the parts in my “formula,” above, has the potential to contain, create, and/or contribute to all three types of knowledge.

My embodied research is expressed through several interrelated practices in different contexts. Some of these include meditation, somatic work, teaching, and solo, duet, and ensemble dancemaking from multiple, shifting perspectives and states of body~mind. Each practice supports and influences the others, all are contexts for cultivating relationships, most include exercises and/or induce states designed to increase duration and qualitative range of attention, and many require and/or result in slowing down and softening. Each practice is distinct, yet they are all expressions of the same *integrated* body of work.

### *Practices*

This writing is an effort to articulate some of the relationships between the aforementioned practices in the context of various explorations of integration. The practices defy strict categorization and resist the linear nature of a written article, so I present them in a few ways. Most are in list form, below, followed by short explanations of several in later sections. The practices are expressed visually, illus-

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<sup>1</sup> Also referred to as “outsider knowledge,” information in the *know-that* category of this model, if explained well, can serve as a bridge between disciplines. Interdisciplinary endeavors benefit from meaningful communication between those who are creating new knowledge in their respective disciplines. As an academic and artist dedicated to the development of the whole person through integrated curricula, I am inspired by the challenge of articulating current research in dance for those who are less familiar with the art form. I am also committed to studying and applying new knowledge from other disciplines into my own creative processes.

trating their relationships, in Figure I at the end of the paper. Discussions of others are woven into the various explorations of integration.

- Solo Practices
  - Meditation, including both formal and informal practices from the mindfulness tradition.
  - Body-Mind Centering® (BMC®), The Feldenkrais Method® Awareness Through Movement lessons, and Bartenieff Fundamentals (somatic practices<sup>2</sup> that include movement, visualization and somatization<sup>3</sup>)
  - Dance artist Deborah Hay’s questions and theories of practice
- Duet/Dyad Practices
  - Contact improvisation<sup>4</sup>
  - Dancemaking with collaborator, Eric Geiger
  - Authentic Movement<sup>5</sup>
- Ensemble/Group Practices
  - LIVE, a weekly ensemble practice researching spontaneous dancemaking (dance improvisation)
  - UNICORN, a group dance directed by Leslie Seiters/Little Known Dance Theater

*Interlude: Somatics, Contemplative Practices, and Dance*

The word *somatics*, coined in 1976 by Feldenkrais practitioner Thomas Hanna, is derived from the Greek word *soma* meaning “living body.” Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen (founder of BMC), summarizes beautifully:

Hanna’s use of the word “soma” to designate the experienced body in contrast to the objectified body. When the body is experienced

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2 In addition to these, the field of Somatics also includes systems such as the Alexander Technique, Ideokinesis, and Continuum.

3 Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen uses the word somatization to “engage the kinesthetic experience directly,” which is different from visualization, “which uses visual imagery to evoke a kinesthetic experience” (Bainbridge Cohen, 2012).

4 Instigated by Steve Paxton in the 1970s, contact improvisation is a spontaneous movement practice where the primary motivation and source of information inspiring its initiation, continuation, redirection, quality and/or resolve are the point(s) and/or surface(s) of contact between a person and another person, (persons, earth, object(s), perhaps even self). It has been described as a moving meditation, an art-sport, and has become increasingly integrated into the field of dance since its inception.

5 Authentic Movement is a practice created by Mary Starks Whitehouse, and further codified by Janet Adler. The basic dyad form involves a mover and a witness. The mover closes his or her eyes and waits for movement impulses, allowing him/herself to “be moved.” The witness observes the mover, attempting to remain present with his or her own experiences. The mover opens his or her eyes at the end and the movement portion of the practice is followed by dialogue.

from within, the body and mind are not separated, but are experienced as a whole... “Somatics” also names a field of study—the study of the body through the personal experiential perspective. (Bainbridge Cohen, 2012, p. 1)

Widespread recognition of the limitations of Cartesian dualism (also known as the “mind-body split”) is part of what led to the development of the early somatic methodologies.

Many contemplative traditions pre-date Descartes by thousands of years, so I am considering Somatics as part of that lineage. I am also proposing that somatic practices are contemplative practices, and/or techniques for deepening and distributing contemplative practices in and throughout the/one’s body. Although a full comparative analysis is beyond the scope of this paper, the following is a list of qualities, values, and foci that contemplative and somatic practices have in common:

- Subjective, first-person perspective and experience
- Development and study of awareness, attention, consciousness, and concentration
- Cultivation of attention to and awareness of breath and the present moment
- Embodied inquiry
- Sensory attunement
- Process-oriented
- Quieting of mental activity to allow the perception of more subtle aspects of experience
- Slowing and softening
- Reveals dialogue between the conscious and unconscious aspects of mind.

Western, theatrical dance has a long history of valuing beauty (narrowly defined) and quantifiable physical skill. The perspective and vision of choreographers and teachers were primary, and the experience of the dancer was rarely part of the conversation. In the late 19th-early 20th centuries, modern dance began to change that. When postmodern dance and forms like contact improvisation emerged in the 1970s, the dancer’s experience became *materia prima* in many training and creative processes. Although the roots of modern dance and somatic systems are intertwined, it was not until the 1980’s that the dance world began to “take serious interest in somatic education...[which] is now a household word in a dancer’s training” (Batson, 2009, p.1).

Over the past few decades, somatic practices have influenced more aspects of contemporary dance, going beyond support for technical, physical training and into the creative process of dancemaking. In my own dance history, somatic practices became transformative, contemplative practices when they made their way into all major areas of my research in dance. The practices went from being tools

that supported my dancing to perspectives through which I could more meaningfully navigate art, life, and my own development. This shift gave somatic methodologies transformative power and is one reason why I now recognize them as contemplative.

## PRACTICING

### *Solo: Meditation*

In 2009, I completed the 8-week Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) course and established a daily, sitting mindfulness meditation practice. During this training, I often noticed what Catherine Kerr (*Mindfulness Starts With the Body: A View from the Brain*) and Christine Caldwell (*Mindfulness & Bodyfulness: A New Paradigm*) are articulating so clearly in their work: mindfulness is a practice deeply rooted in the body.

In “A Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction Workbook,” Stahl and Goldstein state that

There are essentially two forms of meditation: insight and concentration. Mindfulness is considered insight meditation since it brings full attention to the body and mind in the present moment without trying to alter or manipulate the experience...In concentration meditation...the focus is on concepts, imagery, or a mantra. (2010, p.8)

Somatic practices involve directives that resemble both insight and concentration meditations, with more emphasis on the latter. Explorations often begin with simple observation of one’s physical experience with equanimity (insight) and then attention is typically shifted toward a more specific location within the body, sometimes with imagery that guides one’s experience and/or movement (concentration). Somatic methodologies are more explicitly focused on the body, so they yield and provide very detailed tools for embodiment. This specific direction of attention, when coupled with my tendency to analyze, leads me to experience most somatic practices as concentration meditations.

Continuing with formal, sitting mindfulness meditations has allowed me to practice a more curious and receptive quality of attention, and this training has enabled me to rest in this way of attending for greater stretches of time. It slows me down enough to experience my quickness, and somehow makes me more resilient and softer at the same time. My view is clearer and my grip is loosened. This allows my relationships to become more dynamic and fluid in all of my practices. In the classroom, meditation enables me to instigate experiences rather than simply doling out information.

Healthy alignment is an important part of technical training in contemporary modern dance. If a student’s spine is overly extended (also referred to as exces-

sive lumbar lordosis, hyperlordosis, or “sway back”) it can compromise their balance, limit their ability to move in certain directions, and lead to injury over time. Typically, instructors use directives like “tuck your tail under” to “correct” hyperlordosis, which usually results in an immediate, almost reflexive, over-correction. The adjustment is often so fast and muscular that the dancer’s felt sense of where they began, how they shifted, and where they ended up is almost completely obscured by the psychophysical manifestations of their obedience. Meditation has shifted my approach. I now begin by observing the student’s body without trying to change anything. Next, I gently ask them to do the same. In the case of the student with the overly extended spine, I would ask them about their experience of their spine without giving any specific information about its current or ideal position. I have witnessed intelligent, specific, and holistic change in students who learn to pause and simply “notice what is.” It is much like the meditator whose breathing is transformed when they are asked to simply notice it, without judgment or striving. In instances of hyperlordosis, simply noticing the spine can cause the muscles to release, allowing the spine to relax into its natural curvature. If dancers can feel this as it is happening, then they are primed to find it on their own.

*Duet/Dyad: Contact Improvisation*

Contact improvisation is a somatic practice, meditation, dance technique, and dancemaking tool. Moving in contact with another person in this form is an intersubjective experience that allows both partners to experience the laws of physics, modulate muscle/mind tone, sharpen or temper their reflexes to meet the demands of the moment, move three-dimensionally through three-dimensional pathways in space with greater ease and efficiency, enrich their sense of touch, practice listening and responding at the same time, and physically access each others’ nervous systems and movement skills. In the beginning, attending to so much requires slowing down, quieting, and releasing. Sitting mindfulness meditation allows me to access this state much more quickly, and to sustain it longer. During Contact practice, I experience a psychophysical state of awareness so open and available that my whole being has the capacity to move in any direction at any moment. Contact improvisation is a way to embody the practice of response flexibility, a capacity often attributed to contemplative practices. This state is invaluable in the classroom. It allows me to plan full classes, and deviate from those plans as needed in response to the students’ engagement, interests, and degrees of comprehension.

During a contact improvisation, I can move through the world in ways that are impossible without a partner and, over time, traces of these pathways and trajectories often show up to support me in the absence of a partner. Relational concepts such as support, control, patience, willfulness, and communication are all operational in the most literal, physical sense possible in a Contact dance. Modulation of each of these qualities/tendencies, from one micro-second to the next, is

necessary in contact improvisation, making it one of my favorite ways to practice relationships. As a teacher, I want to support students. If I am patient throughout the learning process, I can both guide it *and* stay out of its way. Tempering my willfulness and need to control enables me to connect to students' desires rather than unconsciously imposing my own. Communication in the teacher-student relationship is complex and constant, requiring a kind of listening that can quiet even the loudest mind chatter.

*Ensemble/Group: LIVE*

*LIVE* is a group of seven dance artists and a musician, with whom I have practiced every Thursday morning for seven years. Instigated in 2007, the basic structure is an extended version of Barbara Dilley's *Contemplative Dance Practice (CDP)*<sup>6</sup> where we sit quietly for 20 minutes, prepare/warm-up/"tune" individually for 20 minutes, add touch, weight sharing, and allow various kinds of groupings to emerge for another 20 minutes, and then we "make something," spontaneously, in the hour that follows. This is the basic structure of our practice, but the lines between each section blur in different ways each week. I am often the only one sitting at the beginning, and the end is sometimes impossible to identify. Many of the artists in the group have significant experience with Contact and other forms of improvisation. The movement practice is followed by a conversation where we savor our favorite moments, share what we are working on, and discover the myriad perspectives in the room.

*LIVE* was made up of the same group of people<sup>7</sup> from 2008-2013. It has dismantled over the past year, and is currently finding its new identity. The theory that emerged during our practice during those years was a moving target, each of us aiming at it from a different place. There are few statements that can be made about the ensemble as a whole, but we were all interested in 1) shared reflection, and 2) discovering and questioning our assumptions. *LIVE* is a contemplative practice for me because my conditioned responses are constantly revealed through the process of reflection that happens from several different perspectives. Reconciling these different takes on reality requires yet another layer of contemplation, which both challenges and calls up my skills as an individual within the group. If recognizing a habit is a bicep curl, doing so in the context of a group is a bicep curl with a heavier dumbbell.

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6 "CDP...is a score for the exploration of open space improvisation...composed of three sections...sitting meditation, moves into personal warm-up phase, and then allows time for open space improvisation—an invitation for spontaneous dancing. Participants sit around the edge of the space with a meditative attention when they aren't working in it. A short final sitting meditation and time for group discussion end the practice, which is designed to take about three hours but may vary in length" (Buckwalter, 2010, p. 193).

7 From 2008-2013, *LIVE* was Kristopher Apple (musician), Ron Estes (narrative therapist), Liam Clancy, Eric Geiger, Yolande Snaith (all University of California, San Diego), the author, Leslie Seiters (both San Diego State University) Mary Reich (dancer, Expressive Arts therapist), Karen Schaffman (California State University, San Marcos).

A few years into practicing, we began attempts to perform our practice. It has since been suggested that the performances informed and served our practice rather than the other way around. This is just one of the many conventions we questioned. I approached *LIVE* practice with the same rigor I did academic pursuits. However, there were qualities within the practice that are rarely celebrated in academia, but have proven essential to the generative power of the work including a very loose structure, a privileging of process over product, a sense of play, and a high tolerance for nonsense. *LIVE* gently forced me to rethink my definitions of performance, dance, choreography, improvisation, and technique. The meanings of phenomena such as support, generosity, virtuosity, and beauty have expanded for me as I experienced them, physically, within *LIVE*.

Contemplation requires space and a lighter touch than most academic endeavors. *LIVE* has proven fruitful, potent, and productive. It took years for me to understand that this was *due to* rather than *despite* the open nature of the practice. College is serious official business. Courses must have evaluation criteria to be approved, syllabi serve as contracts, and grades are relatively final. *LIVE* is a constant reminder of how much learning can happen in contexts with very little structure; situations where students cannot fail, where failure is celebrated, or when “failure” is redefined through a shift in perspective, state, or even a transformation of worldview. Including moments, projects, practices, and sometimes an entire class period with that much space can feel radical in the context of an institution. If framed well, however, it can be an opportunity to use freedom to cultivate students’ sense of responsibility for remaining curious, creating questions, and engaging in ways that are unique and meaningful to them.

#### *Defining Integration*

A web search on the string “define integrate” yields several definitions that are around bringing parts together to make a whole. Many of the definitions included words like “unify” or “combine,” while others focused on more social or mathematical definitions. I am grateful to those whose personal and professional explorations of integration have led to more granular and/or embodied definitions and expressions of the word. At this moment in my experience and study, integrating is a process where differentiated parts find context-appropriate, well-timed, dynamic relationship(s) with each other and/or a whole that is undergoing its own transformation into a larger, more complex whole. Could the sparks created by these relationships be what triggers the transformation? If so, could practices that make integration a conscious, embodied process be considered contemplative?

#### *Identification, Articulation, Differentiation, and Integration*

If mindfulness meditation has made me more conscious, BMC moves that consciousness through me and into action with greater specificity and qualitative range.

In her forward to Bainbridge Cohen's book, *Sensing, Feeling, and Action*, Susan Aposhyan writes:

For me the most precious aspect of BMC is the uncompromising belief that consciousness pervades *all* of the body. This leads one to a very intimate, almost microscopic, experience of the body. From this level, all tissue and fluids, each and every cell, are clearly intelligent, can perceive and take action. Not only can we be aware *of* the body, we can be aware *with* the body. The realization of this belief stems largely from Bonnie's ability to contact herself on a microscopic level and communicate both *from* that place within herself and *to* that place in others. (Bainbridge Cohen, 2012, p.vii)

My experience studying BMC with Bainbridge Cohen is consistent with Aposhyan's. Bainbridge Cohen is a practitioner, and that allows a transmission of the material that is mysterious, less effortful, and seemingly unmediated. She knows how to rest in being in the middle of a culture of doing. In her presence, I have access to this state of being and I learn things about recuperation that support me as I juggle the roles of mother, wife, dance artist, and teacher. Learning from her in this way has inspired me to teach from my own experience, which has inspired my commitment to practicing what I am teaching. On a good day, this happens *in the very moment* I am teaching it.

Identification, articulation, differentiation, and integration are locations on one of my favorite maps of embodiment from BMC. For instance, I can identify my hand. See it, feel it, look at anatomical maps of human hands, and discuss my findings with others (identification). Next, I can feel my hand as I move it, notice what it does, how it does it, try to make it do things/do things with it (articulation). Then I can repeat those activities with parts of my body that are not my hand, such as my wrist, forearm, or the rest of my body, to gather more information. As I articulate my hand, I can notice where my hand becomes my wrist or forearm in my perception. I can attempt to keep my hand still while my forearm (or the rest of me) moves (differentiation). Finally, I can let all of those explorations go and dance, do the dishes, or scratch my head and notice my experience of my hand again. Or, and this is encouraged in the training, I can take a nap (integration). I can repeat this process with the skin, bones, muscles, ligaments, blood, and cells of the hands, or any other system or part in my body, all with the goal of waking each little part up to its role and relationship to each other part, as well as to my whole self. If contemplative practices are about awakening, then could the application of this process of identification, articulation, differentiation, and integration turn the study of anatomy (or any subject for that matter) into contemplation?

This question led to the creation of a course called Embodied Anatomy for the dance majors at San Diego State University. An experiential and empirical

overview of human anatomy and kinesiology, the course utilizes movement and awareness practices from contemplative and somatic methodologies (such as BMC) to facilitate students' subjective, first-person study of their own anatomy in action. The course also includes objective analyses through the use of images, models, and physical demonstrations of basic biomechanics.

#### *The Linkage of Differentiated Parts*

In a talk at the Garrison Institute in 2011, Dr. Dan Siegel defined integration as “the linkage of differentiated parts” (Garrison Institute, 2011), explaining that it is not the same as blending or homogenizing because *the parts maintain their individuality in relationship*. He went on to ask several audience members onto the stage for a singing demonstration. First, he asked everyone to sing the same note. Next, he had them plug their ears and sing any song they wanted. Finally, he asked them to sing Amazing Grace. He went on to describe the first sound as a drone or an example of rigidity (lacking differentiation), the second version of singing as cacophony or *chaos* (lacking linkage), and the third, as harmony or *integration* (containing both differentiation and linkage). According to Siegel,

The entire *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* falls into symptoms of syndromes that are either chaotic, rigid, or both. And we are now having the technology to show that those disorders are associated with impaired integration in the brain...Here is the proposal: Integration is health. Period...When you have a mind that is able to regulate energy and information flow in relationships and the body (the embodied brain...), you get wellbeing. (Garrison Institute, 2011)

Is it possible that someone could be integrated/healthy/resilient enough to choose to embody both chaos and rigidity, separately or simultaneously, as parts of a whole palette of choices? What skills are needed for a group to harmonize, on the spot, moment-to-moment, *without* a known song like Amazing Grace?

In *The Whole-Brain Child*, Siegel explains integration within the brain in two different ways, stating that it can be

*horizontally integrated*, so that...left-brain logic can work well with...right-brain emotion...[and] *vertically integrated*, so that the physically higher parts of [the] brain, which let them thoughtfully consider actions, work well with the lower parts, which are more concerned with instinct, gut reactions, and survival. (Siegel, 2012, p.6-7)

The higher parts of the brain are newer phylogenetically, and as such, the lower parts are foundational and necessary for the upper areas to evolve. The higher parts of the brain could not exist without the lower parts, but the reverse is not true. The relevance of this admittedly oversimplified explanation of the

“holarchy”<sup>8</sup> in the brain (Hansen, 2009) will become more clear in the exploration of the following perspectives.

*The Lively Interplay of Opposites: The Lemniscate*

The Integrated Movement Studies (IMS)<sup>9</sup> program was one of the most holistic educational experiences of my life. My primary teachers were Peggy Hackney (University of California at Berkeley) and Janice Meaden, and it was in the context of this aptly named program that I first experienced integration as both an embodied process and a pedagogical priority. Hackney devotes an entire chapter to integration in her book, *Making Connections: Total Body Integration Through Bartenieff Fundamentals*.

We now come to a stage of study that is not about developing specific new skills of bodily articulation. Nor is it about simply adding up all the skills we now have and combining them in different ways. This next stage is about using all the patterns of moving and skills that we have acquired in such a way that the “whole is more than the parts” (Hackney, 2000, p. 201).

In Bartenieff Fundamentals there are six “patterns of total body connectivity” that begin to emerge in utero and continue in a developmental progression during the first twelve to eighteen months of life. A baby organizes his or herself by, and in order to, interact with the environment through increasingly complex movement patterns<sup>10</sup> that are in direct relationship with their neurological and cognitive development. Each emerging pattern contains all the possibilities of the previous patterns, and when in dynamic relationship, they create new, more sophisticated ones. Like Siegel, Hackney discusses polarities as part of differentiation, but instead of using the harmony metaphor, she suggests that integration

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8 This term is defined and cited in context in the section titled, *Transformation and Translation*.

9 IMS is a somatically-oriented, 700-hour certification in Laban/Bartenieff Movement Analysis.

10 The Patterns of Total Body Connectivity include Breath (undifferentiated growing and shrinking), Core~Distal (all distal ends are in relationship with navel), Head~Tail (three-dimensional movement begins through the changing relationships between head and tail), Upper~Lower (upper half and lower half of the body are differentiated and in communication, carving out movement through the front/back and up/down dimensions of the sagittal plane), Body~Half (right and left body halves are differentiated, and begin to communicate with each other to move the body sideways), and Cross~Lateral (where all three dimensions of movement from the previous patterns are present, coordinated, and available to create movements as complex as spirals). A full discussion of The Patterns of Total Body Connectivity is beyond the scope of this piece. Please see *Making Connections* for a beautiful exploration of the system.

Laban/Bartenieff Movement Analysis is a system that includes the four basic elements of Body, Effort, Shape, and Space (each with several subcategories), that can be used to generate or describe movement.

includes moving beyond polarities to what she calls a “lively interplay” or “rhythm of interaction” between opposites that is informed by one’s sense of “aliveness” in any given context. In IMS’s approach to the Laban/Bartenieff<sup>11</sup> system, the goal is for one’s “Inner Connectivity” and “Outer Expressivity” to be in a “co-creative relationship to each other” (Hackney, 2000, p.36). She places each polarity within either side of a lemniscate (infinity symbol) to illustrate this.

*The Continuum of Deliberation and the Tilde*

Historically, choreography and improvisation have been treated as polarities in the western, theatrical dance lineage. Improvisation was more often used in the service of choreography. Dancers improvised (played, explored, created material “on the spot”) to generate ideas and movement material to be “set” (edited, adjusted, rearranged, memorized, and rehearsed). Universities built dance curricula with choreography and improvisation as separate classes. Beginning in the 20th century, dancers started performing the improvisations themselves, dramatically changing the landscape in the field. I use the term “dance making” or the word “dancemaking,” along with many other contemporary dance artists<sup>12</sup>, to describe a process that includes both predetermined (set) and spontaneously created (improvised) material.

In her dissertation, dance artist Nina Martin challenges what she calls the “binary” of “choreography~improvisation” (Martin, 2013, p.4). Her use of the *tilde* “~” is very similar to Hackney’s use of the lemniscate. She borrows this punctuation from Scott Kelso and David Engstrøm’s work, “in coordination dynamics, where apartness and togetherness coexist as a complementary pair...yin~yang, body~mind, individual~collective” (p. xiv), in order to “convey notions such as *choreography~improvisation* as a dialectical pair rather than as a binary opposition” (Martin, 2013, p. 8).

The IMS program has several “dialectical pairs” as part of its scaffolding. In addition to the aforementioned Inner Connectivity~Outer Expressivity<sup>13</sup>, the training is guided by the lenses of Function~Expression, Exertion~Recuperation, Stability~Mobility, and, the most relevant here, Parts~Whole (*differentiated* Parts~*integrated* Whole). Bainbridge Cohen states that, in BMC, “we are constantly looking at relationships and are always recognizing how opposite qualities modulate each other” (Bainbridge Cohen, 2012, p. 2).

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11 Laban/Bartenieff Movement Analysis is a system that includes the four basic elements of Body, Effort, Shape, and Space (each with several subcategories), that can be used to generate or describe movement.

12 My colleague, Leslie Seiters, (also part of *LIVE*), wrote a course called Dancemaking for the dance department at San Diego State University, which integrates the choreography and improvisation series into one course that students repeat.

13 I will use the tilde from this point forward as it is much more practical than the lemniscate.

Martin's "*continuum of deliberation* situates more or less repeatable choreographic works on one end of [a] continuum and more or less improvisational works, without so much as a plan or score, on the other end of [a] continuum" (Martin, 2013, p. 6). I have created and performed in numerous dances across this continuum, from those with movement that is "set" all the way down to where and when my eyes move, the shape and trajectory of each of my fingers, which side of my head I part my hair on, and exact, pre-determined relationships to specific elements of a piece of music, to dances with as little as possible decided beforehand, the instruction or score<sup>14</sup> for which might be something like, "begin now and end on the floor." Most of the former happened early in my dance career (1997-2005), and I became invested in the latter, less structured material around 2006.

Over the past three years, I have been in collaboration with Eric Geiger, whose dance career has spanned nearly thirty years, and who has been committed to improvisation in practice and performance since 2007. We are both interested in the shifts in consciousness we feel as we move along the continuum of deliberation. We have researched this continuum in the context of two dance-making processes, *Bigmouth Strikes Again* and our current work-in-progress, *lush*. How can we bring the sense of composition and order from our experiences with set dances to the dances we create spontaneously? How can we perform known, considered, and rehearsed material as if we are creating in the moment, with the awareness, aliveness, and presence we experience while improvising?

"*The body and mind are not two and not one. The body and mind are both two and one.*" Suzuki Roshi's words, above, have long inspired me to hold more than one truth at once. It is through dancemaking that I can most readily embrace contradictions and inhabit multiple perspectives. Befriending duality in this way makes me feel as if anything is possible, and helps me experience the truth and value within viewpoints that appear, on the surface, to be in conflict with my own.

Some of the other polarities~continua or "lively interplays" currently inspiring my life and work as a teaching dance artist include how~what, being~becoming, being~doing, dramatic~ordinary, practicing performance~performing practice, queer (othered, marginalized)~normative (privileged, legitimized), allowing~asserting, humans simply being on stage~superhuman performers, movement~moves, long duration~jump cuts, process~product, minutia~big picture, cooperation~conflict, and experimental~traditional. The key to each often exists in the other or one can be an inroad to the other. Attempting to live in both simultaneously is generative.

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14 An improvisational score in dance can range from a simple parameter, image, or set of rules guiding a movement exploration or the creation of a dance, to an extremely detailed description that includes all of the above, as well as specific temporal and spatial details/instructions.

Occasionally, they blend and create something new. Sometimes they are well modulated. Other times, the proverbial pendulum swings really far in one direction or the other. Each has its own definition and any set can exist along a continuum, one clarifying the other. If neither is repressed, denied, or undervalued, then nothing is “othered.” What could this mean for relationships within dancemaking processes and dance education contexts?

A true “both/and” mindset includes both “both/and” and “either/or.” Context determines which side of the coin I privilege in any given moment. More often, and especially when I am teaching, I choose that which is underrepresented or less known, but I never ignore its counterpart(s). Giving attention to both ends of any spectrum exposes my biases and explodes the number of choices available to me at any given moment, on stage, in the classroom, and on stage in the classroom.

Navigating concepts in this way also makes for great theater. Contradiction is at the heart of UNICORN, a group dance directed by Leslie Seiters, which is made explicit in this description of the work she wrote for the press:

UNICORN is assembled from a suspicion that we can't make magic happen AND a belief that magic is inevitable every time. In this new evening by Little Known Dance Theater we practice and exploit contradictions with our bodies, each other, the choreographic process, and our relationship to the audience. We take the body seriously. Who cares if horses have horns? (Seiters, 2013)

We have performed several iterations of this piece over the past three years, which includes material situated all along the continuum of deliberation. There is a score in the piece called “transformation” that is based in the impossibility of repetition. Movements/we “transform” over seven minutes or so in the smallest increments possible. Done well, it looks like repetition, until the viewer realizes that the movement being “repeated” has changed shape. From the inside, it feels like I am attempting to gently and patiently exorcise anything that I am unconsciously holding in my body while simultaneously working through a calculus problem, timing it so that I might complete both at the same time. An audience member once called it an “urban ritual.” Whatever it is, I can feel my consciousness fluidly zooming in and out, oscillating between specific, pinpointed attention to detail and awareness of the my whole, soft self/space.

What if it is fixedness in or resistance to binary thinking that is limiting rather than the binary itself? When I am embodying contradiction, paradox, or the “lively interplay of opposites,” allowing a “dialectical pair” to “coexist” through/within me, discovering a continuum, or even standing firm for just a moment as the slash between either and or, I experience a destabilization of Self for which transformation seems the most natural anchor. Is this approach to polarities a contemplative one?

*Translation and Transformation*

Ken Wilber writes about patterns in evolution “from matter to life to mind” (Wilber, 2000, p.17), including the existence of “holons” (whole entities that are parts of larger wholes) that “translate” and “transform,” horizontally and vertically. The horizontal “drives,” as Wilber calls them, are the holon’s maintaining of its own “wholeness” (agency) and “partness” (communion):

It [the holon] has to maintain its own *wholeness*, its own identity, its own autonomy, its own *agency*...in the face [of] environmental pressures which would otherwise obliterate it...It simultaneously has to fit in as a *part* of something else. Its own existence depends upon its capacity to fit into its environment. (Wilber, 2000, p. 19)

While it is not exact, the agency and communion that Wilber refers to as “horizontal capacities of holons” have some relationship to the differentiation and linkage in Siegel’s horizontal integration. From my perspective, something resembling this agency~communion continuum was a recurring negotiation among the members of *LIVE*. Each week, nine experienced artists entered a context designed to neutralize any emerging hierarchies, resulting in no leader and no set of procedures for making decisions. We also brought our individual research interests, desires, and embodied histories. Chaos ensued. Usually, there was more agency than communion, which made the moments of communion that much richer. In some ways, the agreement to show up each week was the communion upon which our agency could ride. Over time, our conversations yielded the image of a big soup pot. When someone expressed a delight or disappointment, the words landed in the pot where they would be reduced, evaporated, cooked, softened, or absorbed by the rest of the soup. The sharing of opinions, difficulties and desires did not typically come with the expectation that anyone’s behavior change to accommodate any one person. Saying it was often enough. It was similar to breath following in meditation—the mere suggestion that one notice his or her breathing often creates immediate change.

When discussing vertical development of holons, Wilber explains Arthur Koestler’s word “holarchy,” which is a

natural hierarchy...an order of increasing wholeness, such as: particles to atoms to cells to organisms, or letters to words to sentences to paragraphs. The whole of one level becomes a part of the whole of the next...“the whole is greater than the sum of its parts”...means the whole is at a *higher* or *deeper* level of organization than the parts alone. (Wilber, 2000, p. 24-25)

Wilber borrows from Robert Kegan’s work in developmental theory to explain that when a holon moves from one stage to the next in any developmental

progression, that holon “both transcends and includes” all of the previous stages. Kegan articulates how some of these ideas can clue us into the complexity of supporting young people in the potentially overwhelming process of transforming:

...it is *not* necessarily a bad thing that adolescents are in over their heads. In fact, it may be just what is called for *provided they also experience effective support*. Such supports constitute a holding environment that provides both welcoming acknowledgement to exactly who the person is right now as he or she is, and fosters the person’s psychological evolution. As such, a holding environment is a tricky transitional culture, an evolutionary bridge, a context for crossing over. It fosters developmental transformation, or the process by which the whole (“how I am”) becomes gradually a part (“how I was”) of a new whole (“how I am now”). (Kegan, 1994, p. 43)

#### *Transcending and Transmitting*

Kegan’s words bring to mind the relationship between “being” and “becoming,” which is often contemplated within the Integral Theory community. The latter is where I lived, until I met dance artist and author of *My Body, The Buddhist*, Deborah Hay, who asked me, “What if (no big deal), all of my 350 trillion cells<sup>15</sup> *had the potential* to [insert something beautiful, profound, and impossible here]”? Many of Hay’s seemingly impossible and meticulously crafted questions begin this way. They are like koans for embodied artists. About a year after graduate school, I spent two weeks in full time study with her and I learned to ask questions with every cell in my body. The meta-goal was to “transcend [our] choreographed bodies.” Questions have guided my work ever since. When does dancing become a dance? What if dance is how I practice relationships? What is at stake? Can I see while being seen? Can I be while being beheld? How do I dance forever? The following is my memory of the “something beautiful, profound, and impossible” that followed the setup described above during my intensive study with Hay in 2009:

...to get what they need or think they need while noticing space change as they move through it, time as it passes (here, gone, here, gone), while inviting being seen, turning my f#\$\*ing head/refreshing my visual field, and noticing, dis-attaching from and responding to the (non-linear) feedback from my whole body at once, the teacher, in relationship to others (choosing to presume that they’re practicing what I’m practicing), in the lab? (Humphrey, 2009)

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15 Hay has been working with her cells since the 1970s. At the time, she remembers consulting scientists and learning that there were 5 million cells in the human body. When I studied with her in 2009, the number she was using was 350 trillion (Hay, 2000).

We danced this question for hours and hours. I waited in vain for her to break it down into parts. Differentiation was not an explicit part of the process, yet she is one of the most integrated dancers I have ever been in the presence of. She seemed very focused on simultaneity and interested in the “whole body at once,” dancing. In 1986, her performance practice was, “I invite being seen whole and changing. You remind me of my wholeness changing” (Hay, 2000, p.103). So I must add to my list of questions: How does she become greater than the sum of her parts? Is full, embodied, and conscious “translation” (or repeated “transcend[ing of] the choreographed body”) over time, the key to her “transformation”? Perhaps this is why her philosophies of practice add so much to my life. Her questions are meditations that, by their very design, “temper my inner perfectionist’s need to answer” them, and, before I know it, I find myself deep within a spiritual practice. Chapter ten in Hay’s *My Body, The Buddhist* is titled, “my body is bored by answers.” It reads, “I was never drawn to participate in sacred dance classes. I feared my irreverence, cynicism, and snobbery. Little did I realize that my problem was linguistic. Sacred dancing is redundant” (p.53).

In considering how I might relate this work to my teaching, I wonder: What would simultaneous support of horizontal integration/translation/*being* and vertical integration/transformation/*becoming* look like? My own process of vertical development/integration as a human being in love with moving has been an adventure, and, with some deeper reflection, might yield some ideas. I grew up doing gymnastics and valuing measurable perfection. I found contact improvisation less than ten years into dancing and it welcomed the upside down-ness of my early movement training while quietly softening any patterns of fixedness left over from years of “sticking it.” I became conscious when I worked with Deborah Hay, as she pushed me to “transcend [my] choreographed body.” This did not mean getting rid of anything. It was about becoming aware in a way that made everything available. Since learning and personally testing this “transcend and include” theory, I have a deeper respect for students’ skills and perspectives, regardless of where they are in their own development. I trust that what they know and love now will both endure and mature as they evolve. Rather than “fixing” students, I am interested in increasing the number of choices they have available to them as artists and human beings.

#### *Integration as Contemplative Practice?*

Nancy Stark Smith (one of the earliest instigators of contact improvisation) refers to processes that are “*prescriptive*...telling you what to do in the future and *descriptive*...a way of talking about what you just experienced” (dancetechnv, 2013).

This attempt to articulate the connections between my practices has been *descriptive*. Like a deeper, more granular reflection, this writing helped reveal the

contemplative nature of my practices, as well as some of the elements and qualities that make a practice contemplative. In the spirit of Practice-as-Research in the arts, I end this piece with a dive back into another practice. It is a list-making process designed to help me integrate new insights. It is a choreography of words and phrases that makes space for questions to be asked in many ways, and for any question to have numerous answers. In the past, it has helped me further explore the nature of a dance. I choreographed the list, below, using material from others' words, this paper, my experience, and whatever emerged from the arrangement and refinement of its line items in real time, to learn more about contemplative practice. A few of the questions and prompts alive in my mind during the process include:

- Contemplative practices are/a contemplative practice is...
- What constitutes a contemplative practice?
- What is contemplation? What is practice?
- What are the qualities of a contemplative practice?
- How do you make a practice more "contemplative"?
- What are the methods within contemplative practice?
- What do contemplative practices have in common?
- What do contemplative practices do? What effects do contemplative practices have?
- How do I engage in contemplative practice?

Arranging the words and phrases in space gives the list shape(s) and generates more language. The sounds of the words and their relationship to each other influence this part of the process, revealing multiple meanings and ways of seeing/saying. Categories, punctuation, and new questions emerge. There is a feedback loop between the organization and generation that allows both to serve as very clear banks for a stream of consciousness. Making the list is a way of contemplating that allows for both freedom and form. The process of choreographing the list is more important than its product. Still, the list is useful. When I complete a list and show it to others, they almost always respond by adding to it. A list can reveal what is missing, the poetry of a thing, or the next steps in a creative process. It articulates my perspective more clearly than I can state it.

embodied  
 enlivening  
 cumulative  
 awareness  
 awareness of awareness  
 awareness of awareness of awareness...  
 delineate **REFLEX, reaction, &** response  
 respond → respond-ability → responsibility?  
 integrator  
 state shifter  
 mind mover  
 grip loosener  
 experience instigator  
 consciousness cultivator/connector/choreographer  
 perspective generator/revealer/shifter  
 attention developer/director/designer  
 transcend, transform, translate  
 simultaneously  
     into~out of  
     being~becoming  
     the what and the how  
     a presence, the present, a gift  
     a kind of work out~a way to rest  
     productive/not about productivity  
         not “about” any(one)thing  
     a question~an exploration~a discovery  
     a way to access wholeness~enliven parts  
 slow down  
 soften  
 open  
 often  
 pause  
 whiskers  
 waking up  
 imagination  
 improvisation  
 create a process  
 creative process  
 it’s just a practice  
 conscious/unconscious dialogue  
 curious

surrender  
reflection  
How do *I* feel?  
**How** do I feel?  
parasympathetic?  
What would it feel like to go fast without rushing?  
What do you see when you close your eyes?  
What movement do I feel when I am still?  
What sounds do we hear in silence?

*What does contemplation feel like?*

Am I aware of my body?  
Am I aware **with** my body?

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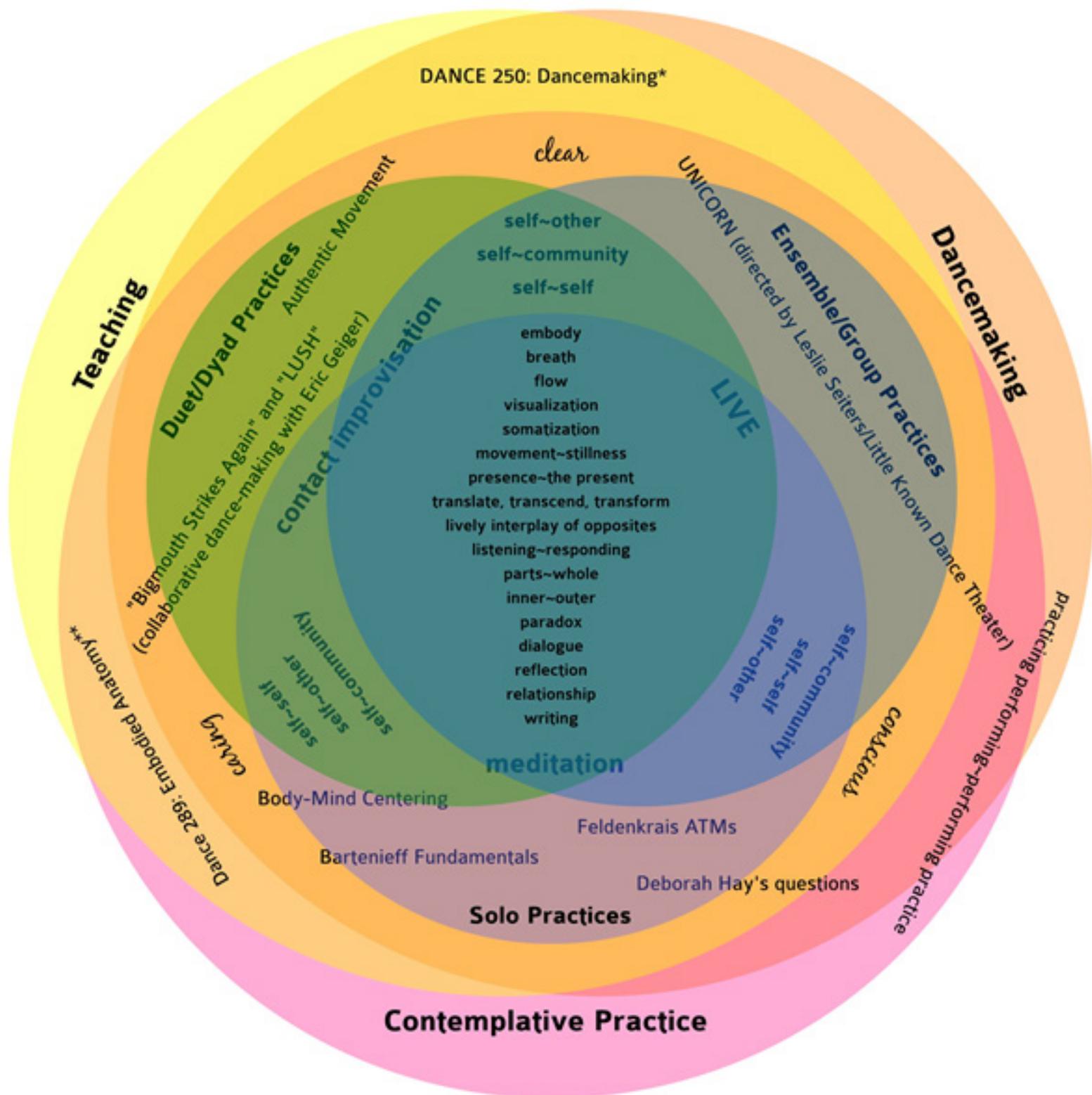
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### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

JESS HUMPHREY, MFA, CLMA, RSME, is a contemporary dance artist and teacher. Her movement research began in childhood with competitive gymnastics, and continues today with dancemaking from various, shifting perspectives and states of body~mind. Her dances are expressions of her engagement in contemplative and somatic practices, Integral Theory, and her situation within the western, theatrical dance lineage. She earned an MFA in Modern Dance from the University of Utah, and a BFA in Dance from California State University, Long Beach. Intensive study with Deborah Hay in 2009 changed her life and continues to enliven her every move. She certified as a Laban/Bartenieff Movement Analyst (CLMA) in the Integrated Movement Studies (IMS) program, is currently studying Body-Mind Centering (BMC), and continues to learn through teaching at San Diego State University where her role will change from Lecturer to Assistant Professor this Fall. Last year, she was Artistic Director of *A Step Beyond*, a non-profit organization that provides rigorous contemporary dance training, tutoring, and family services to underserved youth. She is currently making dances with Eric Geiger, collaborating with Leslie Seiters/Little Known Dance Theater, and is beginning her 8th year of practicing weekly with an evolving dance research group formerly known as *LIVE* in San Diego.

Figure 1. A visual expression of integrated practices



\* Recently approved course in the dance department at San Diego State University integrating choreography & improvisation classes. Written by Leslie Seiters.

\*\* Recently approved course in the dance department at San Diego State University that includes the first-person, experiential perspective in the study of anatomy & kinesiology. Written by Jess Humphrey.