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In Passing

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The curtain rises.

A wailing note fills the space, like a distant train, as the lights rise on bodies crawling quickly along a rope stretched horizontally across the stage. The bodies are crawling from either side of the space, converging and intertwining, several thick along the rope. One dancer emerges from the highway on the floor, slowly bringing his cupped hands to his face.

The lights dim to silhouette. The people on the floor pull each other up to standing on stage left and one dancer climbs up their bodies and over their heads. The shape of her crawling body progresses through and above the group, which is moving beneath her to support her overhead passage towards stage right. The dancer that had emerged from the crawling highway is still dancing on his own, and the group is moving towards him. When they meet, he reaches up and carries the raised dancer down.

The dancers rush to stage right, clustered over the rope. One person on the floor climbs urgently through the group's ankles and then along the rope towards stage left, while lights slowly rise on the standing bodies, whose arms and torsos are spilling backwards, as though they are the jet stream from the body surging forward beneath them. Unable to spill back further, the group arcs and sprints forward to catch the ankles of the crawling body, pulling her backwards along the ground, through the group, and to her feet.

The group splits in half, standing, holding the rope, like a tug of war. The person at the front of each opposing group dives to the ground, and using the rope, crawls hastily to the opposite side of the tug of war where each is pulled to her feet. The two groups accelerate towards each other, becoming one again.

The rope is crossed into a big X, with bodies pulling it taut from all four corners. Using the rope, one dancer crawls rapidly from downstage right to upstage left, and is intersected by a dancer crawling from upstage right to downstage left.

The dancer that last crawled along the intersection holds onto one end of the rope as the rest of the group runs into a curved formation along the right side of the stage, all holding the rope. They yank her towards them, as though fishing for a man-overboard, until she reaches their feet where she crawls through their ankles to the end of the arched line. Dancers run to the end of the line to create more handholds for her, winding her path across the front of the stage, back to where she was before they reeled her in. The rope is thrown off stage. All standing dancers run off, leaving the crawling body inching slowly forward in the dimming light.

In Passing has begun.

INTENTIONS

My intentions for *In Passing* were to build the beginnings of an education philosophy through a richly varied choreographic process. I wanted my dancers to come away from this work with a heightened eagerness to explore the unfamiliar and an increased confidence in their ability to support one another and be supported, and I wanted to learn to more effectively and tenderly lead a group of many different personalities through a long-term creative experience.

I think we have been successful.

BACKGROUND

I began dancing at age four, quit at age eight, started again at age eleven, and I have not stopped since. I did not begin choreographing until the fall of 2007, my junior year of college, because of a conversation I had with Kathleen Paganelli (CMC' 07) at the end of my sophomore year. I had been in Kathleen's pointe piece that year, and at the end of the experience, she mentioned that I might consider choreographing. At the time I truly thought she was crazy. I could not picture myself creating a piece, much less having the courage or direction to lead a group of people through an extended self-motivated project. Somehow however, after getting over my initial terrified skepticism, the idea grew on me. I began choreographing the next semester. Two years later, I can say that choreographing has been among the most rewarding and growth-provoking experiences of my life. Through choreography, I have learned to believe in and share my ideas, and I have become passionate about growing them through the collaborative process of working with dancers.

INFLUENCES: SAN FRANCISCO CONSERVATORY OF DANCE

My four summer intensives at the San Francisco Conservatory of Dance in 2005, 2006, and two sessions in 2008, and my summer at LINES Ballet in 2004, have been among my most valuable educational experiences, and thus every project that I have done after those intensives is in some way deeply informed by what I encountered there.

Alex Ketley

Alex Ketley, a teacher at the San Francisco Conservatory of Dance (SFCD), as well as a choreographer and a former principle from LINES Ballet and San Francisco Ballet, told me two things that have become my mottos for dance and for life: “Anything can potentially hold something beautiful within it” and “Nothing is too precious to let go of.” These ideas fueled the creation of *In Passing*.

I worked with Alex in the summer of 2008 in the creation of one of his new works, and his passion for experimentation opened my eyes to the infinite ways that dance can be made. The following are just a few of his seemingly absurd ideas: he had us stack chairs to make precarious sculptures and then try to imitate them with our bodies, take a phrase and boil it down to just the plies to make a new phrase, and do partnering material in which the sides of the partners’ faces had to touch the entire time, regardless of how difficult this was to maintain through the lifts in the choreography. Alex created an environment in which experimentation was incredibly exciting, and also taken seriously, and he was also not afraid to throw out what did not work.

Alex’s open-minded and spontaneous choreographic approach inspired me to enter the dark uncertainty of experimentation to make *In Passing*, and to love the dark.

Bobbi Smith

Taking *Gaga* classes from Bobbi Smith of Ohad Naharin’s Batsheva Dance Company of Israel in the summer of 2008 at SFCD revealed to me the importance of body-mind connectivity in dance, and influenced me to design rehearsals and choreography in which full presence would be demanded. *Gaga* is a guided improvisational warm-up class that begins by improvising with the fingers, while tuning in to the sensation of breath and the light in the room, and then allowing the movement to spread to the arms, head, back, hips, legs, and feet. This evolves into jumping, quaking, and traveling through the space. All the while, the teacher reminds the students to “turn on the lights behind your eyes,” a command which functions as a wake-up call; the eyes open wider, the breathing becomes deeper, the mind becomes more present to the sensation of being alive, and movement is born from that reaction. Inspired by my experiences in *gaga* classes, I attempted to create through *In Passing* a movement

experience that can only be completed successfully and safely if my dancers' bodies *and* minds are fully present.

Ourselves in Front of You

I completed a choreographic internship at SFCD in 2008, in which I was given three dancers to work with, six hours of studio time a week for three weeks, and weekly feedback from professional choreographers. In this internship, I created a piece called *Ourselves in Front of You*. This piece began with a month of journaling about why I dance, what I feel dance can offer to the world, and why I choose to continue dancing. I determined a three-part answer. First, dance teaches us to move, sense, and be ourselves in a very physical, energetic way. Second, it teaches us to do this with other people- to have connections from a place of genuine presence. Third, it teaches us to do these things in front of an audience. If we can be genuinely ourselves with ourselves, with each other, and in front of eyes who may judge us, we can live more courageously in this world. I recorded myself speaking about these ideas, and then built music around my words in GarageBand, creating a soundtrack for my piece. I also asked my dancers to journal about these ideas, and based on our combined thoughts, we created solo material for each of them, then merged these phrases into group work, and at the end of the piece, they directly acknowledged the audience through eye contact. *Ourselves in Front of You*, though quite simplistic in retrospect, laid important groundwork for my evolving thoughts about how dance has the potential to shape bold and sensitive individuals, interactions, and communities. *In Passing* is a more complex investigation of these ideas.

FALL WORK

Casting

My two stipulations for casting *In Passing* were that the dancers must exhibit a strong background in some type of dance training *and* be open to working in new ways. I asked Lucy Vasserman, Genevieve Peaslee, Jill Mahoney, and Alex Frisinger to be in my piece because I had worked with them in the fall of 2007 in my first choreographic work, *Impulse*, and they had demonstrated that they could be pushed to try new things. I asked Alyssa Mello, Charlotte Smail, Molly Mather, and Maya Guice to join the piece after the

fall 2008 audition, having been impressed by how they embodied and individualized the phrase I taught in the audition. I invited Alissa Sanchez to join the cast as I had been a dancer in her piece in the fall of 2007 and I knew how eager she was to be pushed. I also wanted to work with men, as I felt that a piece about communities would be better served by having both men and women contributing their voices, so I invited Alex Randall and Tom Tsai to join the piece. Tom could not join until the spring. In mid October I overheard Sydney Freggario saying that she wanted to be in a student piece, and so I asked her if she would like to join. Sydney was our last addition to the fall cast, making it a group of eleven dancers.

Writing Exercises I

I began *In Passing* with the use of writing exercises. I was aware that for most Claremont College dance students, dance is simply a hobby. After a dance class, most do not reflect on what happened in the class, or how the skills they are learning in dance could be applied to life outside of dance. My writing exercises for them were intended to challenge them to consider their dancing more carefully, so that I could learn how dance has contributed to making them into the people they are, and how it could be more effective in shaping them into the people they desire to become. I also wanted to see how closely their self-evaluations resembled my objective impressions of their dancing, so that I could devise ways to reach them that would take their self-perceptions into consideration. The questions in the first week of the fall semester for my eleven dancers were:

1. *What are your strengths as a dancer?*
2. *In what ways would you like to grow as a dancer?*
3. *What skills have you developed or enhanced in the dance studio that could be valuable outside of the dance studio? (Valuable for your own life outside of dance, or for non-dancers if they had these skills)*
4. *What are your goals in dance?*
5. *What does it mean to you to be awake/aware/present? (Explore for a few minutes in writing the many levels of these states that you may experience...for example- mind somewhat asleep, but body awake or vice versa... awake in thoughts of past, asleep in present moment or vice versa.... fear awake, love asleep or vice-versa...)*
6. *When dancing, what helps you to reach a place of being acutely awake / aware/ present? (Your own mindset, teacher's/choreographer's attentiveness, the way you are asked to engage with material, performance situations? Be specific.)*

7. *Describe a moment in which you found yourself so present that you realized that you had been somewhat unaware/distracted for some time. What helped you to reach that state?*

8. *Do you think that presence/ wakefulness/ awareness is a choice that you can consciously make and/or a skill that you can develop? Explain.*

I received quite interesting answers in response to the above questions (see Appendix C for selections from their answers.) The areas in which my dancers felt weak seemed only to be weak because of their lack of confidence about those things. Thus my piece became an attempt to enhance their confidence in areas in which they wanted to grow, including partnering, performing non-balletic movement, being more present in performance, and improvising confidently. I feel that the act of asking and considering these questions in the first week of rehearsal informed the entire year's work. I had asked them to consider things that seemed quite basic, but were in fact difficult to answer, since dancers are rarely asked to articulate their evaluations of themselves and to analyze what they are doing every day in the studio.

Individual Work

Using the dancers' answers on their question sheets, I created individual phrases for them, which were meant to employ and test what they believed to be their strengths, challenge them to face their perceived weaknesses, and demand presence. For example, Alissa Sanchez had mentioned that she was very comfortable on stage and good at strong and sustained movement, but that she lacked confidence in her technique, and was less comfortable with light movement. So I devised a phrase that required lightness in a series of gentle flicking movements, technique in a long balance on one leg, and strong sustained control of her body throughout the phrase. I also gave her specific imagery and focus points for her gaze, which would require her full presence to perform. I created phrases for each of my dancers in this way and held individual rehearsals with them in which I taught and coached the phrase. These trust-building sessions supplemented the less personal group rehearsals.

Partnering Work

I held partnering rehearsals with my cast, two dancers at a time. In these rehearsals I tested their trust of themselves, and their trust of the other dancer, by building material that required them to support one another. I wanted them to explore how to communicate using weight, eye contact, and assertive but gentle touch. These were remarkably powerful rehearsals, as I found that dancers who had been hesitant about touch and resistant to giving or taking weight, quickly became quite comfortable with partnering under my coaching. As Alex Randall told me, “I never knew that physical trust could precede and inevitably lead to emotional trust.” He and Gigi made exceptional progress in ability as partners this year, originally quite hesitant to touch one another, but soon dancing as one body, knowing how to share a center of gravity.

Group Work

In group rehearsals, I asked my dancers to take authority and teach the group their solo or partnering material. I wanted the movement to be filtered by my dancers and taught secondhand, thus giving them more responsibility and a sense of leadership in rehearsals so that my dancers would have listen to and respect each other and not just me. Each dancer’s material was named after him or her and everyone referred to the phrase as Molly’s phrase, Charlotte’s phrase, etc. Thus the piece became each of theirs, and not just mine. In retrospect, we did not build much group material in the fall. We mostly worked on solos and partnering in our large group rehearsals, everyone learning everyone else’s phrases. The one exception was the walking improvisation that ended up beginning and ending the fall version of *In Passing*. This is explained in greater detail in the next section and on page 13.

Fall Version of *In Passing*: Description & Analysis

The fall version of *In Passing* begins with the lights rising on the full cast walking slowly across the floor, in a structured improvisation, with the following guidelines: the dancers have to vary their footfalls to avoid walking in unison, occasionally clasp each others’ hands or shoulders, slowly pass or be passed by one other, and turn or be turned to walk backwards. Lit from the side, the dancers’ shadows cross one another, and

occasionally slivers of light illuminate the spaces between dancers, where their hands reach for one another. The dancers slowly cross the stage, leaving just one dancer on stage, who slowly improvises in silence. *3 Ghosts I*, an energetic instrumental piece by Nine Inch Nails begins, and the dancers enter the space performing segments of the faster solo material. The stage becomes a chaotic field of intersecting dancers, each traveling quickly and cutting sharp corners to avoid each other, and individually exiting and reentering the space with an even more complicated version of the solo material. The dancers perform solo phrases from rehearsal that they have altered by changing the facing, the orientation of the phrase, removing steps, reordering movements, doing just the arms or just the legs, etc. The chaotic movement and the energetic song eventually dissolve, all of the dancers exiting except for two who slowly walk towards each other and begin a tender partnering phrase. *1 Ghosts I*, by Nine Inch Nails begins, later merging into *2 Ghosts I* (both are somber, atmospheric instrumental tracks), and other couples enter the stage and begin partnering. Eventually all the dancers fill the stage, reaching a single unison moment of a high diagonal reach (See Appendix G, photo 4) before slowly exiting by either crawling or walking, leaving one dancer onstage laying on the ground, and two dancers improvising. After a minute, the rest of the cast re-enters with the original slow walking passage across the floor, absorbing into their midst the two improvising dancers and the dancer on the floor. The lights fade to black as the dancers continue the walking improvisation to slowly exit.

The fall piece was, in essence, a compilation and complication of everyone's solo and partnering material, book-ended by the full cast walking improvisation across the floor. After the fall performance I could not wait to get into the studio again in the spring. I wanted to evolve the piece and push my dancers by creating physically demanding tasks in which each dancer would be genuinely dependent on and responsible for the other dancers. I wanted to create moments of engaged full-cast collaboration (See Appendix L, photo 3, for a moment of the type of intensive group work I was craving, which I would soon create in the spring).

SPRING WORK

Casting

In the spring, Tom Tsai joined the cast, Sydney Freggario and Alex Frisinger left for scheduling reasons, and I asked Amanda Peel, Ingrid Vidal, and Katie Duberg, all of whom had been abroad in the fall, to join. A few weeks into the spring semester I was approached by a first year student, Abby Taubman, who wanted to know if I was looking for more dancers. I took the question as a *positive disruption*, a circumstance that surprises me and injects the work with energy, (see page 30 for more examples of positive disruptions) and welcomed her into the piece. The spring cast had fourteen dancers.

Writing Exercises II

I started the spring semester's work by measuring my continuing dancers' perceived growth over the fall semester. I gave them their question sheets from September 2008 and allowed them to make any revisions to their strengths and weaknesses. In addition I asked them about dance as a community builder, as I wanted to create a piece that would demand interdependency. Here were the questions I asked them:

1. *Read over your perceived strengths and weaknesses in September 2008, and consider whether your answers have changed. Write below any additions or changes:*
 - a. *Strengths as a dancer*
 - b. *Areas in which you would like to grow as a dancer*
2. *What have your experiences dancing taught you about human interactions and about being a part of a community?*

Many of my fall dancers wrote that they felt much stronger in partnering, that they were more comfortable with experimenting with movement, and a few wrote that they had become better communicators because they had learned to be clear about what they needed, and to ask each other what they could do to help. All of this was extremely encouraging, and I aimed to push them even further in these areas in the spring.

Since I had five new dancers, I asked them some of the questions from the fall, as well as the community question:

1. *What are your strengths as a dancer?*

2. *In what ways would you like to grow as a dancer?*
3. *What skills have you developed or enhanced in the dance studio that could be valuable outside of the dance studio? (Valuable for your own life outside of dance or for non-dancers if they had these skills)*
4. *What has dancing taught you about human interactions and about being a part of a community?*

My new dancers were at a different place than my fall dancers; most felt unfamiliar with partnering, while my fall dancers were just becoming confident about taking weight and being responsible for others. I knew I would have to work hard to bring them all to a similar comfort level in the spring, so I began designing giant group partnering tasks, in which the strength of the cast might bolster the confidence of the individuals within it.

I have included in Appendix C excerpts from revisions my dancers made to their strengths, the skills they feel they have gained from dancing, as well as what dance has taught them about human interactions and community.

SPRING VERSION OF IN PASSING: DESCRIPTION & ANALYSIS

Episodes with Rope

In the spring, I wanted to go much further than simply arranging individual and partnering phrases together on stage. I wanted to harness the power of fourteen bodies and make them need each other to successfully and safely get through the piece. And so I threw a rope in the piece, with the intention of using it as a tool to make traveling through the space more difficult and make the dancers more dependent on aid from the rest of the cast.

We did a lot of rehearsal experimentation with the rope, eventually only keeping the six rope tasks that I describe in the prelude (page 1). Collectively we called these the “Episodes,” and individually we named them “Highway,” “Lucy overhead,” “Katie Ankles,” “Tug of War,” “Intersection,” and “Fishing.” These tasks create situations in which the dancers genuinely need each other. The “Episodes” are performed to an atmospheric soundtrack that I made by layering songs by Biosphere, Oval, Phillip Jeck, Nine Inch Nails, and CJC (see page 23). In “Highway” (Appendix L, photo 1), the rope is

laid horizontally across the stage and the dancers are split in two groups, each lying down on either side of the rope. Their task is to pull themselves with their arms, towards the opposite side of the rope, each group relying on the opposing group's counter pull to have the tension to transport themselves forward. In "Lucy Overhead" (Appendix L, photo 2), the rope is not used, but the same idea of interdependence is employed. Lucy's goal is to travel from stage left to center stage by climbing over everyone's bodies. The rest of the cast has to provide the structure upon which she travels, and once she passes them, they have to run to the front of the group to keep the structure progressing forward. I asked them to vary the ways that they would support her. "Lucy Overhead" is thus quite specific in its goal to support Lucy from point A to point B, but the dancers make choices about how to achieve that goal. They must be completely attuned to Lucy's needs, making rapid decisions to provide for her a sturdy platform that is well placed to support her next footfall, and also different from the shapes that Lucy had already stepped on. In "Katie Ankles" (Appendix L, photo 3), Alex runs off stage left and holds the end of the rope, while the rest of the group clusters over the rope on stage right. Katie's task is to propel herself to stage left, on her belly, using ankles to pull herself through the group of people, and then using the rope to pull herself out of the group and across the stage. Alex provides the counter-tension on the rope. The rest of the cast's task is to provide stable ankle supports for Katie, and once she has traveled a distance across the stage, to run after her, catch her, and pull her backwards on her stomach, through the group and to her feet. "Tug of War" (Appendix L, photo 4) requires the dancers to create the tension of a tug of war on the rope so that Alyssa and Alissa can drag themselves from one team to the other. "Intersection" (Appendix L, photo 5) splits the cast into four groups, each pulling the rope taut towards a different diagonal so that Gigi and Charlotte can use it as they crawl from one corner to another of an intersecting X rope formation. In "Fishing" (Appendix L, photo 6), the entire cast pulls Charlotte towards them via the rope, and then the cast passes the rope to the end of the line for Maya to coil while maintaining stable stances so that Charlotte can pull herself through them using their ankles. Once Charlotte reaches Maya at the end of the line, the dancers run just in time to land in front of Charlotte to create more handholds for her to pull herself forward, and then they all run off stage, leaving Charlotte crawling forward on her own (Appendix L, photo 7).

Chaos

We referred to the second section of *In Passing* as the “Chaos section,” as it pushes the dancers to be responsible for each others’ safety through a set of challenging partnering tasks, to make improvised choices when the partnering is not happening, and to maintain a fast-paced, chaotic energy on stage. It begins with the full cast sprinting on stage and diving into a massive “boulder” around the prone Charlotte. Lucy jumps onto the boulder, (Appendix L, photos 8-9), and as she lands, everyone sits up, throwing her off. The cast splits into two groups and Tom runs and leaps into one, while Amanda runs and leaps into the other (Appendix L, photo 10). Amanda’s group carries her off-stage. Tom’ group splits into two parts and one half catches and carries Abby, while the other half catches and carries Gigi. Meanwhile, Amanda’s group sprints back onto the stage, Lucy dives out and claws past them using their ankles, while Alissa falls into the group, which runs her backwards. Immediately everyone splits into quickly traveling trios, Gigi and Jill running Alex backwards, while Tom and Abby run Maya backwards (Appendix L, photo 11). Suddenly, the entire cast reorganizes into pairs, each dancer either carrying their partner or being carried, and finally the pairs divide so that all of the dancers are running independently and chaotically through the space. The music, by Arto Lindsay and Melvin Gibbs, increases in its intensity, just as the running turns into aggressive duets and fast improvisation (Appendix L, photo 12). The dancers sprint from partner to partner, lifting, catching, and throwing each other, and in the moments between partnering, they either sprint around the space or perform an excerpt of a fast solo phrase, all the while making sure that they are not in the way of other dancers and ready for their next partnering. Eventually dancers either run or are thrown off stage, and as the music ends in a crash, Molly and Alissa collide in an embrace (Appendix L, photo 13).

Slow Partnering

Using the slow partnering section from the fall piece as a rough template, we created a new slow partnering section for the third component in the spring *In Passing*. Using new partnering we had developed in the spring, plus some of the fall partnering, we compiled a series of slow and sensitive duets and a few solos that entered and exited

the stage. (Appendix L, photos 14-15). As Alex Randall told me, the partnering from the fall became incredibly easy after they had been pushed in the spring with the “Episodes” and the “Chaos section.” The fall partnering requires just two dancers to be responsible for each other, and it happens so slowly that the dancers can keep their awareness within the small area that holds the partnering, since they do not rocket through the space. An atmospheric song by Vladislav Delay creates the environment for this section. Later in this song, I layer in a track by my brother Elliott Cost, and this is the cue for all of the duets and solos to collect on stage and find their way to a unison diagonal pointing motif (Appendix L, photo16). The unison moment slowly decays and the dancers begin to exit stage right, either by walking or crawling along the floor. The slow partnering section ends with Molly, Maya, and Charlotte improvising: each dancer aware of the other two, and consciously trying to add to the texture on stage. I created this section because I wanted to challenge these three dancers in their improvisation, as all had demonstrated exceptional focus, presence, and confidence in their dancing (Appendix L, photo 18). Additionally, I wanted to explore a trio that is not physically connected but still highly interconnected, as an investigation of relationships from a distance.

Final Image

My intention for the end of the piece was to involve the entire cast, and to use less physical contact than the “Episodes,” but still require heightened interpersonal awareness. The following was our solution to this (performed to rustling bird sounds from the end of a song by Rachel’s): as Molly, Maya, and Charlotte improvise, the rest of the cast enters from the stage right, performing the slow walking improvisation we had used in the fall, an unhurried and loving passage of a community. This image slows time, and sweeps away from the stage any traces of the chaos from the previous sections (Appendix L, photo 19). It is an exercise in patience and awareness. The dancers’ goal is not to get across the stage but to experience the crossing. They make choices within the following structure: they must to vary their footfalls, avoid unison walking, and not block another dancer for long. They can take each other’s hands and shoulders gently, and they can turn around and walk backwards for a while. Within this structure, the rope is reincorporated, Tom trailing it behind him while they walk onstage. Maya and Molly each find a way to

improvisationally join the walking group soon after it enters, but Charlotte continues to improvise until the group surrounds her. As they pass her, she sinks to the floor, looking intently towards stage left, where everyone is heading (Appendix L, photo 20). Laying down, she rests, but her eyes are still focused on the path before her, as the walking group slowly leaves the stage. After a few moments, she slowly and purposefully takes the rope and pulls herself after them (Appendix L, photo 21). As she reaches the wing, many arms reach out for her and pull her off stage, reincorporating her into the group, and leaving the rope on stage as a memory of their trajectory and interdependence (Appendix L, photo 22).

Narrative Emerges

Ronnie Brosterman was the first person to identify and describe the narrative in my piece, which I had been crafting in a sort of subconscious way; I was attempting to make an arcing journey for a community of fourteen, but I had not specifically described the journey, because I did not want the dancers to theatrically perform any one story, and I wanted the looseness of the plot to allow the viewer to imagine his or her own story into the work. Thus Ronnie's interpretation came as a complete surprise and yet also made perfect sense. The following is my recollection and interpretation of what she said: "Something has happened to this community before the piece began. There is a sense of rescue and struggle, as though they are recuperating from some disaster. The rope binds them together. It makes tangible their dependency on each other. As the piece goes on we see an explosion of energy, an echo of the undisclosed previous crisis. After this explosion reaches a climax and collision, we are allowed to zoom in on details of the community, solos of reflection and friends caring for each other and moving on. In the final moments of the piece, the rope returns, this time bonding them together in a different way, no longer a rescue device, but rather a remnant of the past. It is a memory that they are carrying with them into the present, and this shared memory functions as the bond that pulls a straggler back into the community."

I shared this interpretation with my dancers during our last spring rehearsal (see page 27) and they were impressed and excited to have storyline to envision. The narrative

had been clear to a viewer through what the dancers had done. I could not have asked for a better way for it to emerge.

REHEARSAL EXPERIMENTATION: DEVICES AND STRATEGIES

The following section describes some of the backside of *In Passing*, an immense playful process that was boiled down to the ten-minute piece that we presented onstage.

1. Passages

I wanted the entire piece to be a passage, both in the process of making it and in the way that it would be read. During winter break I wrote out a series of possible journeys that I could imagine, which inspired a lot of rehearsal experimentation: migrations of individuals, small groups, or communities through time and space; relationships that form and dissolve as they pass through time, intersections of individual passages; overhead passages of full support; underground passages with supports but no explicit aid; passages of time with little spatial progress; tangled passages which complicate themselves through time; inward passages that are enormous and important yet private; heroic passages that require strength, stamina and determination; and passages of frailty, which through determination alone progress through time and space. I began to think about language prepositions and how all paths are in relation to at least one of these spatial commands: over, under, between, in, out, amongst, above, below, along, around, across, through, etc. In all of these passages, a few elements are essential:

- 1) The person/'s relationship to the ground, and the use of the ground as a means to transport the body along a trajectory.
- 2) The person/'s desire to travel: an internal need that causes forward motion along a trajectory towards some destination. (Yet for this work, I was not interested in the destination but rather it is the action of traveling)
- 3) The person/s relationship to other humans on this path. Do the other humans form supports, stepping-stones, handholds, levers, or obstacles? Is the passage in spite of the others, but still in relation to them? Can one ever be truly alone in one's passage?

These thoughts formed the "spine," or underlying theme, of *In Passing* (Tharp, 140-154).

2. Twister

We played a variation on the game Twister in one of our first spring rehearsals, because I wanted to explore an interlocking community in which many people are navigating tight spaces. I placed a grid of masking tape dots on the floor, fourteen dots wide by 4 dots deep and asked my dancers to each stand on a dot. Then I had each dancer begin to travel by only touching dots, with any point of their body. I asked them to reach for the furthest possible dot and to attempt to truly tangle themselves. The intention was to have the dancers to remember which dots they touched in which order, and to remember phrases of these directions, so that when I took away the dots, they could repeat the puzzle-like, interlocking floor work. After trying this once in rehearsal we never again used the tape. I simply continued to create circumstances in which their bodies were in close proximity and in which they had to travel using each other's limbs as pulleys and the negative space between limbs as passages. Playing Twister was our first exploration of full cast work, which became an major theme for *In Passing*.

3. Clump

We did a lot of clump work in rehearsals to build group trust. I had my dancers stand in a tight clump, close their eyes, and try to breathe together, giving them time to just stand there and start to sense each other. As their breathing harmonized, I had them begin to rock together, gently at first and soon actually taking each other's weight as they moved from side to side. As they became more comfortable with this, I began to increase the risk factor even more, asking them to melt the group to the floor, and then try to stand back up by leaning into each other. Soon I had them taking each other's weight, carrying a body above them. Then we worked on traveling the clump, exploring how the choices of individuals compose the overall shape and path of the group. As the dancers became more comfortable with group work we explored how single bodies could move vertically, diagonally, and horizontally within the tightness of the clump. These experiments created group trust and prepared the dancers for the multiple partnering moments in the piece.

4. Climbing

After a few conversations with Alex Ketley and another with Charlotte about the

importance of cross training for dance, and in particular, their experiences rock-climbing, I became fascinated with the fierce, full-bodied athleticism of climbing. Over winter break, I looked at dozens of photographs of rock climbers in Patagonia and National Geographic magazines, and tried to determine what was so intriguing to me about these images. I realized that I was drawn to 1) the intensity of their presence and the necessity of it- if they are not completely engaged in the moment they will hurt themselves; 2) that they have to activate every fiber muscle to travel even an inch; 3) that they are invested in an fervent dialogue with their surroundings/ the surface on which they were climbing; and 4) that they have a destination, but that their focus must to be on the *process of getting there*, not on the arrival.

I wanted to bring climbing into the piece, replacing cliffs and rock-faces with people and the floor. I asked the dancers to climb the floor as though they were scaling walls, and to climb up and over each other's bodies. The climbing experimentation we did in rehearsal led to the rope and people climbing in the "Episodes" as well as the floor crawling motif throughout *In Passing*.

5. Fragility

To contrast to the full bodied aggressiveness of climbing, I also wanted to explore fragility and dependence. This led to the delicate, sensitive, slow motion partnering in the second half of *In Passing*. The questions I explored in rehearsal were: how can I expose exhaustion and dependence in my dancers? Can I create movement that they cannot do without each other? How sensitively can my dancers help each other through the dance? The slow partnering section was placed after the athletic "Episodes" and "Chaos section," so that my dancers would be fatigued and would more genuinely need each other to get through the choreography.

6. Carrying

I wanted my dancers to become exceptionally skilled at taking each other's weight and moving each other through the space, so I created throughout the year about eight partnering phrases that demanded this of them. Most of this material did not end up in the piece because we simply had far too much for a ten minute piece, but the exercise

of learning and honing these phrases enhanced their ability to execute the small phrases that ended up in the piece. Additionally after taking a series of contact improvisation classes at American College Dance Festival in Texas, March 2009, I taught my dancers a whole new series of lifts that gave us material for the “Chaos section.”

7. Spontaneous Ten-Minute Pieces

One of the discoveries I made early on is the value of spontaneously creating a ten-minute work. This exercise demands that I trust my instincts, and thus creates a much-needed workout for the instinctual voice. The spontaneous ten-minute piece requires a bit of preparation work; you have to have something you want to play with. In the beginning of each semester I generated so many different phrases and different textures of movement that I felt like we had a fairly extensive palette of colors to work with, so early on I got into the habit of giving dancers a placement in the room, turning on music, and talking to them, telling them each what solo phrase or partnering to do (and with whom), where to do it, which direction to face, while also inserting improvisational moments, walking, sinking, crawling, and entrances and exits. This became a weekly exercise. At the end of a rehearsal of teaching new material and coaching old material, we would film a spontaneous piece, my voice talking them through it. These investigative sessions not only gave me tons of choreographic ideas, but also got my dancers very comfortable with change, listening, and rapidly absorbing directions and making intelligent choices. By the end of the semester, some of my most classically trained dancers were saying, “Well, I don’t know what the piece is, as its different every week, but I’m not worried because it could be any of the versions that we’ve done.” They were comfortable with working through choreography without setting, repeating, and cleaning it, as they were becoming *rehearsed in being unrehearsed*.

8. Talking While Dancing

As a pedagogical technique, I have discovered that talking to my dancers while they are dancing is a highly effective way to create change in their dancing. If I simply give them notes between run-throughs, sometimes the dancers make changes, but often times they simply forget, dancing the piece instead through muscle memory. Yet if I talk

to them while they are deeply immersed in the moment of moving, they become malleable and super perceptive in their dancing. I see my words enter their bodies and transform what they are doing. I have experienced this multiple times this year, but I will describe in detail just one particular session I had with Katie Duberg. I reviewed a phrase with her and then had her do it several times, each time coaching the movement more deeply by giving her richer imagery and providing more physical cues- brushing the palm of her hand, widening her back with a gentle pull of my hands, extending her foot and arm away from one another, and giving her specific places to focus on in the room. Her movement transformed. The first time she had done the phrase, the movement was empty, marked, and purposeless. As I gave her reasons to do it and ignited her imagination, the *lights came on behind her eyes* and her body became empowered. I told her “You are leaning her torso out of a window on the 100th floor of a building and you see the people on the street below, the sounds of their chatter come drifting up to you. A wind from the streets is blowing through her fingers and hair. Feel it, show me what it feels like.” Her gaze at the floor suddenly did not see the floor. She was perceiving life 100 floors below her. Her hands became alive with the imagined sense of wind, and her whole body became perceptive and alive to the story I was telling her. We went through the whole phrase this way, and I was nearly ready to cry at how beautiful her work became. I realized that the mind and imagination must power movement, or it is simply a shell of actions without internal drive. I saw how satisfying the dance became for her when I provided rich stories for her to embody, how satisfying it is for me as a choreographer and teacher to affect such sudden and remarkable change in a dancer, and how powerful it is to be talked to while dancing. If I had told her that story before she had danced, she may not have taken it as seriously. But when information is given to a dancer while they are within the work of dancing, they will be much more likely to soak it in and transform themselves with it. *Work* must be infused with *purpose* while the work is occurring, or the two will always remain disparate entities.

As a second pedagogical technique, I have found that to an extent, giving my dancers the freedom to speak while dancing enhances their ability to communicate with each other. *In Passing* insisted that the dancers depend on each other, and so in rehearsals it was very important for them to tell each other what they needed from each other while

the piece was being practiced. This led to a rather noisy rehearsal space, in which at times it was a bit hard for me to be heard, but it was also an essential tool for my dancers as they figured out how to work together. I opened up the space for much-needed dialogue and though at times I had to grab the reins again, I did see changes in my dancers' ability to do partner work by the end of the year, partially as a result of them having spent a lot of time speaking to each other. Dancers who, in the fall, had a clear sense of a personal bubble, and whose bodies bristled or arched away from touch are now very enthusiastic about partnering and not at all afraid of touch. I heard them asking each other, "What do you need from me, in this moment of the partnering?" which made me so proud of them, as they were actively helping and seeking help from each other.

BETWEEN REHEARSALS

Notebooks

I have filled almost four spiral notebooks since May 2008, all teeming with ideas and observations that have fueled *In Passing*. Keeping a notebook makes me an active observer. I have been keeping my notebook beside me as I do work for other classes, when I go to dance shows, when I am out and about on campus, and next to my bed at night. By having it always there, it makes idea-catching the most fundamental work in my life, and all other things possible sources of ideas. It is a net, and the world is full of butterflies.

Flipping through my notebook I am reminded of tons of ideas, yet I rarely read it. My notebook is more of an artifact of the way that I am living, not something that I always need to refer to. When I do need an idea, however, I can randomly open the book, and find a stick figure drawing of a movement idea or a scrawled fragment of a thought that will get my creative juices going again. See Appendix N for a few randomly selected thoughts from my notebooks.

Notes for Dancers

One thing I know as a dancer is the value of a well-articulated correction. When a teacher gives me a good note, one that not only shows me that they believe I can rise to the next level, but also gives me a way to get there, I try to live by it until it sinks in and

changes me. Knowing this, I have been attempting to really open my eyes and see my dancers, identify what they need and craft ways of not only verbally coaching them, but also devising rehearsal activities that demand them to grow in these ways.

One technique of giving notes that I have found to be quite meaningful is to write each of my dancers a short letter and give it to them in rehearsal. The note becomes a kind of gift to them, showing my dancers how closely I have been watching them, and that I believe they can grow. While in one of my dancer's dorm rooms, I found one of my notes to her rather prominently on her bulletin board, and I felt extremely gratified. She clearly valued my words, and she had certainly shown changes in her dancing in rehearsals. See Appendix D, F, and K, for individual notes to my dancers.

The Weekly Email and Video

Another method of giving notes was through my weekly (sometimes more frequent) email to my dancers. In it I included a thank you to the dancers for the things that I felt they did especially well in the last rehearsal, a video from the previous rehearsal, schedule information, and a list of notes. This has been excellent exercise for me, as it challenges me to reevaluate rehearsal and articulate what I felt went well and what could be better. Also, giving my dancers a video to look at and a description of things to work on helped to counter the usual lack of momentum that occurs when dancers have had a week off from working on a piece. I could not be certain that all of my dancers were watching the videos or reading my emails, but I could tell that at least a crucial percentage of them were, and that their energy kept the entire piece not only buoyant but growing on the off-days. See Appendix O for a sample weekly email.

Our rehearsal and performance videos are posted at:

http://web.me.com/jacost/Dance_thesis_08/In_Passing_Trustee.html

Evaluating and Using Feedback

My main sources of feedback in the making of *In Passing* were my meetings with Joel Smith and my conversations with my dancers. My meetings with Joel were incredibly thought provoking, always leaving me with a page full of notes that I would use to craft a new rehearsal plan. I think that my work on *In Passing* marked a major shift

in my attitude towards feedback. Since the purpose of *In Passing* was to challenge my dancers and myself, Joel's comments were welcomed, not feared. I found myself pondering thoughtfully over his ideas, not feeling at all defensive of my own; as my ideas were experiments and I knew they could only grow from stirring them. This approach created a buffer, in which all critique was interesting and potentially useful and nothing could be threatening.

Conversations with many of my dancers were also valuable, and I have peppered this paper with their insights: Abby, Gigi, Lucy, Alissa, Katie, Maya, Alex, and Charlotte each offered me helpful, honest feedback throughout the year. My talks with Charlotte, however, were particularly meaningful as she was willing to spend the most time with me, patiently listening to my rough ideas and offering her own thoughtful insights. It was extremely helpful to have one of my dancers so present for me outside of rehearsals, allowing me to bounce ideas off her, and giving me a sense of how *In Passing* felt from a dancer's point of view. We had an especially helpful conversation in February, when I was feeling a need to ramp up the athleticism of the piece and create increasingly difficult tasks that would require all fourteen dancers' strength. Charlotte responded by describing her experience working with Diavolo Dance Company. She had been in a piece in which there was a series of high drama episodes in which the lights turned off at their climaxes. In one of them, she had to run full speed at a wall held up by several dancers and just as she slammed against it, the lights went out. Though I never saw her perform this, her description struck me, and it helped me to form the idea of the six quick and dramatic rope episodes in the beginning of *In Passing*, each of which has some sort of action and intense physicality that depends on other dancers, complemented by lighting.

PRODUCTION

Music

The Score-a-thon Workshop in the fall Senior Seminar was an extremely valuable experience, fitting into my decision to use anything as inspiration, and not be afraid to let go, shift, and play. In this workshop, David Karagianis and Chad Michael Hall of Loyola Marymount University played clips of our rehearsal videos with several different songs to

show us how music can change the way we view the same piece of movement. This was a revelation for me, as my two previous choreographic works had been driven by the sound-score. After the Score-a-thon workshop, I realized that in these past works, I was fighting to make the movement work with the music, and that as a choreographer I wanted to make the music work for me. Hall also said that it is extremely important for a choreographer to build an extensive music library, and to have a wide variety of music that can be employed to enhance a diverse range of movement ideas.

Taking these suggestions, I started using a variety of songs in rehearsal, and began using an application called PandoraJam, which downloads the music you are listening to on Pandora to iTunes, and I have been madly searching and experimenting with music since. Pandora is an internet radio program in which you enter the name of an artist or song you enjoy, and the website plays a stream of music that is similar to that song or artist. It was through PandoraJam that I found a many of the artists that I collaged into my spring sound-score: Biosphere, Oval, Phillip Jeck, CJC, and Vladislav Delay. These artists' atmospheric music created an environment for my dance but did not leash it to counts. Through Tom's recommendation, I found Rachel's, through Charlotte's suggestion I discovered Arto Lindsay and Melvin Gibbs, and through my brother Elliott Cost, I found a series of Nine Inch Nails instrumental tracks. I also received from my brother a track that he made himself on a child's piano, which I layered into my spring soundtrack. Using my knowledge of GarageBand that I had gained over the summer making the audio for *Ourselves in Front of You*, I edited and layered these songs together, in much the same non-linear, spontaneous way that I was making the choreography. Gigi's boyfriend, Matthew Blackmar, helped me with aspects of GarageBand that I was less familiar with, reconstructed a portion of my layered tracks when I lost my raw file, and helped me to intensify a crashing sound at the end of my "Chaos section." I thank him for giving me multiple hours of his time, and for all of his enthusiasm and support of my work.

Lighting

I worked with the brilliant Eileen Cooley to light my spring piece. We lit the "Highway" with a band of choppy lighting across the floor, "Lucy Overhead" with a

silhouette against an amber scrim, rising yellow sidelights during “Katie Ankles,” and dimming lights as “Fishing” ends. During the “Chaos section” we made the lights explosive and flashy, and for the slow partnering we lit the scrim with a light blue and applied sculptural side lighting quality. During the final walking improvisation, we added lavender to the scrim, fading the lights to black on the rope after Charlotte is pulled off stage. Lighting added created a hauntingly beautiful environment for *In Passing*.

Costumes

In the fall my female dancers wore black dresses or black skirts and tank tops, and those with long hair wore low pony tails. Alex Randall wore a black shirt and pants. (See the end of Appendix G for a picture of the fall cast in costume). In the spring I decided to make their costumes less gendered and uniform. I asked them to put together their own costumes using layers of both black and grey clothing: pants, skirts, dresses, shirts, leggings, sweaters, etc, and allowed them to wear their hair however they felt comfortable. This allowed my dancers to appear as individuals, yet the palate of grays and blacks made them seem like a community with a shared history, additionally helping the dramatic lighting to seem more colorful by contrast. The simplicity and pedestrian nature of their outfits enabled the dancers to be quite comfortable, and let the viewer focus on the movement, not on what they were wearing (See the end of Appendix L for a picture of spring cast in costume).

SPRING PERFORMANCES

Board of Trustee Performance, Garrison Theatre, Scripps College, March 27, 2009

The Dance Department was invited to present a short concert for the Board of Trustees Annual Report on March 27, 2009 and *In Passing* was selected to be shown in this performance, along with two faculty pieces. The Board of Trustee show was a powerful growth boost for the cast and the piece. It took place the week after spring break, and since I had gone to Texas the week before spring break for the American College Dance Festival, we had not rehearsed in fifteen days, and we had never run the piece all the way through in the way it was to be in the performance. The day of the show was our first chance to rehearse. We met for two hours to review, light, and space *In*

Passing, and in that small window of time, the dancers grew from not fully remembering the piece to suddenly performing it in such a captivating way that I found myself barely breathing while watching them from the light booth. The theatre environment and the impending act of performing created the pressure that glued the piece together. The lights behind my dancers' eyes turned on like never before, and a new seriousness infused the piece, which carried us through the rest of the performances in the spring. I introduced *In Passing* to the audience of trustees with a speech that I have included in Appendix I.

California Dance Invitational, Waltmar Theatre, Chapman University, April 4, 2009

The Dance Department invited me to bring a piece to *The California Dance Invitational* at Chapman University, a performance that gave California schools an opportunity to have a mini American College Dance Festival, as our Southwest region did not host a festival in 2009. The day of the performance ended up being quite stressful, but also quite remarkable. We had been anticipating performing the piece without Tom, who was in a breaking competition that day, but a just before the concert, Jill had to fly home for an emergency wisdom tooth extraction. The night before the concert, we had a hectic rehearsal trying to figure out how to do the piece without Jill and Tom. The next day I got a call from Maya saying that she might not be able to make it to the show, as she had recently gotten her wisdom teeth out and was in a lot of pain. So I spent the morning of April 4 contacting the other eleven dancers and asking them whether they thought we could do the piece with three dancers missing. Immediately I received a text from Abby saying, "You got it. Ill take her place in the boulder" and a text from Alissa saying, "I think we can do this. It'll be a good experience for people to be aware and take charge on stage." I received a whole series of text messages from almost everyone else in my cast that all said the same thing: "We can do it." For some reason, upon receiving these, I nearly cried. I had lost confidence that morning, feeling like I was asking too much of my dancers, who are primarily students of other subjects, and who had already given so much to this piece. But my dancers had not lost trust at all. They were completely capable of pulling this off. They were rehearsed in being unrehearsed, and not only comfortable but enthusiastic about the challenge. I had created a piece that depended heavily on all fourteen of them to execute, but more importantly it depended on

their ability to think on their feet and remain engaged throughout turbulent changing circumstances, which they were more than ready to do, onstage. Maya ended up being able to come to the performance that night, but the amazing response of my dancers that morning was a powerful statement to me. Their trust in themselves and each other had grown immensely over the year such that on April 4, 2009, it buoyed even me through the work.

I realized in retrospect that one of the reasons my dancers had been so ready to do the piece at *The California Dance Invitational* without three dancers was that I had almost never given them a chance to do the piece the same way twice, and we had almost never had all fourteen dancers in rehearsal together. I spoke to one of my dancers, Abby Taubman, about this and she said: “One of the reasons your piece is hard to do, but also fun to do is that it is always changing.” *In Passing* is literally a transient set of choreographic instructions- every part of it is *in passing*. There is almost nothing that is stable about the piece, except that it needs at least most of the dancers to succeed, and that is what makes it vibrate on stage; the dancers know that certain things are supposed to happen at certain times, and that other things have elasticity to them, that certain people have certain roles when particular dancers are missing, and that when dancers are not missing, they have other equally important roles. The complex algorithm of the piece demands tons of presence from the dancers and keeps the piece alive. It is full of overlapping directions such as “If x happens or if person a is missing, person b does this and person c and d do this.” Everyone has to constantly be watching out not only for themselves, but for everyone else, filling shifting roles in order to accomplish the piece, and because they were so trained in being present to the needs of the piece as a whole, they were ready to do the piece without three dancers and without a rehearsal to prepare for that particular circumstance.

Performing in *The California Dance Invitational* was also an opportunity to see *In Passing* in the context of other students’ work. I realized that our piece added something quite different to the show; the use of the rope was a deviation from the way that other dances were navigating space, and the improvisational choices that my dancers were making on stage contrasted the carefully choreographed nature of most of the other pieces. It was an opportunity to see our work from a more objective point of view.

Scripps Dances, Garrison Theatre, Scripps College, April 17 and 18, 2009

In the final rehearsal before the *Scripps Dances* performance, I coached the dancers on their presence, rather than coaching the movement directly. I read to my dancers Ronnie Brosterman's interpretation of the piece (see page 14) and a quote that a friend had given me. Ronnie's narrative helped my dancers to see a through-line in the piece, as each choreographic segment that had seemed to be and perhaps was arbitrarily placed in rehearsals, now had a clear reason for being exactly where it was. Hearing a beautiful narrative helped to give my dancers a sense of purpose in their dancing. The quote from my friend was also a very powerful last nugget of inspiration for my dancers: "love that is other-centered yet neither neglectful nor destructive of the self" (Denise Ackerman). I explained to them that this quote has two parts: we must support each other through this piece and through life, but at the same time, we must be strong on our own, so that loving another does not deplete us. I wanted my dancers to see the strength and trust of each other required by *In Passing* as directly applicable to life outside of the dance studio. My dancers resonated with this, all of them nodding, and a few saying "Ahem." In this final rehearsal, we prepared to give the piece to the Claremont community not only by physically rehearsing the piece, but by recognizing the that the movement structure we had created was an important investigation of what we want to enhance into our non-dance lives. My cast worked together with exceptional patience and presence in that rehearsal and it reminded me that in order to do truly great work, I must continually emphasize the greater meaning of the tasks at hand.

Before the Scripps Show, I gave my dancers a letter and individual notes to express my gratitude for them and to again remind them of the larger reasons for doing this piece. The letter and notes are included in Appendix J and K. The final performances of *In Passing* in *Scripps Dances* went beautifully. The dancers were extremely invested in the work, and as Lucy told me, she never felt the audience, because there was such a demand to remain present to the community onstage. That is exactly what I had wanted: a piece that required real interdependence and thus could not become presentational. If I was going to take ten minutes of the audience's time, I wanted to give audiences a ten-

minute experience of seeing fourteen people genuinely helping each other and listening to each other, because that is what we need more of in this world. See Appendix M for audience reviews of the piece. Their words suggest that our intentions were felt.

Moments in a Larger Continuum

I hoped from the start that my experimental approach towards *In Passing* would not harden into an intense desire to perfect it for performances, and that if I did end up wanting a specific cleanness to the piece, that I would not polish it until just before the show so that it would remain somewhat raw on stage. It became challenging to maintain the roughness we had in rehearsals since we performed *In Passing* for an entire month; *The Board of Trustees Performance* was on week 10 of the semester, *The California Dance Invitational* on week 11, and *Scripps Dances* on week 13. I did not want to overvalue the performative moments, but I also had to set the piece to create the specificity and clarity that both myself and my dancers needed to make us comfortable putting the piece on stage. To solve this dilemma, we rehearsed less during the show month, so that we would be limited in what we could clean and set, and thus much of the piece would remain a bit rough on stage. We rehearsed the moments where specific timing was important, while leaving other moments improvisational. There are many moments in the piece in which the dancers have tasks but no set way of doing them; thus much of our rehearsal process was dedicated to practicing making decisions in real time. Additionally, between the shows, I gave the dancers small changes, testing their ability to remember and apply them onstage. Most importantly, however, we had spent a year practicing collaboration, confidence, clear communication, listening, generosity, open-mindedness, presence, and trust. Thus the dancers were rehearsed in the skills needed to perform the piece, as much as they were rehearsed in doing the actual piece.

REFLECTIONS

Distributing Responsibility

During one of my later rehearsals, in the midst of creating a “people rope” for a potential ending (which we later rejected), involving dancers crawling on their stomachs on stage and using each other to crawl past one another, I overheard a few of my dancers

saying to each other “This is problem-solving!” It struck me just how much responsibility I had given my cast. I had told my dancers that we were going to build a “people rope” and that there were two rules for it: their only way forward was by pulling themselves along other people, and some people would need to be still for a time, so that others could use them to pull themselves forward. The rest was up to them. My dancers, most of whom a mere eight months earlier were only accustomed to learning choreography by watching a choreographer dance it, now were quite happy to work to bring a choreographer’s rough idea to life. I realized that I was standing there, watching them choreograph my concept. They were saying to each other, “ Ok, I should stay still here.” “Lucy crawl past me.” “Ok Ingrid, now you stay still.” “Tom, can you crawl forward?” These were directions that a choreographer might give, but my dancers were giving them to each other. They were not afraid of being directors, and they also were not hesitant to take each other’s directions. This was the communicative community that I had wanted to build! It was happening! I was offering ideas and directions, and it was my idea that they were choreographing, but they were bringing it to life in ways that I could never have imagined on my own.

Change

Over the course of the year I have seen major changes in my dancers’ attitudes toward change. Many had come from backgrounds of ballet or competition dance in which they had never been exposed to spontaneous, non-linear, continually shifting, or improvisational choreography or rehearsal processes. They were accustomed to seeing choreography as unquestionably set and evaluating themselves based on their ability to execute it. These dancers were at first unsure of what to make of the process of making *In Passing*, in which everything was constantly being rearranged, edited, and layered, and in which they had to participate in seeking solutions to the choreographic problems I was giving them. Every rehearsal, we jumped from activity to activity-- doing a trust exercise, then learning a phrase, then trying the phrase to a few different songs, then experimenting with ways to use the rope, and finally making and filming a few spontaneous ten-minute pieces. I deliberately tried to create a richly varied process to keep them always on their toes. Everything about *In Passing* was changing constantly: the music, who was

partnering with who, which phrase those partners would do, a solo phrase might be turned into a partnering phrase, the soloist in a particular “Episode” was constantly shifting, etc. My dancers could not trust that any element in the piece would remain the same, and therefore it relied heavily on their trust in me, my ideas, and each other, which I feel they were able to develop so quickly because I trusted each of them so completely. *In Passing* challenged many of my dancer’s notions of how to put a piece together, and because trust in each other was so essential to this way of working, the cast became quite close.

Positive Disruptions

I determined from the start that when an obstacle arose, I would take it as a sign that the work was in need of a melting down and rebuilding. Through the adoption of this idea, melting down became a delicious activity that I did not save for dealing with obstacles but rather I sought out. My mantra became: “Throw more things at this work, I want the challenge!” I have come to think of obstacles as *positive disruptions*.

The following is a series of *positive disruptions* that I encountered this year and my reactions.

1) I overheard Sydney Freggario saying in October 2008 that she wanted to join a student work, and I thought to myself, “Why should I deny her the opportunity of being in my piece? Plus it would be good challenge to add a dancer a few months late, and I want to challenge my dancers to deal with another body in space. It will demand more presence.” I invited her to join the work, and it was a great learning experience to catch her up and determine how to incorporate her, especially since she had to miss an hour of rehearsal each week since she taught kick-boxing. I ended up devising a smaller part for her so that when she was absent the piece was not harmed, but when she was present she added beautifully to the texture of the work.

2) Throughout the year, as a result of working with fourteen dancers with incredibly full schedules, I rarely had all of my dancers in rehearsal together until performances (and in *The California Dance Invitational* we were missing three dancers). Yet I found myself for the most part enjoying the challenge, asking, “How can I prepare each of my dancers to be ready for anything and anyone in the space?” When the piece was performed, I

realized that I loved how raw it looked and how bright the lights were behind the dancers' eyes as they figured out how to get through the work.

3) One of my dancers, Molly Mather, tore her ACL over winter break, and once determining that she still wanted to be in the piece, I asked myself, "How can I design gentle movement for her that will shine no dimmer than full-bodied movement?" This new texture of Molly that we added to the puzzle of the piece was just as interesting as the un-injured Molly.

4) A few weeks into the spring semester when Abby Taubman asked me if she could join the piece, I was excited rather than startled by her audacity and welcomed the challenge of incorporating another dancer into the enormous puzzle.

My role as choreographer of *In Passing* became to welcome and intelligently incorporate new elements, dream up new trajectories for it, and coach my dancers to make smart, present choices within it. The piece became an absorbent sponge for newness and obstacles, such that I started to feel that almost nothing could damage it. Anything that seemed threatening was in fact an energy jolt for it. Creating *In Passing* taught me that if I see obstacles as gifts, that is exactly what they are.

Letting Go

After having performed the piece at *The California Dance Invitational*, I began to sense that it was ready to be released from my control. It was not mine anymore, but instead belonged to my fourteen dancers. I could no longer give them new instructions that would keep the piece from sinking into muscle memory, nor could I describe images that would shift the atmosphere they envisioned and thus created on stage. I had to sit silently in the audience and watch the effort. It was both maddening and exactly what I needed in order to learn what I next needed to learn. Here in front of me were fourteen people actively collaborating for ten minutes to navigate a web of choreographic instructions, each of them shouldering responsibility for the group's success and safety. As the dancers performed *In Passing* for the last few times, I was no longer desperate to keep pushing them. Instead, I was fascinated and proud to see all of these people, collectively from Arizona, California, Georgia, Hawaii, Maryland, New York, Taiwan,

Washington, and Wyoming working together so sensitively and intelligently. Watching *In Passing* reminded me of perhaps the most important reason for making dances- *it brings people together and beautiful things happen.*

FUTURE INTENTIONS

After a year of creating *In Passing*, as well as collaborating with Maya Guice to choreograph a solo for her called *Course*; dancing in works by student choreographers J. Lindsay Brown, Jill Mahoney, Alissa Sanchez, Tom Tsai, and Lucy Vasserman and a faculty piece by Joel Smith; creating the posters for the dance concerts (Appendix Q); designing note cards using my dance paintings for the dance department to sell; designing t-shirts for the Claremont College dancers (Appendix R); taking ballet, modern, modern repertory, Traditions of World Dance, Laban Movement Analysis, an independent study in dance history; as many guest workshops as I can; and attending as many performances as possible, I am more deeply in love with this art form than ever before.

Of all the above projects, *In Passing* has been by far my most meaningful work this year, as it has been an opportunity to lead fourteen dancers through a rich creative process, designing rehearsal circumstances that would demand their growth (and my own), as well as a final piece that could hold meaning for a viewer. I feel that at least a few of my dancers grew significantly in the past year, becoming more open to change, incredibly capable of supporting each other through risky tasks, and able to communicate and work together to bring to life the concepts I have given them. Working on *In Passing* has filled me with the desire to become an educator and to engage in this wonderfully challenging and rewarding work for a lifetime.

My next steps post-college are the following. I will be working at the San Francisco Conservatory of Dance this summer for 8 weeks as the administrative assistant to the director and founder, my dance guru, Summer Lee Rhatigan. I will help her run the summer intensives, observe and work with the other phenomenal dance educators she brings to the school, work as a full time chaperone for younger students, and take technique classes. During my last four weeks at the Conservatory, I will be doing all of the above in addition to dancing as a full time student, nine hours a day in the Batsheva curriculum lead by Batsheva company member Bobbi Smith. I will be taking daily *gaga*

classes and learning repertory in addition to working with Rhatigan, Alex Ketley, Chiharu Shibata, and Christian Burns in the creation of new works. I am looking forward to drinking in the massively powerful dance vitamin that is a summer at SFCD, as well as gaining invaluable experience helping to run a school that values and empowers individuals as a prerequisite for teaching them to dance.

In the fall, I will begin the two-year Dance MFA program at UC Irvine, on a full scholarship with a teaching assistantship. I will be concentrating on choreography and pedagogy, with the aim of becoming a dance professor and eventually running or opening an arts school. My journey is just beginning.

A woman dances by herself, while a slowly walking community arrives behind her, trailing a rope. As they pass her, she sinks slowly to relax on her side. She is secure resting on her own. The group slowly exits.

A few moments pass before she takes hold of the rope that is now beside her, and begins to pull herself, carefully, yet deliberately forward. She has a purpose to fulfill. Just as she reaches the wing, many arms reach out and envelop her, sweeping her off stage. She is and was never alone.

Lights fade on the rope. The curtain closes.

In Passing has passed, but it too is just another moment in the continuum.

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APPENDIXES

A. Rehearsal Schedules

Julia's Fall 2008 Rehearsal Schedule

Note: all weekday rehearsals at Pendleton, all weekend rehearsals at Scripps

September

12th: 4-6 (Friday) all (minus Maya and Alex R.)
13th: (Saturday) 1:30-2:20 or 3, Alex R. and Gigi
14th (Sunday) 2:30-3:30 Alissa

15th: 6-7 pm (Monday) Molly and Alissa
17th: 6-7 (Wednesday) Lucy
19th: 4-6 (Friday) all (minus Maya)
21st: 2:15-3:15 Alyssa and Alex

26th: 4-6 (Friday) all
27th: (Saturday) 1:30-2:15 Molly, 2:15-3 Gigi, 3-3:45 Maya
28th Sunday, 10-12 Charlotte and Maya

October

3rd: 4-6 (Friday), all (minus Lucy)
4th: 1:30-3:30(Saturday) Alex R., 2:30-3:30 Alyssa

8th: 6-7 (Wednesday) Jill and Lucy - Lucy make-up

10th: 4 pm Faculty Showing

11th: (Saturday) 11:45-1:45 all

17th: 4-6 (Friday) all

October Break 20th-21st

24th: 4-6 (Friday) all (minus Lucy)

29th: 6-7 (Wednesday) Lucy make-up

31st: 4-6 (Friday) all

November

7th: 4-6 (Friday) all

14th: 4 pm Faculty Showing

15th 11:45-1:45(Saturday) all

21st: 4-6 (Friday) all

Thanksgiving Break 27th-28th

December

1st: tech starts 6 pm (Monday)
2nd: tech/ dress 6 pm (Tuesday)
3rd: tech/ dress 6pm (Wednesday)
4th: Show -8 pm (Thursday)
5th: Show -8 pm (Friday)
6th Shows - 8 pm and 2 pm (Saturday)

IN PASSING (WORKING TITLE), SPRING 2009

CONTACT NUMBERS:

- JULIA COST** 808-281-8453
1. **ALEX RANDALL** 415-828-7901
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9. **KATIE DUBERG** 443-844-8320
10. **LUCY VASSERMAN** 646-320-4145
11. **MAYA GUICE** 626-825-8615
12. **MOLLY MATHER** 925-330-3990
13. **TOM TSAI** 206-708-4825
14. **ABIGAIL TAUBMAN** 818-720-7788

JANUARY

- 20 TUESDAY 8:30-9:30 SCRIPPS ALEX, GIGI
22 THURSDAY 6-7 PENDLETON MOLLY, ALISSA
23 FRIDAY 4-6:30 PENDLETON ALL (MINUS MAYA)
.....
31 SATURDAY 10-12:30 SCRIPPS ALL

FEBRUARY

- 3 TUESDAY 7:30-8:30 PENDLETON KATIE, ALYSSA
6 FRIDAY 4-6:30 PENDLETON ALL (GIGI MISSING OR LEAVING EARLY, MAYA?)
7 SATURDAY 11-12 SCRIPPS TOM, AMANDA
.....
13 FRIDAY 4-6:30 PENDLETON ALL (MINUS GIGI)
14 SATURDAY 11-12 CHARLOTTE, LUCY
.....
20 FRIDAY 4-6:30 PENDLETON ALL
.....
27 FRIDAY 4-6:30 PENDLETON ALL

MARCH

- 6 FRIDAY 3:30 SCRIPPS SHOWING (WE SHOW AFTER 4:15)**
7 SATURDAY 9:30-12 SCRIPPS ALL (MINUS INGRID)
.....
10 TUESDAY 6-7:30 PM PENDLETON ALL WHO CAN
(ALEX, ALISSA, ALYSSA, AMANDA, CHARLOTTE, GIGI, INGRID, JILL, KATIE (LATE), LUCY, MAYA,
MOLLY, TOM (LEAVE EARLY))
.....
SPRING BREAK
.....
27 FRIDAY 1-2:30 LIGHTING GARRISON, 7 CALL FOR GARRISON SHOW
28 SATURDAY 9:30-12 SCRIPPS ALL

APRIL

- 3 FRIDAY 4-6:30 PENDLETON ALL
4 SATURDAY CHAPMAN TECH AND PERFORMANCE (MINUS TOM)
5 SUNDAY 1 PM SHOWING (WE SHOW AT 2)
.....
10 FRIDAY 4-6:30 PENDLETON ALL
.....
15 WEDNESDAY TECH GARRISON

16 THURSDAY DRESS GARRISON
17 FRIDAY SHOW 8 PM GARRISON
18 SATURDAY SHOW 2 PM & 8 PM GARRISON

B. My First Clear Articulation of Pedagogical Values, September 12, 2008

Features of a good class

A good class challenges me.

It makes me feel that the teacher believes in my ability to grow.

It is clear that the teacher is passionate about my growth.

The teacher gives the students mind-blowing imagery, exercises, challenges, and encouragement to make learning irresistible.

The class makes me want to work incredibly hard.

I don't want the class to end.

I see real things with my eyes, listen intently, catch on quickly, absorb, notice new things, and have revelations.

A good class gets me out of my own way, power-washing my brain free of all worries, fears, future, past, everything unnecessary.

It leaves me empowered, excited, inspired, filled with love for life.

Features of a bad class

The teacher doesn't notice the needs of the class

The teacher does not offer corrections, inspiration, or images to hold in mind

The lack of challenges seem to indicate that the teacher doesn't believe in the potential of the students

The teacher does not maintain authority or command respect

The teacher does not seem to know what he or she is doing or wants

The teacher cannot articulate the ideas he or she wants to convey

There is too much or too little explanation

There is too much or too little repetition

However- with all of these an extremely dedicated student can still find value in the class and have the experience that he or she needs. Students will get out of a class what they put into a class.

Long-term goals within a dance class semester:

To be unrecognizable to myself by the end- to have grown that much.

To be brimming with strength, articulation, power, confidence, ideas, ideas, ideas!

To have learned more about myself by finding new movement languages to express unexpressed parts of me.

To be burning to apply what I have learned to another project so that everything I do feeds everything I will do.

Short-term goals within a dance class

To push myself a little further (or a lot further!) every class.

To continually test what I can do against what I say I want to do so that I am walking the walk, not just talking the talk.

To desire much and match desire with effort

To become a brighter, bolder, version of me all the time.

To practice being whom I want to be.

C. Excerpts from Dancer's Answers to my Questions

Below are some of the most profound answers I received from my dancers on the question sheets:

1. Being actively aware is a result of actively deciding to be aware.
2. I have developed the ability to hear music in the silence.

3. I strive to have every viewer take something from my dancing- an image, thought, or feeling.

Below are the skills my dancers have collectively have said that they developed or enhanced in the dance studio:

Appreciation for detail, work ethic, competition not with others but with oneself, ability to express oneself without words, adaptability, compromise, ability to work together, discipline, empowerment, focus, health, stress relief, strength, mind-body connection, constantly setting goals and working towards them, versatility, interpersonal awareness, ability to accept personal shortcomings in the short-term but also to refuse accepting them in the long-run, loving what you do but also with whom you do it, determining the strengths of your peers and subsequently being able to employ them.

Below are some of the additions my dancers made to their perceived strengths in the beginning of spring 2009:

I am more adaptable now than I was, but I still want to become even more adaptable than I am. I also have become better about communicating with other dancers, especially in partnering, telling them what I need, etc. - Lucy Vasserman

I feel that I became more comfortable trying new movement and exploring last semester- Molly Mather

I'm a good partner! I am comfortable holding/touching the other dancer, I know how to take and give weight, and I can interact with others in dance/onstage- Alissa Sanchez

I have learned to trust a stranger, and that physical trust can proceed and lead to emotional trust- Alex Randall

I have made progress with being comfortable with non-balletic movement and with having a sense of connection with other dancers onstage. I am also now trying to think more about being aware of the present moment- Genevieve Peaslee

Below are some of my dancers insights into what dance has taught them about humans interactions/ community:

In dance it becomes clear how you feel about human interaction: it might be to get nervous, to fully commit to the interaction, to approach the person aggressively, or to handle the interaction with tenderness. – Charlotte Smail

Through dance, I've learned that openness and honesty are extremely valuable to building a trusting community. - Tom Tsai

In dance- especially partnering, you have to really pay attention to what other people need. And if something isn't working, you have to discuss it rather than try to deduce it. - Lucy Vasserman

Honesty is the safest policy. The sincerest interactions are often unspoken. Don't trust yourself with someone else before you can trust yourself. In a community, one good deed can benefit all. Work with change not against it. Touch everything. Touch with curiosity, with respect, with love, and you'll find yourself touched. - Alex Randall

Communication and cooperation are essential. –Alyssa Mello

When you dance you have to be fully aware of other's space as well as your own, and be willing to share personal discoveries so that the community/ cast can glow as a whole- Maya Guice.

D. Individual Notes to Dancers, October 2008

Alex Randall: Be yourself. No acting, nothing staged. Relax as you. Feel everything. Let the sensation of movement direct further movement. Sink into your plie. Find stability there. Feel that roots as long as your body are connected to the bottoms of your feet and firmly set beneath the floorboards. Each night this semester, do 20 slow squats or wall sits. Work on expanding your feet on the floor to support any movement. Imagine that you had scuba flippers for feet. Practice the squid!! All the time!!

Alex Frisinger: Approach dance class for a few weeks with the following intention: the class will be one enormous abs workout. In every step, contract your abdominals and lengthen your lower back. You have wonderful release from your lower back. Match your flexibility with strength and you will be unstoppable. All of your dancing will be transformed as you work to place behind your navel a solid center of power so that your limbs can fly free, still tethered tight to your core.

Alissa: Stretch! Make a point of stretching every night. Do homework or watch TV while you stretch. Stretch your quads, your hip flexors, your back, your hamstrings, and your hips. Make a habit of it. Love it. Commit to it and you will be transformed this year. You have enormous power. Now develop for yourself the release and length. You will be unstoppable! I had a teacher who decided to stretch 3 hours everyday and said that before he knew it he went from being one of the lesser dancers in the company (SF Ballet) to becoming one of the best. But even a half hour a day will make a tremendous difference.

Alyssa: You have a wonderful visible desire to grow and learn. Keep doing what you are doing, but do more of it. Take more risks. Challenge yourself to work off center and find a center there. Be explosive. Move yourself through space by moving your hips. Consume space like you can't get enough of it. Be boldly yourself. Be a sensitive listener...work to find and support your partner's center in the duets and trust her with yours. A teacher once told me "Don't be careful, be full of care."

Charlotte: Take risks. Employ your strengths to blaze new paths in your dancing. Go places with your torso and head that are beyond what you believe you can support. Experiment with twisting your spine, finding torque in your shoulders, arching your neck, twisting your hips, contracting your back, supporting any unfamiliar contortion with a tiny center of power behind your navel. Shrink the size of that center of power so that your whole body can release around it. You have a wonderful sense of squareness and you are strong and stable in the vertical. Push yourself to explore the unfamiliar, the contorted, and the released. A teacher told me once: "Freedom is power."

Gigi: Take risks. Be sure that you are putting nothing in your own way of being the biggest, boldest version of you. The moment that you peel away all layers of resistance, worry, or judgment then you will be *unstoppable*. You are a natural rocket. Say yes to the thrilling trajectory into space that can be yours. You can do absolutely anything if you believe you can. And vice versa- if you think you can't, then you can't. A teacher once told me: "Don't be careful, be full of care."

Jill: You have so much length that you can employ as powerful long stakes into the earth. Incredible groundedness is yours the moment you work for it. Your task this year: exploring plie and strengthening your quads and abdomen. Take class like it is a giant ab workout. Never stop engaging your abdomen and hips. Use that to get your knees over your toes. Imagine that you had scuba flippers for feet. Concentrate on your plie. I had a teacher who said: "Plie is not a on and off switch, an up or down. It is a dimmer." Every degree of plie has a different usage in your dancing. Each night this semester, do 20 slow squats or wall sits. Do not try for a "perfect" 1st position that is rolled in. Concentrate on making a highly functional 1st position that can support your dancing. Practice the squid! All the time!

Lucy: Let loose. There *is* logic in looseness. Don't think, just do. There is structure and reason in the movement vocabularies that are new to you. Trust in that. Trust that you can speak any body language in your own body's voice. Put nothing in the way of your innate ability as a *mover*.

Molly: Be a bigger, bolder version of you! Consume space; be aggressive and confident in the excellent technique that is innate to your body. Powerfully describe the space you inhabit. Describe it to someone a

mile away. Be that clear. Travel...rip through the room like lightning. Everything you need for this is already in you. Its just a matter of you knowing that you are incredibly capable, wanting more, and unleashing yourself.

Maya: Take lots of risks. Big risks. How far off balance can you get? How twisted can you make your torso, how far can you get your toes from your finger tips, how curled up can you get? How much space can you consume with a single step? How high can you reach with your elbows or your knees? How can your breath be the initiator of movement rather than a limb? Invent unusual tests for yourself every class, every rehearsal. You are capable of more than you can even imagine.

E. Letter to Cast, *In the Works*, December 4, 2008

In Passing

December 4, 2008

Dear Dancers,

A few thoughts for you...

The act of performing this weekend is just another fragment in a much longer process. Let the piece continue to evolve through the shows; these are just more moments in the continuum.

“Just be. Listen to the air, the invisible truths that are hidden from our eyes in the space we share. Sense the people you are communing with, this is dance, and this is what the work is about. Work is about people; always remember that YOU are the work and be empowered by it. Let your bodies speak and listen to them in return, let the dance take over, give in to gravity, the passion and pleasure engendered by exploring our human condition.”

-Claire Granier

This has been an amazing 12 weeks with you. Together we created a dance on the premise that change is fascinating. And it is. Nothing can be a mistake, because it probably holds something fantastic in it. This piece is yours and it is elastic. Stretch it, mold it, carve your own beautiful path through it.

I cannot wait to keep working with you.

Thank you for your hard work and most of all for your trust.

Julia

F. Individual Notes to Dancers, *In the Works*, December 4, 2008

Alex Randall: Thank you for your willingness to try anything. You make things happen. I so appreciate that. Keep pushing yourself through the shows. Travel further. Know that your part in this piece is very important and purposefully add your movement texture to the space. Be clearer and more expansive in all of your lines. Trust Gigi even more. Make your care for her even more tangible.

Alex Frisinger: Thank you for accepting a smaller part in the performance. Your presence still adds a beautiful texture to the overall landscape of the piece. Know that and purposefully and powerfully add yourself to the space. Open your eyes wide and see the people around you who are sharing this experience with you. Trust Alyssa and make your care for her more tangible. Relish the lighting on your limbs and the joy of saying something without words. Savor the experience of these shows.

Alissa: Thank you for your presence in this piece. You know the difference between nodding at corrections and embodying them, and between a willingness to try and an eagerness to try. Keep pushing for more of everything- more sustainment, more presence, more pleasure in the movement. Notice the way the light and shadows are falling on your fingers, your shoulders, the people around you. Relish the energy of the show

and charge your movement with importance and passion for movement. Thank you for everything that you have brought to this piece.

Alyssa: I so appreciate your focus, your desire to learn, your presence, your trust in the dancers around you and in my guidance. It is beautiful to see you deeply engaged in movement. You know the difference between nodding at corrections and embodying them, and between a willingness to try and an eagerness to try. During these shows I know you can continue to evolve what you do. Search for ways to illuminate your individuality as you travel through this movement map. You are a pleasure to work with, and a magnetic presence on stage. Thank you.

Charlotte: You have given so much to this piece, and your presence adds so much to the work. You charge your dancing with so much power and purpose... it is captivating to watch you deeply engaged in movement. I so appreciate that you constantly push yourself. You know the difference between nodding at corrections and embodying them and between a willingness to try and an eagerness to try. Keep the piece alive through the shows. Do not let it harden. Let it vibrate with your choices. Make the trust and care that you have for Lucy even more tangible. Relish the sensation of light falling on your limbs, and the sense of the group around you, supporting you, and experiencing this dance with you.

Gigi: Looking back at what you wrote at the beginning of the semester: you wanted to learn to better connect with others on stage and to be more comfortable with non-ballet movement, I am amazed by how much you have grown. My entire piece is non-balletic and you look not only comfortable but strong doing it. Your partnering with Alex is beautifully connected: you two have a wonderful chemistry together. Continue to develop your connection through the shows. Relax against him and make your trust and care for each other even more visible. You have made immense progress this semester. Thank you so much for opening yourself up to growth and for being a part of this piece.

Jill: I so appreciate your work this semester. You have a beautiful facility as a dancer and I have seen you use it more and more fully these past weeks and really stretch any imagined limitations. It is so exciting to see you grow. I really appreciate that anytime I asked something of you, you worked hard to make it happen. Your eagerness and work ethic make you a pleasure to work with. Throughout these shows, employ and push through your beautiful lines. Consume more space than anyone. Purposefully paint the stage with your movement. In your partnering, make your trust and care for Maya even more visible.

Lucy: Your trust means so much to me. Thank you for everything that you bring to this piece. Your powerful dancing adds beautifully to the overall design of the stage. Know that. Do not let the dance harden; let it vibrate with your choices. In the partnering relax against Charlotte. I know that you two trust and care a lot about each other. Keep finding ways to deepen your connection and make it even more visible. Search for ways to illuminate your individuality as you travel through this movement map.

Molly: It has been a real privilege to work with you this semester. Calm, humble, and yet super strong and powerful, you have been a gift to this piece. You are incredibly capable and you have a beautiful focus onstage. You have a magnetic quality about you and it is riveting to watch you deeply engaged in movement. Relax into the knowledge that you have the tools to move in a way that is truly beautiful. You are at a level where you can certainly keep pushing yourself through these shows. Vary the texture of what you bring to the stage. How clearly and powerfully can you shape the air around your body? How sensitive and strong can you be in your partnering with Alissa? Dance with your eyes. Relish how it feels to move.

Maya: You have been a true pleasure to work with. As you well know, there is an immense difference between talking and doing, between nodding at corrections and embodying them, between a willingness to try and an eagerness to try, between passively following directions and actively engaging in the journey and coming up with your own even better ideas. You have done the latter of each of these things, and your presence in my piece has been a gift. Thank you for your focus, commitment, and ideas. You know what to do through these shows. Never let the piece harden. Keep it alive and vibrating with your choices. Trust and relax against Jill and make your trustworthiness unmistakable. Open your eyes wide and take in the space, the people around you, and the energy of having many other eyes watching. Relish the sensation of

dramatic lighting and shadows falling across your limbs and the joy of painting the stage with your movement.

Sydney: Thank you for jumping into the piece late and weaving your own beautiful texture into the larger basket of the piece. Push yourself to stretch further, travel more, see the people around you and enjoy the moments of your shared experience on stage in this movement map. Know the tremendous importance of your presence and purposefully, powerfully add yourself.

G. Photographic Outline of *In Passing*, Fall 2008



1. Original passage across stage; exploration of individual choices and sensitivity through time and space.



2. Chaotic breakdown: exploration of boldness and individualism in a crowded space.



3. Exploration of generosity and sensitivity of two selves, supportive interactions that enter and exit the space



4. All crossing couples collect on the stage and reach out beyond their own relationships- first moment of "unison" in piece



5. Two dancers begin improvising a non-contact duet/ solos linked by eye contact with another crawling slowly towards the rest of the cast, who have exited left.



6. Final passage across the space, same structure as original passage, exploration of individual choices within a larger trajectory of community through time and space.



Fall 2008 Cast: (left to right) Alissa Sanchez, Sydney Freggario, Maya Guice, Molly Mather, Charlotte Smail, Jill Mahoney, Alex Frisinger, Alyssa Mello, Lucy Vasserman, Genevieve Peaslee, Alex Randall

H. Concert Reviews of *In the Works*, December 4-6, 2008

A dance that caught my interest was in *Passing*, by Julia Cost. The dance was set up on a dimly lit stage. It started and ended the same way, with people walking across it, forming connections with others as they went along, but breaking them and finding other connections. The movements were slow and beautiful.

The connections the dancers made reminded me of the kinds of relationships certain tribes that live in South African society form. A talk I went to a couple of months ago explained that almost everyone in a village is connected to each other through the complex relationships they form. A man or a woman will

have multiple life partners, and those life partners will have multiple life partners, connecting everyone.

Watching the people form relationships, especially during the middle part of the dance, and then going back to those relationships and others they formed when the dance started, reminded me of that. It was interesting how those two ideas connected in my mind, but I don't think it was what the choreographer had intended.

The last piece in the first half, *In Passing*, was fantastic! It started off beautifully with people walking delicately, slowly, and deliberately towards the light across the stage. It was poetry in motion. The use of black costumes and the incandescent lights created a warm glow off the dancers' faces, limbs, and skin.

The effect of all the dancers together in such awesome coordination and harmony with each other was captivating. Unlike the other pieces, the dancers in this piece made it appear as if the dance was inherent to them and the movement was completely natural. They were so exact and precise it looked as if they were being powered by the music. The communication between them was brilliant though silent and they interpreted and understood each others' body language with even more ease than if they were exchanging spoken dialogue. I watched the dance in awe until the cycle of completion, bringing a halt to a perfect performance.

There were two pieces that I felt a connection and passion towards. Julia Cost's piece was absolutely beautiful. A month or so ago we learned some of her choreography that appeared in the piece. It was so interesting to see how the phrase we learned fit into the dance as a whole. My favorite part of her piece is the partnering section. The dancers interacted so gracefully with each other and there was constant movement throughout the choreography. Even when the dancers were still, there always seemed to be energy radiating off their bodies. Simple movements such as the grabbing of a hand, or the step of a foot, seemed to hold so much meaning in the dance. It was obvious when a movement was rushed or if one person was walking across the stage a little faster than the rest of the cast. There was a constant vibe of intensity, patience, and community throughout the dance, no matter what movement was being performed or the amount of people who were performing.

I. Introduction to *In Passing* for the Board of Trustee Performance, March 27, 2009

My name is Julia Cost, and I would like to introduce to you my dance thesis entitled, *In Passing*. *In Passing* is an exploration of passages of people through time and space and the coexistence of struggle and support, individuality and interdependency, and boldness and sensitivity within a community. It has been built upon multiple goals. I wanted to create not only a piece for the stage, but also break open and expand my choreographic process, and attempt to widen my own and perhaps also my dancer's perspectives about ways of building dance. I have given my dancers physically demanding tasks, which require collaboration and trust in order to be completed successfully and safely. I have incorporated a rope into the piece, which not only delineates passages through the space along which the dancers must travel, but also creates possibilities for collaborative group tasks. In order to effectively use the rope to get through space, there must be a counter pull, and thus this prop has created circumstances in which there is no option but interdependency. I have also been exploring contact work, in which dancers are asked to trust each other, and to trust themselves to support each other. The final and perhaps most important device in the process of making "*In Passing*" has been the use of constant change. We have rarely rehearsed the piece the same way twice, and thus, any performance of it requires utmost presence from each of the dancers, as muscle memory cannot be relied upon.

I would like to thank my dancers for their intelligence, compassion, many hours of hard work, and most of all for their trust.

Thank you and enjoy.

J. Letter to Cast, *Scripps Dances*, April 17 and 18, 2009

In Passing

April 17, 2009

Dear Dancers,

This has been an amazing year with 9 of you and semester with 5 of you. You entered the first rehearsal as 14 distinct individuals, and through the development of this piece, you retained that individuality while becoming generous, trusting, present friends who support each other through the demanding tasks of this choreography. That is what is most meaningful about this work--that your love for each other as you perform *In Passing* is real.

The performances this weekend are just a small part of what this work was about. Most valuable was the experience of making it; we worked to harness the power of 14 individuals and pour it into tasks that are greater than what any one person can do alone, to open ourselves up to playing and experimentation, to communicate confidently and clearly, to listen and be sensitive to each other's needs, to create something as a community that depends on everyone's presence to be successful, to trust one another, and to prove ourselves as trustworthy. These things that we work on so intensively in the dance studio-- collaboration, confidence, clear communication, listening, generosity, open-mindedness, presence, and trust-- these are what this piece is about. And these are things that we must strive to enhance in the world outside of the dance studio.

Relish your time on stage this weekend and give this work to the audience with pride. *In Passing* was born out of our intersecting passages this year, and you are each stunning within it.

Thank you for being such an incredible group to work with.
Much love to you,

Julia

K. Individual Notes to Dancers, *Scripps Dances*, April 17 & 18, 2009

Abby: I love that you say what you feel. You bravely asked me if you could join this piece, and I am so glad you did as your presence in the piece has added a lot to the work and to the community of our cast. I appreciate and admire your ability to communicate openly, freely, and with humor, your loving and supportive energy, your willingness to do whatever it takes to make something work, your eagerness to take risks and put yourself out there on a limb, your intuitiveness, and your wonderfully pointed questions. It is refreshing to be with you, as you get straight to the heart of things. You will touch many people and go far on whatever path you choose and I want to hear all about it! Much love to you. Thank you for everything you have given and shared with me this semester.

Amanda: You are a beautiful dancer, and your focus has really added to this community. I am so glad that I was able to work with you this semester and add your beautiful dancing to this piece. Thank you for your time, your work ethic, your positive energy, and your bravery- leaping into that group of dancers takes guts and I love how you simply do it without hesitation! It has truly been a pleasure working with you.

Alex: Generous, responsible, intelligent, hungry to learn, open-minded, spontaneous, loving, eloquent, perceptive- these are just some of the things I admire about you. I am so glad that I got the pleasure of working with you this year. Whatever it was that I asked of you, you rose to meet the challenge. When I gave you imagery the lights turned on behind your eyes and I knew you were seeing it. You have a beautiful heart, and I'm so glad that you have been a part of the community of *In Passing*. Many thanks.

Alyssa: You are wonderful. You truly blossomed this year, emerging at Scripps immediately as a committed, talented, and intelligent dancer. You always have the lights on behind your eyes- and it has been so nice to work with someone so bright and eager to learn. I really admire that about you and know you will go far with your drive and passion. I am so glad that I got to work with you in the creation of my

thesis work and in Joel's piece, and I am glad it's not over yet. This summer at SF Conservatory will no doubt be incredible. Much love to you, and thank you so much for your dedication.

Alissa: What can I say? You are fantastic. You work so hard and are so eager to try new things. You are exactly the type of dancer that I love to work with-- you take what I say and make it your own, take risks without hesitation, look out for the safety of everyone around you, offer helpful feed back, do what it takes to make things work, and loyally show up to every rehearsal, not just physically present, but truly *present* to the work. I so appreciate you. You will go far with your work ethic, passion, and intelligence. I feel lucky to have worked with you these past years and to have your beautiful texture in *In Passing*. Much love to you.

Charlotte: I am not sure what this year and piece would have been like without you. Your perceptive ideas, eloquent articulations of your thoughtful opinions, your eagerness and capability to rise to meet challenges, and your positive energy have been so meaningful to me in the creation of *In Passing*. Beyond dance, however, I am so glad that I found your friendship this year. You are a wonderfully present person-- extremely present for the people around you, present as you craft ways to express your insights and ask questions, present in your dancing, present to the moment such that your photos reveal the everyday as beautiful and intriguing. I really admire that about you. And I so appreciate the great conversations we have had. Thank you so much for everything you have given and shared with me this year.

Lucy: What can I say? You have been at my side since before day one of this choreographic exploration-- from trash bags, apples, and cowboy hats, through Comp class, *Impulse*, *Unfurlings*, *Perpetuum Mobile*, and now *In Passing*. I have sincerely appreciated your support, inspiration, encouragement, ideas, and trust throughout all of it. You have taken so many risks in this past year dance-wise in my piece, especially in partnering, and I am so excited about how much you have grown in your ability to let yourself be supported, and to support others. Beyond dance, thank you for being such a great friend-- you are so intelligent, witty, wonderfully confident, and refreshingly honest. I know that if something passes the Lucy-test, it must be good :) Your friendship means so much to me. Here's to many more years of friendship post-college!

Katie: You are fantastic. So hard working, intelligent, focused, loyal, and eager to work. *Perceptive*. You are a friend whose mind I can see working, you are constantly and visibly soaking in all the information that surrounds you, synthesizing it, seeing the core of issues, weighing all sides, and making smart decisions. It has been such a joy to work with you, because you bring so much to the table as a dancer. You work hard to create choreographer's visions, and you do it with presence, never simply going through the motions. You are a leader, and it is wonderful to work with a leader, as you do not simply follow directions, but use directions as a map for blazing your own trail through the piece. I so appreciate you. I want to hear from you next year and the years after-- you are headed for big things.

Jill: Thank you so much for all you have given to this piece this year. Your quiet patience, work ethic, and drive to grow is so apparent, and I feel lucky to have gotten to work with you in my pieces for three semesters and to get to experience your choreography this semester. Thank you for your willingness to take risks, to try anything I asked of you, and to make things work. Your solo passage in this piece is so sensitive and powerful. I truly value you, as a dancer, and as a friend. I intend to come back and see your choreography in the coming years! Much love to you.

Ingrid: Thank you so much for your work in the creation of this piece. You are a beautiful dancer, and I really appreciate your positive attitude. Your solo during the slow section of the piece is striking-- it adds something really stunning to that corner of the stage. Know that! Thanks so much for a wonderful semester of dance!

Gigi: Thank you so much for your presence in this piece. I am so gratified and excited that you tried things that you were less comfortable doing, and that you have grown to be incredibly capable in those things. Your partnering and non-balletic movement are stunning and add so much to this work. I value your friendship, and I want you to know how much I have appreciate your presence in my thesis work and in my life these past 3 years at Scripps. Many thanks.

Maya: I knew from the moment I saw you in John’s first modern class in the fall that I wanted to work with you in my piece. At the audition, I told the other choreographers, “I want number 1” and they agreed that yes, I could call you first after the audition. I am so glad that I was able to get to know you this year, learning from your ideas, working to challenge you, and adding your rich and present dancing to *In Passing*. What I want for you is that you *keep pushing for more*. Never settle for less. If your circumstances are not pushing you, push yourself. You thrive on challenges. I can see the hunger in your eyes for hard work and how thrilled and engaged you are when you are working hard. Surround yourself with teachers and peers who will support you in that. And get yourself in leadership roles at Scripps! I want to come back and see you teaching classes, choreographing, making strides to run your own jazz club or your own Dorothy Chandler Pavilion. I believe in you, not only because of your immense talent and work ethic, but more so because *you believe in you*, and that will be your keys to whatever it is you desire.

Molly: I am so grateful for your presence in my piece. Your contagious positive attitude, your laughter, your openness to trying new things, your rapid synthesis of any correction, and your beautiful presence on stage make you such a pleasure to work with. You have added a beautiful texture to this piece, and I am so glad that you said yes to continuing the piece through the spring, in spite of your injury. Thank you for being such a wonderful presence in the mini- community we created this year. I want to hear from you next year and beyond!

Tom: You are an intensely present dancer. I see you dig into each moment when you are dancing and live there. You make time seem to hover because you are so attentive to it, and you make your viewers attentive to it as well. It has truly been a pleasure to work with you and add your beautiful texture to this piece. Much love and many thanks.

L. Photographic Outline of *In Passing*, Spring 2009



1. Episode 1 (Highway): Dancers crawl along the rope while Tom emerges.



2. Episode 2 (Lucy Overhead): Lucy climbs over the group, while Tom continues a solo.



3. Episode 3 (Katie Ankles): Katie climbs through ankles and across the space via the rope, and dancers catch her and pull her back through them.



4. Episode 4 (Tug of War): Alyssa and Alissa cross to the opposite sides of a tug of war.



5. Episode 5 (Intersection): Gigi and Charlotte pull themselves across the intersection.



6. Episode 6 (Fishing): Dancers reel in Charlotte, Maya coils rope.



7. Charlotte is left crawling on the stage.



8. The “Chaos section” begins with dancers sprinting onto the stage.



9. Dancers make a “boulder” and Lucy jumps onto them, and they sit up to throw her off of them.



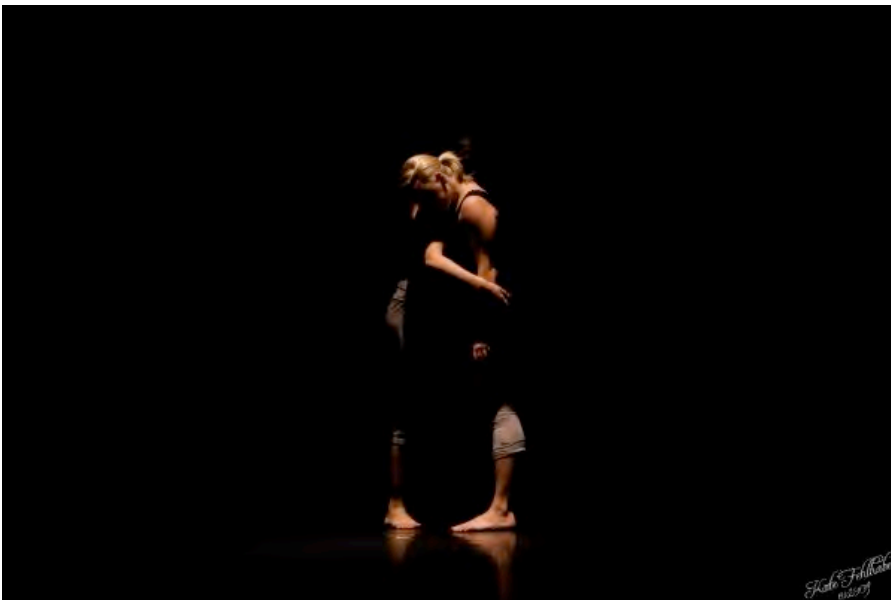
10. Group splits into two, one half catching Tom, and the other half catching Amanda.



11. Further fragmenting into trios.



12. Chaos reaches an intensity as dancers run, perform aggressive moments of partnering, and snippets of a fast solo phrase.



13. Molly and Alissa collide.



14. More tender partnering enters the space.



15. Partnering enters and exits the space, and a few dancers perform solo phrases.



16. Dancers reach the diagonal pointing motif at their own times, linger there together, and decay from it at their own times.



17. Dancers either crawl or slowly walk off stage.



18. Molly, Charlotte, and Maya begin to improvise.



19. Walking group improvisation with Tom carrying on the rope. Charlotte continues to improvise.



20. The group surrounds Charlotte and she sinks to the ground.



21. After the group exits, Charlotte pulls herself along the rope after them.



22. As she reaches the wing, many arms reach out to pull her off stage.



Spring 2009 Cast and I: (left to right) Julia Cost, Lucy Vasserman, Alyssa Mello, Amanda Peel, Ingrid Vidal, Genevieve Peaslee, Katherine Duberg, Molly Mather, Charlotte Smail, Abigail Taubman, Jill Mahoney, Alissa Sanchez, Alex Randall, Tom Tsai, and Maya Guice.

M. Concert Reviews of *Scripps Dances*, April 17 and 18, 2009

“*In Passing* had a powerful sense of community, and I was particularly struck by the way that space and time were used in this piece...each member of the group created a part of the structure to support individual dancers.... As the dancers made their way across the stage for the final time, the movement was one of sustainment, performed in unity by all fourteen members. They were all connected by softly touching one another, creating a sense that the sustainment was instigated by the first dancer, and traveled through the remaining dancers as if they were the muscles of one body. The ending evokes two different moods because combined with this sense of calm, is the feeling that appears to be expressed by the one dancer who remains on the floor. She appears to be in agony, a stark reminder of the splinters that occur in community. When the dancers reached out for her at the end, I was left with a feeling of completeness, as if everyone was accounted for, and yet still a sense that perfection of unity cannot be achieved, because that last dancer was somehow disconnected from the energy that flowed through the others. Additionally, force was quite important in this dance. The rope that was used created a medium for the transfer of palpable force between the dancers. This was especially important for the one dancer who remained on the floor at the end, s she used the rope to stay connected to the other dancers, and yet it created a contrast between simply the transfer of energy and the transfer of that energy by direct human contact. The image of that one dancer’s firm grasp of the rope at the same time that Alyssa loosely and gently held the hand of one of her companions is impossible to forget.”

“*In Passing* used a rope as a prop, and I loved the visual, literal passing that happened onstage as dancers maneuvered to pass each other from opposite directions along the rope. At first, the movements were faster, more urgent- the dancers ran from place to place on the stage, often in lines in a sort of follow-the-leader pattern, or traveling by pulling themselves along the rope quite quickly. Later they moved across the space more slowly in pairs, physically moving each other or supporting one another’s movement. I definitely saw this dance as a commentary on how people relate “in passing” and the idea of “love of the other” as noted in the quotation in the program.”

“One of the aspects of *In Passing* that stood out to me was the cooperation between the dancers- the fact that the moves of one person depended on the moves of the other person, including lifting other dancers in the air, pushing on the shoulders of the other dancers to lift oneself up in the air, climbing the legs of other dancers, and pulling on the legs and arms of other dancers to gain velocity. When some of the dancers were carrying the other dancers in their arms walking slowly and solemnly it gave such a feeling of vulnerability- just the fact that they were laying in their arms. It was dramatic, yet kind of adorable, mostly because the one dancer was completely dependent upon the one carrying her, being completely supported by her carrier. The dancers seems to cooperate a lot and stick in a group. They helped each other perform tasks with imaginary ladders and ropes. When one of the group members was detached from the general group, they seemed lost. They curled up with overwhelming agony, seemingly pained. Eventually someone would help them up or guide them off stage. I liked this dance a lot. It was very intense emotionally and was interesting to watch.”

“I really enjoyed the use of the rope in “*In Passing*,” which in my opinion effectively conveyed this passing of human interaction as people’s paths crossed. It was particularly interesting seeing the dancers interact with each other and how their movements depended on someone else’s support. I felt like the piece had some really momentous points that made it more memorable. The moment in the piece when two dancers collided emphasized human interaction as a collision and how we unexpectedly come in contact with others. I also felt the ending with the dancers walking out at a sustained pace, leaving a single dancer who is helped up the rope truly made a lasting impression.”

N. Excerpts from Notebooks

I have fourteen dancers. Employ their manpower to do something really powerful.

Inevitably what you encounter will be so big that you cannot take it all in. How can you maximize your absorption power and do something great with what you do absorb?

BE CURIUOUS

PATIENCE

Change, transformation, and renewal

Dance doesn't add any extra weight to the world. It explores, critiques, and sculpts what is already here.

BE GENEROUS

Community: responsibility, network, share, replace, carry together, unequal but all important and crucial, cyclical, growing, leaning, aiding, dividing, progressing, decaying, overlapping, withholding, loving, *passing*, moving on, remember, behind, in front, encompassing, touching, letting go, breathing, inhale, exhale, expiring, being reborn

Major words for In Passing: journey, process, project, discovery, collaboration, and experimentation

Build a piece upon the premise of elasticity

Make a landscape of energies

O. Sample Weekly Email

Dancers,
Here is the video:

http://web.me.com/jacost/Dance_thesis_08/In_Passing_7.html

Notice your transitions between episodes and the various lifting segments of the chaotic middle section. See if you can see ways to move between things with more speed and efficiency. I want you to be able to use the momentum of one thing to fuel the next.

In the partnering, notice how sensitively you are approaching the movement and sensing your partner and the people around the two of you. Notice how you are using your plie, your focus, and your transfer of weight. Notice how fluidly you take another person's weight and then place him/her back down. How aware are you of each other's centers? Are there unnecessary steps/ shifts between movements?

Everything you have been doing is super beautiful and I so appreciate your hard work!! I just always want to push for more, because I know that you are capable of it.

Thank you and see you all soon,
Julia

P. Scripps Dances Program

[NOTE:

Original thesis contains an actual program that was glued into this space.

To see program, see original thesis at the Scripps College Dance Department]

Q: Posters

I designed these using images of my paintings from my fall paintings for my art thesis.

In The Works Poster, Fall 2008



Scripps Dances Poster, Spring 2009



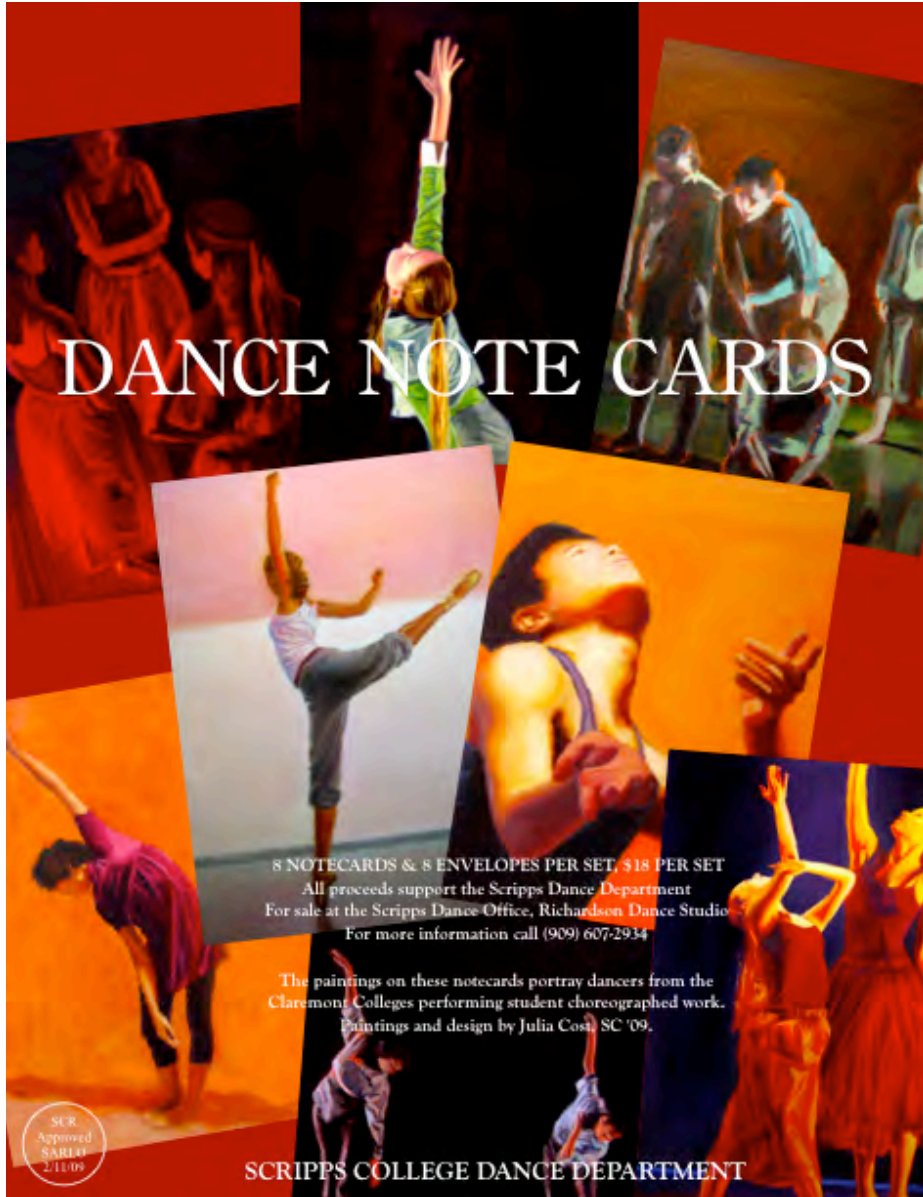
R: T-shirts for Claremont College Dancers

I used an image of Alissa Sanchez dancing in *In Passing* in my design for the *Dancing At The Claremont Colleges* T-shirts. We printed and sold these in spring 2009.



S: Dance Note Cards

Below is the poster advertising the Dance Note Cards, which I designed using eight of my paintings of Claremont College dancers. These note cards are being sold to support the Scripps Dance Department.



DANCE NOTE CARDS

8 NOTECARDS & 8 ENVELOPES PER SET, \$18 PER SET
All proceeds support the Scripps Dance Department
For sale at the Scripps Dance Office, Richardson Dance Studio
For more information call (909) 607-2934

The paintings on these notecards portray dancers from the
Claremont Colleges performing student choreographed work.
Paintings and design by Julia Cost, SC '09.

SCR
Approved
SARL04
2.11.09

SCRIPPS COLLEGE DANCE DEPARTMENT

T: Art Thesis

Below is a photo of my paintings for the Scripps College Senior Art Exhibition, which was exhibited in the Williamson Gallery May 1-17, 2009. My art thesis work was inspired by my work on *In Passing*.

DANCESCAPE

A Work in Translation, Bodies & Movement on Canvas

Julia Allisson Cost

Oil on canvas

Various dimensions

Dancescape I (Blue): Alissa Sanchez (PO'09) and Molly Mather (PO'12), 2009

Dancescape II (Maroon): Jill Mahoney (SC'11) and Maya Guice (SC'12), 2009

Dancescape III (Green): Charlotte Smail (PZ'11) and Lucy Vasserman (PO'10), 2009

The three polytychs in *Dancescape* portray six Claremont College dancers performing three moments from my dance thesis, *In Passing*. These paintings attempt to dissect moments of sensitivity and struggle; to suggest the immense physicality of dance through life-size portraits; to draw attention to the many components of a single second of interaction through split compositions; and to celebrate trusting collaboration between human beings.

