

*Ode to Isadora: Embodying Isadora Duncan's Natural Movement Philosophy
For Choreographic and Performance Tools*

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Abstract

This practice-based research investigates Isadora Duncan's natural movement philosophy as choreographic and performative tools to enhance expressivity on the millennial dancing body. The millennial demographic targeted in this research ranges from the birth dates of mid-1980s to early 2000s. Characteristically, this generation is highly proficient with digital technology and social media applications. My perception of the current millennial dance climate closely parallels Duncan's perception of the emphasis on technical virtuosity during her era. To comprehend Duncan's natural movement philosophy, my research methodology employs a combination of Duncan scholarship, archival and embodied research, and a Duncan-inspired choreographic case study with the York Dance Ensemble in the Department of Dance at York University. Due to the minimal representation of Duncan dancers, performers and teachers in Canada it was essential to travel abroad to study with Duncan practitioners.

Dedication

For my courageous and resilient mother, thank you for fighting.

You are my hero and biggest inspiration.

I will love you forever.

Acknowledgements

In 2015, I made a significant decision to uproot my life and part with the performing arts studio I founded in northern Ontario in pursuit of my goal to become a dance professor. The year 2017 marks the completion of my graduate school journey. Graduate school is truly an Olympic relay marathon with teammates (colleagues) who share the same vision for the future of dance education. I would like to thank my supervisor Susan Cash, Chair of the Department of Dance, Patrick Alcedo, Graduate MA/PhD Program Director, William Mackwood, Graduate MFA Program Director, Paul-James Dwyer, Duncan historian, and Duncan practitioners, Fabienne Courmont and Lori Belilove, for their assistance and guidance during my research process. Thank you to York University's Faculty of Graduate Studies and to the Isadora Duncan Dance Foundation for their generosity. A special thank you to Mary-Elizabeth Manley, Carol Anderson, Selma Odom, Susan Lee and Michelle Johnson for your assistance and support. I am grateful to the York Dance Ensemble for their tireless energy, enthusiasm and commitment to this research project. Thank you to my friends and sounding boards Gabrielle Coulter and Kristyn Watterworth. To my high school dance teacher, Carolle Mageau, thank you for instilling the importance of artistry in dance during my formative years. To my grandmother and #1 fan, Claudette McNamee, thank you for always saying yes to every costume project. I cherish the time spent together crafting, creating and sharing stories. We have glued many things together over the years including our hearts. Thank you Uncle Charlie for our canoe adventures and nature hikes. Our love for nature and the outdoors makes us kindred spirits. To my past and present students, your zeal and love for dance expand my dance pedagogy and scholarly motivation. I am forever grateful to my parents Joanne and Brian Burton for opening my world to dance, believing in me, and supporting my visions and goals. The culmination and realization of this research has been extremely gratifying artistically and spiritually. My heart is full.

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Prologue

“Oh, she is coming, the dancer of the future! The free spirit who will inhabit the body of new women; more glorious than any woman that has yet been...than all women of past centuries – the highest intelligence in the freest body!” (Isadora Duncan, 1903)

Isadora Duncan, famously known as the mother of modern dance, created a new form of dance in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that she considered a revered art and vehicle for self-expression. Her desire to create a *natural* dance opposed what she considered *unnatural* and deforming in the prevailing dance form of her time – ballet. She wanted to raise the status of dancer as entertainer (prevalent in Vaudeville) to dancer as artist, presenting the body on stage in a sacred exhibition. Duncan believed the solar plexus was the gateway to the soul and the body’s greatest energy source for movement cultivation and execution. For Duncan the solar plexus was the entry point to access internal truth, which she then expressed through external movement. Duncan’s dance connected to the spirit of humanity by drawing on inspiration from ancient Greek art and culture, nature, philosophy and classical music. These inspirational sources were integral in the development of Duncan’s natural movement philosophy and vision for the future of dance.

As seen on ancient Greek vases and bas-relief depictions, as well as in Duncan’s dancing, her body executed two-dimensional movements that she considered “natural” for the body like skipping, running, jumping and leaping. While examining archival photographs and ink drawings of Duncan, I note how she emulated the Greek body and posture by lifting her chest upward towards the sky, framing her body heroically with a captivating spiritual presence. Influenced by the waves in the ocean, Duncan created free-flow arcing movements in her repertoire simulating the fluidity and continuity of water. As described in Duncan’s memoir, *My Life*, she accessed her inner emotions to

create expressive movement. There is no discussion of technique or placement of the body, rather she describes feelings, emotions and intentions associated with her “natural” movement.



Isadora Duncan photo from the New York Public Library Digital Collections by Raymond Duncan, 1904

I would like to contextualize the use of the word “natural” when describing Isadora Duncan’s natural movement philosophy. Duncan’s natural dancing body opposed what she believed unnatural in western theatrical dance. She attuned the natural dancing body to be more sensitive to the environment, the audience, elements of nature, musical imagery and, most importantly, the joy experienced in the freedom of movement. By loosening the structure of technical precision in ballet, and by drawing on harmonic inspirations and impulses from nature and music, Duncan created a dance that felt more natural and intuitive for her body. She believed her dance ideologies would empower future dancers to discover the soul as an internal impulse for natural movement. In *My Life*, Duncan articulated her natural movement ideologies and visions for dance education, which resonate with me as a dance educator and choreographer in the twenty-first century.

As a child growing up in northern Ontario, I played hockey and took dance lessons. However, there came a time when I had to make a choice between skates and ballet slippers. I chose dance and

it has been my passion ever since. Whether I danced alone in my bedroom, in front of family at special events and holidays, or in the studio alongside my peers, my insatiable yearning to create dance continues. Ballet, modern and jazz dance techniques were my primary dance studies. Dance is how I define and understand myself in relation to people and the world. Like Isadora Duncan, who grew up in the San Francisco Bay area spending hours watching the movement of the waves, I too had the privilege of growing up along the water where I spent hours on the dock watching the silky ripples of movement flow into one another seamlessly. I too see rhythm, energy and harmony in the natural flow of water as inspiration for movement cultivation.

As a young dancer my biggest challenge was learning how to access expressivity in performance. Critiques from past teachers, professors and choreographers continue to echo in my mind; “Ashley, you need more performance quality... Ashley, perform more... Ashley, express more.” These remarks have been ingrained and stored as memory in my dancing body. But what does it mean to perform more or to express more? In my training as a young dancer the primary focus was on developing strong technique to meet dance competition aesthetics, rather than fostering artistry and performance as a vehicle for self-expression. Without access to the proper tools for artistic growth there was a disconnection between my expressive dancing body and my technical dancing body. Without a source of inspiration the demand to perform “more” and express “more” was perplexing. I was missing a piece to that puzzle.

While a dance major at a performing arts high school my exposure to the art of dance blossomed. It was my high school dance teacher, Carolle Mageau, who first introduced me to dance history, world dance practices, dance writing and composition. During those years I learned about the pioneers of modern dance. I was captivated, in particular, with the “mother of modern dance” Isadora Duncan and her ability to generate internal expressivity externally in performance. Eureka! Finally,

the piece to the puzzle I had been longing for. In grade eleven I had the opportunity to create a solo in composition class that was later developed for stage performance. I created a serpentine solo using a long piece of fabric. The fabric, most certainly, had to be silk, as Isadora only used silk. This was my first opportunity to embody Duncan's natural movement philosophy as a possible method to enhance my expressive dancing body.

As an undergraduate student in the dance program at York University, I was particularly interested in pedagogy and choreography. My kinship with Isadora revived thanks to a dance history course. I was impressed by Duncan's expressive approach to movement and fascinated by her transcendental ability to connect with an audience in performance. Throughout my undergraduate years I took advantage of every opportunity to research and write about the great Isadora Duncan. Following graduation I wanted to travel to the Netherlands and pursue freelance choreography but with my parents' encouragement and guidance to have a "plan B," I enrolled in the consecutive Bachelor of Education program. The summer of 2007 would prove to be challenging, however. My mother was diagnosed with breast cancer. Devastated, afraid and weighed down by uncertainty, I offered to stay home to be with her. She strongly disagreed with my proposition, insisting I complete teachers' college. I felt guilty for not being physically present for my mom during her treatments. However, by channeling her warrior strength, I completed the program. Following graduation, I moved back home to Sudbury, Ontario. Returning to my hometown was not the original vision for my artistic future but it turned out to be a blessing. I gained valuable experience as a schoolteacher, working for both district school boards in the elementary and secondary levels. My time at York taught me the importance of collaboration with all forms of art. I was eager to share this concept with my community so I founded Arts North, the only multidisciplinary arts school in northern Ontario.

Mom was stronger now and found new purpose as my assistant while I developed programs for youth and adults in dance, music, theatre and visual arts.

I was invited by dance professor and scholar Mary-Elizabeth Manley to be part of an Aboriginal youth research project at the Banff Centre for Arts. While in the mountains of Alberta, I was fully immersed in nature as my canvas for choreographic creation. The natural landscape heightened my sensitivity allowing me to feel the energy vibrating from the mountains, and to hear the soulful melody of the birds soaring above me in the crisp blue sky. My bare feet, planted firmly on the most interesting rock, connected me to Mother Earth. Entranced by the beauty of the natural landscape, I was reminded that this must have been what Duncan meant when she spoke of the harmony between nature and dance. This was indeed a glorious backdrop for self-reflection and choreography.

I left Banff with a rejuvenated sense of self and a motivation to incorporate more creative movement exercises in my classes at Arts North and in dance workshops for elementary and secondary schools. I wove improvisation and creative movement exercises in dance technique classes as tools for students to cultivate their individual movement vocabulary. However, these exercises did not directly address expressivity in performance. In fact, when given the opportunity to improvise, most students would quickly resort to habitual movement patterns, or display “tricks” and “turns” they had observed on reality television programs, social media and in the local dance studio community.

My initial conception for Arts North was an interdisciplinary studio encouraging artistry and collaboration. However, over time my dance students expressed the desire to be a part of the competitive dance culture. Being “competitive” in their minds validated their proficiency as a dancer. As a result, the trajectory of my pedagogy and choreography altered dramatically. As a business

entrepreneur I felt the need to give the customer what they wanted, and thus fell into an abyss. My artistic integrity be damned. My teaching became predominantly technique-driven to meet the demands of competition standards. Although my students were developing technically at a rapid speed, their artistry was stifled due to the needed repetition in rehearsals to perfect specific steps, turns, and jumps required in their competitive routines. I noted that my dance students were lacking artistically because they were too absorbed with executing the perfect technique, a predicament that sorely mirrored my experience as a young dancer. My business was thriving but my artistic spirit was dying. It was time to move forward by stepping back on that most interesting rock.

Introduction

“When an artistic genius successfully rebels against the conventions of his culture, it is because he understands that processes are at work that demand a change” (Mazo, 13).

The shift between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was a period of immense technological and social transformation. Studies in the natural sciences and humanities of that era influenced a strong cultural desire in America to embrace nature as a way to ease apprehension from the fast-paced evolving world, and to preserve individual autonomy. Early twentieth-century western theatrical dance discourse reveals that modern dance artists integrated ideologies of the natural into their art practice as a holistic approach to movement cultivation (Huxley and Burt, 2011). Inspired by nature and ancient Greek art, Isadora Duncan, modern dance pioneer, explored themes of nature in pursuit of creating a natural dance. Duncan’s opposition to ballet aesthetics and her resistance toward socio-political conventions of femininity propelled her aspirations to establish a woman’s place in high art as the subject rather than the object. Alexandra Carter, dance scholar and editor of *Dancing Naturally: Nature, Neo-Classicism and Modernity in Early Twentieth-Century Dance*, states that the return to nature allowed artists to construct new dance aesthetics, pedagogical philosophies, and equipped the human body with libratory power for social and political transformation (Carter and Fensham, 2001). Isadora Duncan examined the theatrical dance genres of her time (classical ballet and vaudeville) and felt a disconnection. She looked to ancient Greece to reclaim the natural dancing body and discovered a harmonious connection between the mind, body and soul. This would become the foundation for Duncan’s natural movement philosophy.

As a human being and artist in the twenty-first century, I am constantly operating at high frequency due to the accessibility of technology. Although I appreciate the instant global link to the world, there are times when I feel that if I disconnected more from technology I would connect more

with physical human interaction and nature. I feel an urgency to examine how technology has impacted the current dance climate in the same vein that Isadora examined the dance of her era. By focusing on the millennial generation as my target demographic this analysis will address the interstice between the technical dancing body and the natural dancing body. I wondered what Duncan's natural dancing body could offer the millennial technical dancing body.

During my communications with professors and dance professionals in Toronto, I was informed that there are no active Duncan dancers or teachers in Canada. It was surprising to me that Duncan, who is internationally recognized as the mother of modern dance, is absent for the most part today in Canadian modern dance. However, while perusing the online Isadora Duncan Archive to familiarize myself with an international roster of past and present Duncan dancers and teachers, I did discover Canadian Duncan historian, Paul-James Dwyer. Since the 1970s, Mr. Dwyer has generously contributed to the archiving and historical preservation of Isadora Duncan. He studied with second-generation Duncan dancers Hortense Kooluris, Madeleine Lytton, and Nadia Chilkovsky Nahumck, who were taught by Duncan's original pupils, affectionately known as the "Isadorables." Mr. Dwyer's Duncan collection is housed in the Clara Thomas Archives at York University.

Mr. Dwyer introduced me to Duncan researcher and practitioner Fabienne Courmont, Director of *Dance of Being* in Avignon, France. He recommended that I study with Ms. Courmont to gain a deeper understanding of the internal landscape of Duncan's work. He also recommended that I connect with Lori Belilove, third-generation Duncan dancer and Artistic Director of The Isadora Duncan Dance Foundation in New York City. Ms. Belilove is internationally acclaimed as the holder of Duncan technique and repertoire, passed down through Duncan lineage. Fabienne Courmont invited me to take part in her Duncan master classes in Athens, Greece, and I was awarded a full scholarship from the Isadora Duncan Dance Foundation in New York City to study with Lori

Belilove. I would spend the summer of 2016 in Greece and New York City soaking up everything “Duncan-esque.”

Prior to embarking on a journey of research and travel I immersed myself in Duncan scholarship, video documentaries/repertoire performances, and photographic images and illustrations of Duncan in movement. This portion of research established my methodological framework. I would first learn as much as I could about Duncan and her natural movement philosophy through literature, archives and theory, and then allow embodied and choreographic research to fill in the gaps. The literature, archival and embodied research would be acquired from libraries, museums, physical practice of Duncan technique and repertoire, observation and analysis of Duncan dance performances, oral interviews with Duncan practitioners, concluding with a case study and choreographic presentation.

The case study with York University’s York Dance Ensemble (YDE) traces Duncan’s natural movement philosophy through a choreographic process. YDE is a pre-professional training course for dancers in third and fourth year levels. These dancers must audition to be selected as a member of the YDE, and they aspire to additional training and performance opportunities. I will investigate how Duncan’s natural movement philosophy connects the technical and expressive dancing bodies of the YDE millennial dancers as a source for self-discovery, environmental awareness and human connection. Rehearsals are video documented for reference, and student journal reflections are collected as qualitative data in the case study analysis. Drawing from visual artist and scholar Graeme Sullivan’s *Art Practice as Research*, assists my practice-based research methodological framework for the YDE case study. Embodied and choreographic research will be presented through a combination of digital photographs and exegesis.

In Chapter 1 of this thesis I examine the transnational influence of social media, reality television and competition environments on millennial dancers. When examining current dance and technology trends, I refer to contemporary social-cultural anthropologist Arjun Appadurai, social science scholar Hilary Levey Friedman and social theorist Albert Bandura to connect global and social impacts of dance competitions and social media effects on millennial dancers. This section aims to contextualize current dance trends as a mode of inquiry to reveal what the millennial dancer must contend with, and how Duncan's natural movement philosophy can potentially intervene.

Chapter 2 encompasses a literature review of Duncan scholarship to examine the foundation of Duncan's natural movement philosophy and her vision for the future of dance from a theoretical perspective. Drawing from dance scholars like Ann Cooper Albright, Mark Franko, Ann Daly along with Duncan dancers/teachers informed the embodied and practice-based research components by providing a theoretical framework to disseminate my interpretation of Duncan's natural movement philosophy.

Chapter 3 documents the embodied and archival research garnered abroad constructing new ideas for choreographic creation with the YDE. I similarly use this framework with the YDE millennials to deconstruct the hyper-technical dancing body in order to construct a more expressive and intuitive dancing body.

In Chapter 4, I employ Graeme Sullivan's framework for art practice as research as the model for my choreographic research with the YDE. This chapter will also lean on oral interviews with Duncan practitioners, and student journal reflections to support the practice-based research analysis and theory.

The culmination of this research is a full-length choreographic work titled *Ode to Isadora*. This body of work highlights the discovery and development of new knowledge through studio

practice research and performance. As case study facilitator, my dual role as artist and researcher during the creative process was paramount in disseminating new ideas of Duncan's natural movement philosophy and what it might offer the millennial dancer/choreographer in terms of expressivity and performance engagement. The opportunity to transmit Duncan's natural movement philosophy to a concentrated group of pre-professional dancers will underpin how Duncan's natural movement philosophy can be utilized in composition and performance as a tool for artistic and choreographic development.

Chapter 1: An Examination of Social Media Dance Trends and Competitive Dance Culture Affecting the Millennial Dancer

Competitive dance is a significant component in the studio-training environment. Selection for the “competitive” versus “recreational” team symbolizes a level of studio hierarchy. This distinction often reflects the technical skill and flexibility of the dancer. Competitive dancers are required to execute turns, jumps and hyper-mobile acrobatic tricks that reflect the current aesthetic trend valued in competitive dance culture and social media. I argue that social media and competitive dance place too much emphasis on the technical dancing body and not enough emphasis on artistic freedom and joy of movement. Including the viewpoints of dance professionals Dr. Blessyl Baun, chiropractor and Pilates expert, and Paul Malex, choreographer/teacher, help illustrate how social media platforms like Instagram and YouTube, along with popular reality television dance shows like *Dance Moms*, are promoting a hyper-mobile dance aesthetic and “winning” mentality in the millennial dancer.

The transnational accessibility of social media dance platforms influences how the millennials define and gauge a good dancer. Contemporary social-cultural anthropologist Arjun Appadurai addresses the constant and ever evolving global spread of technology in his article, “Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy.” Appadurai develops five terms he refers to as “scapes” which aim to deepen our transnational and cultural understandings of complex global development theories. Appadurai coins the term “mediascapes” to describe how television contributes to the “narrative and visual representations of parts of reality shaped by perspectives of others, fantasies constructing an imagined world” (299). Mediascapes, he explains, are transmitted by “technoscapes” the transnational capability to distribute information instantly. Applying Appadurai’s mediascapes to Instagram reveals how millennial dancers receive, interpret and connect with dance globally. The

accessibility of social media through technoscapes like the internet and television has become a platform where millennial dancers dialogue about ways to improve flexibility and post images of dance “tricks” and technical abilities. Dancers are exchanging advice from non-professionals on the internet as tutorials to mimic trendy moves like over-split leg grabs and acrobatic tricks with little regard to the reliability and validity of the source.

Dance via social media and television reflect what is being valued in dance studio environments and competitions. Social theorist Albert Bandura explains that children learn behavior by observing others directly in real life and vicariously through media (1961). Flexibility is featured on social media sites like Facebook, YouTube and Instagram as the central focus of becoming a “good” dancer.¹ Furthermore, Dr. Blessyl Baun posted the term “flexibility narcissism” on her Facebook page on March 22, 2016, describing the current obsession with flexibility in young dancers. She further states that social media is “creating a hyper-flexible culture” heightening the risk of developing dance injuries. Baun describes an increase in cases of injuries to the hips, back and knees as a result of overstretching, forcing hyperextension and contorting acrobatics. As Appadurai coins the terms mediascapes and technoscapes to describe the global impact of technology, I offer the term “technobody-mania” to describe the current fixation of displaying hyper-technicality through technology. I believe technobody-mania is the combination of exhibitions of extreme technical abilities glorified online with an obsession to emulate virtuosity. As a result of technobody-mania there is too much value placed on the millennial technical dancing body and not enough value placed on the millennial artistic dancing body.

¹ Check the following links for examples of promoting hyperextension via online tutorials:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wkhQIYVeCB0>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CuDp-r4v7U0>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=woeUxEI5gso>

To further examine social media dance trends and the rise of dance celebrities in popular culture, I refer to Business Insider reporter Michelle Mark's article, "Instagram has ushered in a risky new dance trend – and it could be harming young dancers' bodies." Mark refers to 14-year-old Maddie Ziegler, whose stardom was a result of the reality television show, *Dance Moms*. Her celebrity grew through Instagram followers across the world. Mark observes social media rhetoric used online by young dancers, in particular, #TiltTuesday, which encourages dancers to post photos of themselves displaying a standing side split on one leg, with the other leg "held at bizarre angles that extend past 180 degrees" (July 6, 2016). She draws from Paul Malek, dance entrepreneur, choreographer and Artistic Director of Australia's Transit Dance Company who has "seen firsthand the effects that excessive stretching and unnecessary tricks – such as side tilts – can have on dancers' hips and joints." Malek reiterates, "beyond the physical effects on young dancers' bodies, these social media dance trends have also warped their understanding of what dance is." Malek shares that often when he asks young dancers about the world's great dancers "they name 16-year-olds who have 300,000 followers on Instagram who can do a leg mount or scorpion really well" (July 6, 2016).

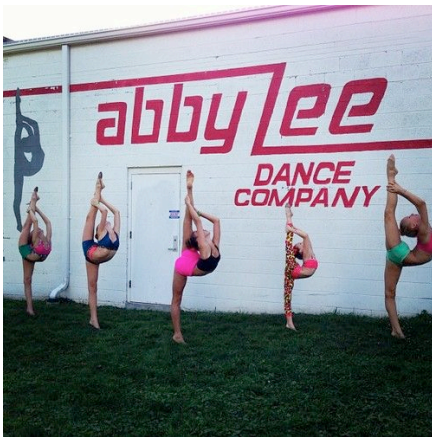


Image found on *Pinterest* cast of *Dance Moms* showcasing "scorpion" accessed March 17, 2017
<https://www.pinterest.com/pin/323344448224773306/>

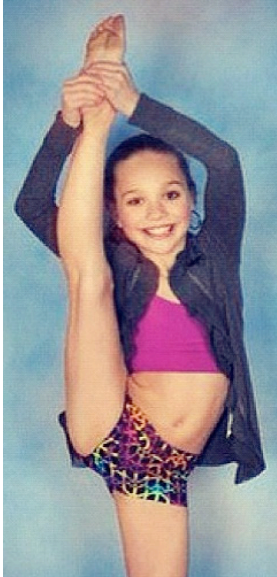


Image found on *Pinterest* of Maddie Zeigler from *Dance Moms* showcasing a “leg mount” accessed March 17, 2017 <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/335729347201134937/>

The Transnational Influence of Dance Competition Culture

Competitive dance has experienced a tremendous increase in participation over the past decade. American dance competitions and conventions like the American Dance Awards (ADA) have had a transnational influence on Canadian dance competitions. As American social science scholar Hilary Levey Friedman, author of *Playing to Win: Raising Children in a Competitive Culture* explains, dance has experienced an international “resurgence” since the emergence of American reality television dance shows like *So You Think You Can Dance*, *Dancing With The Stars*, *Abby’s Ultimate Dance Competition* and *Dance Moms*. These television programs feature competition style dance as precise technique, unison ensemble work, and displays of “tricks” like leaps, kicks, turns and acrobatics (70). The Americanization of competitive dance emphasizes ‘winning’ and dance as a team sport. Friedman writes, “It is no secret that Americans have long loved competitions and rewarded winners” (preface xiii). She provides examples of beauty pageants, bodybuilding competitions, spelling bees and video tournaments to exemplify the American tendency to make everything a competition. Friedman furthers this American tendency by quoting General George

Patton's speech to the troops during World War II, "Americans love a winner and will not tolerate a loser. Americans play to win all the time" (preface xiii). The 'winning' mentality has seeped into the Canadian dance competition and dance studio culture. Demands for rigorous training and team commitment are perceived as paramount in order to achieve success for 'winning' a national title at the 'best' competitions.

Parental influence also plays a vital role in supporting the competition winning mentality. According to Friedman, "parents worry that if their children do not participate in childhood tournaments they will fall behind in the tournament of life" (8). Friedman calls the lessons and skills parents hope their children gain from competition as "Competitive Kid Capital" (17). To further research her "Competitive Kid Capital" theory, Friedman interviews a variety of parents from different competitive activities about the lessons and skills their children acquire through participating in competition. She assembles five common values: a) internalizing the importance of winning, b) being able to bounce back from a loss to win in the future, c) learning how to perform within time limits, d) learning how to succeed in stressful situations, and e) being able to perform under the gaze of others (17). Her interview results highlight the common theme of competing to win. I draw a parallel between Friedman's 'winning' mentality theory and the focus of displaying hyper-mobility and hyper-technicality in dance competitions as the 'winning' aesthetic.

The network *Lifetime* premiered a reality television series called *Dance Moms* on July 13, 2011. This series features the notorious dance instructor Abby Lee Miller, her elite group of six young dancers and their mothers. Each episode features the preparation for a new dance competition, but first Abby ranks each dancer using a pyramid chart according to how the dancer placed in the previous competition. Above all it is Miller's primary goal for her elite group to win first place at every competition. She constantly reiterates, "second place is the first loser." Miller preaches about

the ‘perfect technique.’ She maliciously compares teammates with one another to shame their technical ability to meet her standards. Regardless of Miller’s unruly teaching methodology, the popularity of her reality television series and the social media fame bestowed on her six elite dancers and their mothers is in my opinion a direct result of the shows depiction of competition victory at any cost.

During season three, episode five, of *Dance Moms*, Miller announces that she has entered her elite group in an acrobatic routine for that week’s competition. This category, she explains, must include acrobatic tricks and tumbles. However, one of the elite group members, Chloe, who is perpetually picked on by Miller, struggles to execute the required elements. Miller says, “Chloe does not have a flexible back or the strength to tumble,” but in the next breath she proceeds to say that Chloe must be able to do back tucks in order to be in the routine. Chloe – upset, frightened and feeling the pressure from her teacher – practices the contorting movement despite experiencing physical pain. Miller callously states, “I want the dancer who automatically goes to the gorgeous technique.” I argue that the lack of empathy toward healthy dance practice depicted by Miller and accepted by her elite dancers and their mothers has trickled into the real-world of competitive dance practice whereby young dancers and dance teachers are imitating the winning “tricks” and dance styles seen on the show. How can developing artistry and performance be valued in the millennial dancer when reality shows like *Dance Moms* accolade perfect technique and winning?

In the twenty-first century social media platforms like YouTube and Instagram have made it accessible for millennial dancers to post and view videos displaying “tricks” and technical aesthetics. I believe the current obsession with virtuosity promoted in media and dance competition culture contributes to the divide between the technical dancing body and the expressive dancing body. Through observing, analyzing and interpreting the work of Isadora Duncan, I see value in adopting

her natural movement philosophy as inspiration for millennial dancers to naturally discover their expressive dancing body.

Isadora Duncan's vision for the future dancer included a freer dancing body in the highest intelligence – a dance that expresses identity, nature, society and philosophy. She looks to ancient Greece where dance was art inclusive of poetry, music, drama, motion and nature. Duncan's natural movement philosophy places emphasis on dance as a medium for self-expression. Duncan describes accessing her inner truth as the connection between internal drive (intention) and external movement (expression). I see potential in utilizing Duncan's natural movement philosophy as a tool to encourage dancers of today to discover what feels true, free, intuitive and natural for the body. By discovering a deeper connection between the internal and external body in movement, I hypothesize that Duncan's dance philosophy will offer me as a choreographer and the YDE millennial dancer another perspective for movement creation and performance.

Many of the YDE millennial dancers have a competitive studio background. York University's Dance Department offers courses in dance history, dance kinesiology, prevention and care of dance injuries, dance writing, choreography, etc. The curriculum offered at York University in the Department of Dance aligns nicely with Duncan's vision for a more expressive and intelligent dancing body. Through Duncan-inspired workshops and choreography, I will facilitate a case study fostering opportunities to explore the fusion of Duncan's natural movement philosophy and the millennial technical dancing body as practice-based research. The next chapter presents a literature review examining Duncan's natural movement philosophy and her motivation for creating a new dance.

Chapter 2: Literature Review Isadora Duncan (1877-1927)

At an early age Duncan believed ballet to be artificial, strict, deforming and limiting to the freedom of movement. She would create a new form of dance that would defy the restrictions of ballet. Joseph H. Mazo, dance critic and author of *Prime Movers*, states “She had rejected the academic technique of ballet; she was seeking a way of dancing in which movement would be instituted by emotion and in which each part of the body would be related to the others” (42). Duncan exhibited free-flow successive movement in contrast to the constraints of regimented ballet technique. Rather than wearing the customary ballet tutu, corset and pointe shoes, she preferred to dance barefoot, garbed in a flowing tunic inspired by depictions she had observed in Grecian art. The tunic allowed freedom for whole body movement integration. Duncan synthesized a natural movement vocabulary, which included walking, running, skipping, leaping, reaching and swaying. Her movement was anatomically pleasing and natural for the body. Duncan’s fluid movement embodied freedom, spontaneity, imagination and a connection to the whole expressive dancing body.



Isadora Duncan photo from the New York Public Library Digital Collections by Arnold Genthe, 1915

Duncan was a revolutionary, determined to elevate the status of dance to the realm of sacred art and the status of a woman dancer from an entertainer to an artist. Duncan believed that society was being intellectually stifled by ballet, and that ballet narrative objectified women as victims or seductresses (Splatt, *Life Into Art*, 16). Ann Daly furthers Duncan's argument that the ethereal aesthetic of ballet disconnected the body from the natural, stating

To Duncan, and many of her admirers, ballet was the old order that needed to be overthrown, an embodied symbol of all that was wrong with overcivilized nineteenth-century living. Americans had lost their connection with the earth, and that loss was enacted onstage by ballerinas on point. Americans had lost their connection with their own bodies, and the loss was enacted onstage by ballerinas in corsets (Daly, *Done Into Dance*, 26-27).

In both her artistic and personal lives, Duncan challenged traditional mores through dance as a medium to advocate female social empowerment. She conveyed her ideals of natural feminine beauty through her natural movement philosophy. Duncan liberated dance. In 1903, she lectured in Berlin announcing her vision for the future dancer.

She is coming the dancer of the future: the free spirit, who will inhabit the body of new women; more glorious than any woman that has yet been; more beautiful than...all women in past centuries: The highest intelligence in the freest body (Duncan, "The Dance of the Future," *The Art of the Dance*, 58).

Dance scholar Ann Daly is a major contributor to Duncan scholarship. In her book, *Done Into Dance*, Daly reflects on passages from Duncan's memoir, emphasizing her belief that nature was a vital inspirational source for natural dance. Daly draws on the memoir emphasizing Duncan's connection to nature; for example, Duncan "claimed nature as her first and only teacher, guiding her always toward a body unfettered, undivided, uncorrupted" (88). Duncan believed that developing a harmonic relationship with nature inspires freedom in the natural dancing body. Sheldon Cheney is the editor of *The Art of the Dance*, a compilation of essays written by Isadora Duncan, her family

members and friends. These essays specifically focus on the formulation of Duncan's natural dance and the artistry of her performance. Duncan reaffirms her conviction that nature could offer dance new promise.

When I was fifteen years old and I realized that there was no teacher in the world who could give me any help in my desire to be a dancer, because at that time the only school that existed was the ballet, I turned, as I had noticed all other artists except dancers do, to the study of nature (Duncan, *The Art of the Dance*, 126).

Daly describes Duncan's solo performances as duets, whereby Duncan develops a relationship between her internal force (moral/truth) and the external force (nature/environment) regardless of the choreographic theme (6-7). To further understand the concept of force, I refer to the work of American dance critic and author of *The Modern Dance*, John Martin. Martin describes Duncan's connection to musical interpretation and imagery as a way to awaken feeling (98). Martin states that movement in modern dance is "a medium for the transference of an aesthetic and emotional concept from the consciousness of one individual to that of another" (13). Modern dance, he says, must have a "relation that exists between the physical movement and mental – or psychical, if you will – intention" (14). Combining Daly and Martin's ideas draws a deeper understanding of Duncan's intention to access inner emotion expressed physically through movement. Duncan's movement was initiated from the solar plexus, which she believed was the gateway to the soul. Her internal and external relationship with energy is what compelled her to move. I believe Duncan's connection with internal and external forces produced a mythic trance-like quality in her performances, captivating audiences even late in her career when she intentionally posed still.

Daly divides Duncan's body into five sections: the dancing body, the natural body, the expressive body, the female body, and the body politic, illustrating how Duncan combined internal expression with the external body as the grounding for her dances. In *My Life*, Duncan

philosophically describes her concepts for the creation of a natural dance, which will generate from the solar plexus as the internal motor of movement. She describes her body as a vessel for internal expression of the human spirit.

I spent long days and nights in the studio seeking that dance which might be the divine expression of the human spirit through the medium of the body's movement. For hours I would stand quite still, my two hands folded between my breasts, covering the solar plexus...I was seeking and finally discovered the central spring of all movement, the crater of motor power, the unity from which all diversities of movements are born, the mirror of vision for the creation of the dance (Duncan, *My Life*, 75).

Franklin Rosemont, editor of *Isadora Speaks: Writings & Speeches of Isadora Duncan*, outlines Duncan's diverse roles as a feminist, political activist and avant-garde dance artist. Rosemont coins the term "radical force" to describe Duncan's ability to create movement with meaning and agency. When Duncan moved to Germany she studied Friedrich Nietzsche's philosophy of perspectivism and was inspired by his theories of human condition, truth, morality, value, aesthetics, and consciousness. Nietzsche's philosophical view regarding the objective value of truth influenced Duncan's movement philosophy. Her movements derived from the soul synchronizing the mind and body to express externally what she believed internally as truth. Duncan's choreographic work mirrored significant events in her life. Her early choreography employs a light-hearted flowing movement quality inspired by Greek art. She presented choreographic themes of womanhood and motherhood during her mid-career, particularly after the birth of her children. Following the death of her children in France and the collapse of her school in Russia during the revolution, Duncan's choreography exuded a tragic tone influenced by personal and political subject matter. The evolution of Duncan's choreographic repertoire reveals that she continuously accessed her inner truth through movement representing her ideologies in mythic, narrative and politically charged dances.

Duncan lived a bohemian and free spirited lifestyle. She stated that she would “live to fight for the right of every woman to have a child or children as it pleased her, and to uphold her right and virtue” (Mazo, 37). She recognized that in order to establish a woman’s place in art, she must formulate a woman’s place in society. Duncan’s natural movement philosophy and public speeches encouraged women to realize that they were independent, capable, and functional human beings. Susan Au, author of *Ballet and Modern Dance* writes, “Isadora Duncan was arguably more than a dancer: she was a symbol of female longings, emancipation from traditional roles of wife and mother, for sexual freedom and personal fulfillment” (89).

When Duncan performed, she danced bare-armed and bare legged, which some audience members considered vulgar. Mazo writes, “The corset and the body-covering bathing costume were in vogue; society was not ready for bare knees” (41). Duncan’s personality appealed to progressive radicals, modernists and realists because they were appreciative of her artistic and intellectual concepts. They considered her a symbol of progressive ideology. “She was our symbol, the symbol of a new art, a new literature, a new national polity, a new life” (Daly, 8). Unsatisfied and limited in her work in America, Duncan moved to Western Europe in 1898 and achieved tremendous success. Audiences captivated by her transcending spirit embraced her new dance, and this allowed her natural movement philosophy to gain momentum.

Duncan envisioned great changes for dance. She visualized the dancer of the future, one who communicates through the fusion of the natural body and soul.

The dancer of the future will be one whose body and soul have grown so harmoniously together that the natural language of that soul will have become the movement of the body. She will dance not in the form of a nymph, nor fairy, nor coquette but in the form of woman in its greatest and purest expression. She will realize the mission of woman’s body and the holiness of all its parts. She will dance the changing life of nature, showing how each part is transformed into the other. From all parts of her body shall shine

radiant intelligence, bringing to the world the message of the thoughts and aspirations of thousands of women. She shall dance the freedom of women (Duncan, *My Life*, 1927).

I argue that Duncan utilized her natural movement philosophy in western theatrical dance as a method to advance artistry and performance. She sowed the seed for a new dance genre, inspiring future dancers to develop free and expressive styles of modern dance. Through Duncan's example, artists were stimulated to produce new modern dance styles contributing to the evolution of the art form. Dance scholar Susan Au states that pioneers like Duncan, St. Denis and Wigman "prepared the way for new directions in the art of dance" (101). Following Duncan's death in 1927, her six original pupils, affectionately known as the Isadorables, continued teaching Duncan dance technique and her movement philosophy in the United States. Au explains that there was a craving to learn Duncan's work initially, but this desire reached its peak by 1940. However, there was a resurgence of interest to study Duncan technique during what Au defines as the "history-minded 1980's" (91).

As a dance educator in the twenty-first century, I believe there is value in implementing Duncan's natural movement philosophy in dance training as a tool to accentuate artistry, self-expression through movement, and to enhance performance quality. Dancer and scholar Ann Cooper Albright wrote an essay for the Dance Heritage Coalition titled, "Isadora Duncan." Albright describes what a dancer can learn from Duncan's natural movement philosophy. She examines Duncan's essay, "The Dancer and Nature," where Duncan describes energy in the action, suspension, and resolution of waves. Albright states that Duncan's use of descriptive and symbolic imagery is valuable in stimulating a relationship between a dancer's body and a dancer's imagination.

I believe that by learning about Duncan, they might begin to envision a dialogue between movement and space. Indeed, encouraging a dynamic physical imagination is one of the greatest gifts that Duncan can give a younger generation of dancers. Her inspiration is often metaphysical, found in philosophical ideas about the goodness of nature or art, in addition to romanticized visions of

the purity of ancient Greek culture that were so prevalent in early twentieth-century Hellenism. Yet there is also a physical dimension here, for inspiration can literally mean to breathe in. When she reaches up towards the heavens, with her feet firmly weighted into the ground, Duncan embodies this tension between establishing her material body and evoking the metaphoric world around (Albright, 2).

Albright theorizes that regardless of the theme or gesture in Duncan's movement the underlining relationship with energy moves in a cyclical pattern. Energy is cultivated in the body, released into space through the solar plexus, returning to the body to affect and inspire the next movement. To further Albright's theory regarding Duncan's use of energy, I refer to the book written by Duncan dancer Sylvia Gold, *A Selection of Isadora Duncan Dances*. Gold explains that a Duncan dancer is a visualization of the music, and that the impulse of the music is felt through the spirit first before evoking the physical body to move (7). Connecting Albright's theory that Duncan's internal energy is the initiation for movement, and Gold's description of the rhythmic harmony between music and dancer, I glean a deeper understanding of how Duncan's natural movement engages with the internal spirit of the dancer as the primary intention for movement.

Duncan adopted romantic ideals and philosophical notions of nature that aligned with her visions of beauty and contributed to her holistic identity where art and life became inseparable. Nature is represented as a constant force in Duncan's dancing, encouraging freedom of expression. To further understand Duncan's use of expressivity, I employ dance scholar Mark Franko's theory of expressivity in modern dance from his book *Dancing Modernism/Performing Politics*. Franko writes, "Expressivity, then is inseparable from an idealist perspective in which the body acts as a medium giving the spectator access to an extra-corporeal self of which the body's movement furnishes traces" (1). Franko suggests that Duncan's performances of "inner self" were signifiers expressing absent inner meanings through the presence of her outer physical body. He furthers the concept of absence

and presence by drawing on a personal quote from Duncan, “I did not invent my dance, it existed before me; but it was slumbering and I awoke it” (5). Through this lens I identify that Duncan’s natural movement philosophy reveals an accessing of an absent (slumbering) internal energy/spirit that she awakens and instinctively reacts to through the presence of her physical body. Franko describes Duncan as a dual expressionist: first as a woman dancing the dance of herself, and second as the image of social reform displaying her own specific aesthetic criteria (6-7). Franko’s analysis of Duncan as a dual expressionist represents Duncan’s use of nature and ideals from ancient Greece to reclaim the natural female body as a vehicle for self-expression in dance.

Doree Duncan, great-niece of Isadora, composed the introduction for the revised edition of *My Life*. She defines Isadora’s vision for dance “as an art, as a new education force, and even as a means for social transformation” (11). Academic discourse regarding Isadora Duncan focuses primarily on her dance as an art form and its power for socio-political change. I have identified a gap however regarding Duncan’s natural movement philosophy as a pedagogical method for dance education. Duncan dancer/teacher Julie Levin wrote *Duncan Dance: A Guide for Young People Ages Six to Sixteen* in 1995. She writes that Duncan’s contribution to the field of dance education for children has yet to be fully realized and appreciated (preface vii). In 1904 Duncan opened her first residential school in Germany, advocating dance as an essential component to curriculum and an alternative approach to learning (preface vii). Duncan’s dance technique was never codified unlike her modern dance successors Martha Graham and José Limón. Although Duncan never devised a codified dance system, she did envision future dancers practicing her dance philosophy. In response to Levin’s concern about the lack of Duncan dance appreciation in education, I feel compelled to examine and ignite Duncan’s natural movement philosophy as tools for dance education and choreographic research.

I will incorporate Duncan's natural movement philosophy as choreographic and performance tools in my case study with the YDE. The study will investigate whether or not Duncan's natural movement philosophy will provide the dancer with a deeper connection between mind, body and soul encouraging individual expressivity. The literature review allowed me to formulate my initial definition of Duncan's natural movement philosophy through existing scholarship. However, I needed to embody Duncan dancing to fully understand what Duncan's natural movement offers the dancing body, and how I could then transmit Duncan's philosophy to the YDE.

Chapter three documents my embodied research with two prominent Duncan practitioners who concentrate on different facets of Duncan dancing. One focuses on Duncan's connection to nature and internal energy and the other focuses on Duncan technique and repertory. Being immersed in both practices provides a richer palette to draw from when I am constructing the case study and choreography with the YDE. This next chapter documents the embodied research completed in Greece and New York City via photography and personal reflections as reference points for continued practice-based research and analysis.

Chapter 3: Embodied and Archival Research

O, we can wait no longer,
 We too take ship, O Soul,
 Joyous we too launch out on trackless seas,
 Fearless for unknown shores.
 ~Walt Whitman

In June 2016 I departed from Toronto en route to Greece with my custom made tunic in tow. During the flight, I re-read *My Life* and imagined re-tracing Duncan's pilgrimage to this mystical land. My embodied research agenda included three weeks in Athens to be immersed in Greek culture, architecture, nature and Duncan study with practitioner Fabienne Courmont. My pilgrimage would conclude with a performance at the 44th World Congress on Dance Research. As the plane was descending into Athens I read...

We then revived a project, which we had long cherished, of making a pilgrimage to the very holiest shrine of Art, of going to our beloved Athens. I felt that I was only at the gateway of the study of my Art (Duncan, *My Life*, 1927).

After months of researching Duncan scholarship and networking with Duncan practitioners, I was now ready to experience Duncan somatically. Navigating the metro and making my way through the bustling Monastiraki Square I finally arrived at Hotel Eprivides where I met up with Courmont and the six dancers I would study with over the next three weeks. The energy in Athens was electrifying! Listening to the music and watching the local women dance in restaurants with a view of the Acropolis in the distance was exhilarating. My newfound dance colleagues and I eagerly joined in the local dancing. Observing the natural somatic connection between Greek music and dancing deepened my awareness of Duncan's quest for returning to a more simple and spontaneous form of expression. Participating in Greek dancing to live music in restaurants with the locals became a nightly ritual for my colleagues and me. Through these nightly rituals I developed a greater sense of dance as a medium for human interaction and connection rather than a demonstration of technical

ability. While verbal language presented a barrier, dance language provided a universal mode of communication.

Dance sessions with Courmont focused on developing movement from internal energies derived from connections with the universe. As a method to access internal energy she employs two ideologies: the seven chakras influenced by her eastern dance training, and the soul influenced by her connection to Duncan's natural movement philosophy. Both ideologies centralize on accessing internal spiritual energy as a source for external expression. She encouraged wearing a tunic during dance practice to enhance freedom in movement. Dancing in a tunic was unfamiliar, but it quickly became an extension of my body generating a feeling of infinite movement.

Dancing outdoors at the Dora Stratou Dance Theatre surrounded by nature was artistically stimulating. This open-air theatre was built in 1953 and sits on the sacred Philopappou Hill, also known as the Hill of Muses. Dance sessions at this venue focused on harmonizing movement with nature to inspire natural movement cultivation. Courmont introduced her concept of the wave and energy in relation to Duncan's natural movement philosophy. She explains that natural movement flows in three phases like a wave cycle: a beginning, a climax and a resolution. The beginning of the wave initiates internal energy developing movement externally. The climax of the wave movement eventually resolves so a new wave cycle can begin. The wave cycle is the foundation for Courmont's movement explorations and compositions. Her use of the wave image and the three phase approach to generating natural movement allowed my discovery of an intrinsic connection between breath, nature and the flow of movement. I would continue to explore these ideas during my choreographic research with the YDE.

While in Greece I was honoured to meet Alkis Raftis, an ethnographic scholar on traditional Greek dance and avid admirer of Isadora Duncan. As the president of the Council of

International Dance, Raftis graciously took the time to visit Courmont's dance formation during rehearsal and gave each dancer a copy of his E-book titled *Isadora Duncan and the Artists*. His research braids ancient Greek philosophy and art with Duncan's natural dance by drawing on his ethnographic research of Greek dancing and employing images and reflections of Isadora through artists who were inspired by her. Raftis writes that Isadora and her brother Raymond Duncan "...translated the Ancient World into everyday action, they tried it out on their bodies. They wore chitons and sandals that Raymond had made, they danced trying to bring to life the scenes on the ancient vases" (13). His research includes a variety of Duncan archives from libraries and museums throughout Europe providing additional visual images to draw from when crafting my Duncan-inspired movement vocabulary and choreography with the YDE.

In his research Raftis includes writings, poetry and visual art representations of Duncan through the eyes of the artists who witnessed her in performance. For example, dancer/choreographer Frederick Ashton is quoted as saying, "She had the most extraordinary quality of repose, she would stand for what seemed quite a long time doing nothing, and then make a very small gesture that seemed full of meaning. She also covered the stage in a most remarkable way, she had a wonderful way of running, in which she 'left herself behind', and you felt a breeze running through her hair and everything else. And she had the most beautiful square feet, I remember, and the most impressive hands, and she wasn't really the old camp that everyone makes her now, she was very serious, and held the audience and held them completely" (28). Ashton's emphasis on Duncan's ability to create meaning through subtle gestures resonated with the embodied discoveries I was experiencing with Courmont. His description of the quality in which Duncan ran across the stage as though she "left herself behind" stirred my imagination and informed my embodied practice.



Dora Stratou Theatre in Athens, Greece June 28, 2016 photo by Ashley Ann Burton



Dora Stratou dance studio in Athens, Greece June 29, 2016 photo by Ashley Ann Burton

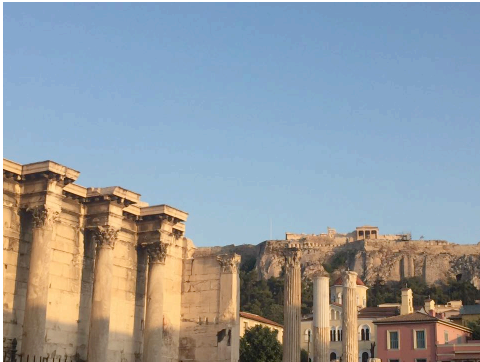
My interviews with Fabienne Courmont granted a clear understanding into her process and interpretation of Duncan's natural movement philosophy. Courmont describes Duncan's natural dance as universal movement. "Looking to nature is the most beautiful form of movement exploration. Isadora speaks to the main principle of her dance. That movement comes from nature. She does not speak about technique but of natural movements and the connection between the body and soul. Isadora said, 'Don't try to copy me...Don't try to do technique with my dance, just go inside yourself, and feel the inspiration coming from your consciousness.' Open your mind and soul to receive the inspiration. All the movements of nature exist inside of us. We can connect to the soul and forms of the trees, birds and nature. Internal dance is not technical dance. Just let go and feel from the inside. From this place we can understand the spirit of Isadora Duncan's natural dance."

I asked Courmont to further explain her incorporation of wave images, energy and eastern dance practices in the Duncan-inspired workshops. She shared, "Noh Theatre in dance is a very old practice in Japan. It was a sacred dance in theatre performed only for the Emperor. The Emperor was considered to be the son of the goddess. One of the principles of the Noh Theatre is

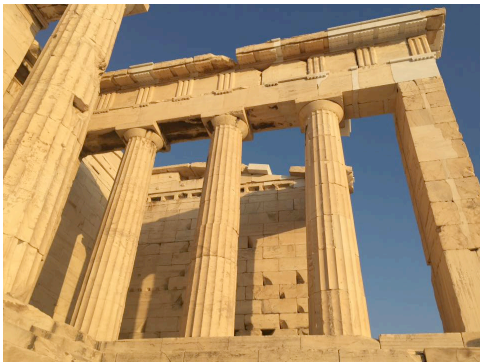
the same as Isadora Duncan dance. It is based on the universal rhythm of life, and the universal rhythm of life is the wave. They call it *Jo Ha Kyu*, which in the Noh Theatre means a universal reason of creation where everything has a beginning, a development and an end. I think it is the same movement of the wave energy in Isadora's movement. A beginning, climax and resolve. For me everything has a *Jo Ha Kyu*. Everything has a cycle of life including a beginning, the development and a resolve. Just like the energy of waves in movement. You start the movement, develop the movement, and then find resolve. From this resolve another movement or wave arrives." Courmont then described how she connects to Duncan's natural movement philosophy by saying, "When I dance I am with the trees, with the waves of the sea, with birds, with people. I can feel the interconnection. The wave is everywhere." She furthers this notion by explaining that the undulation of the wave arrives as light in the solar plexus for self-expression and that "The solar plexus allows you to open up to the light and offer yourself to the world."

The Acropolis is breathtakingly majestic. Moved by the history, the architecture and the magnitude of the temple columns, I could literally feel an energy radiating from this sacred land. Isadora spent many hours at the Acropolis in search of movement inspiration. I felt particularly drawn to the Parthenon, a former temple dedicated to the goddess Athena. Sculptures of Athena are still intact amid the vertical temple columns. I noted the verticality of the temple columns reflective of the erect posture Duncan emulated in her dance. The temple columns rooted in the earth and reaching towards the sky offers a sense of infinity. I sense that same feeling of infinity when I look at visual archives illustrating Duncan's use of the solar plexus in her posture and movement. Curious to embody this sense of infinity, I located an area nearby with the Acropolis in my horizon. Exploring movement with this sense of infinity cultivated an openness and lightness in my body. I quickly realized that in order to stabilize my vertical posture with the incorporation of the solar plexus

required a rooted connection with the earth using my feet and legs. Although physically rooted in the earth, upon opening my solar plexus I felt spiritually transported to infinity.



Walking up to the Acropolis in Athens, Greece on June 27, 2016 photo by Ashley Ann Burton



At the Acropolis visiting the ancient temples in Athens, Greece on July 27, 2016 photo by Ashley Ann Burton



Ashley Ann Burton exploring movement nearby the Acropolis in Athens, Greece surrounded by nature at sunset on July 27, 2016 timer photo by Ashley Ann Burton

During my visit to the National Archaeological Museum of Athens, I had the opportunity to examine ancient Greek sculpture, bas-relief, vase paintings and figurines. Duncan looked to ancient Greek artifacts to inform her natural movement and use of gesture in performance. The bas-relief

scriptures and vases depict traditional and mythical Greek stories and the natural contours and angles of the human body.



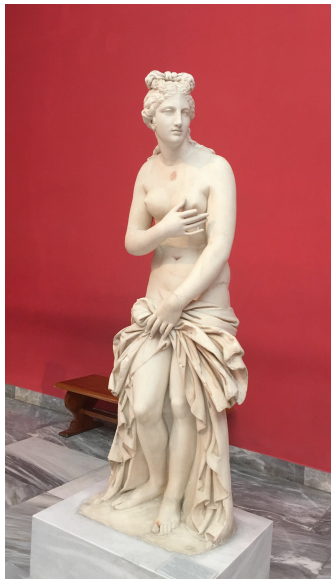
Isadora Duncan photo from the New York Public Library Digital Collections by Hof-Atelier Elvira, 1904

The sculptures of the goddesses Aphrodite, Athena and Nike display a spiritual combination of elegance and strength. Male and female bodies are often sculpted to emphasize an open chest raised upward. The drapery worn by both sexes is meticulously carved and suggests a natural flow of motion in harmony with the body. When studying multiple sculptures of Aphrodite, the goddess of love and beauty, I observed that artists illustrate her chest in both convex and concave positions. As I stood amongst the sculptures, I played with the juxtaposition of softening my chest inward and expanding my chest outward. This movement experimentation produced greater mobility in my back and solar plexus. In order to sustain this range of motion in my chest, I imagined that my lower trunk was connected to the earth like the root of a tree. Sculptures of Aphrodite became my visual tool for

embodying Duncan posture and assisted my development of constructing the Duncan-inspired posture and movement for the choreography with the YDE. Inserted below are three images of ancient Greek sculpture that I shared with the YDE during rehearsals. These images provided the dancers with a visual aid for the required physicality and positioning of the chest and solar plexus that Duncan emulated in her dancing.



National Archaeological Museum of Athens: Sculpture displaying upwards chest photo by Ashley Ann Burton for non-professional purposes



National Archaeological Museum of Athens: Aphrodite Sculpture softening of chest photo by Ashley Ann Burton for non-professional purposes



National Archaeological Museum of Athens: Tunic sculpture photo by Ashley Ann Burton for non-professional purposes

As a 31-year-old dance teacher/choreographer I was seeking a form of dance that felt good for my body. Courmont's Duncan-inspired workshops provided me with an opportunity to develop a new movement vocabulary drawing from internal energy and freedom in movement rather than solely drawing from dance technique. I felt a renewed sense of simple joy in movement, a feeling I fondly remember experiencing as a child while dancing freely in my back yard. When asked what she believes Duncan's natural movement philosophy offers dancers Courmont replied, "Isadora was always thinking about the whole being, the body, soul and spirit in harmony. She was thinking about a new education for children and how dance could provide harmony and connection with nature and one's self. Really, we can look at it as a kind of dance therapy."

While in Athens I became a member of the Council of International Dance representing Canada and was a participant at the 44th World Congress on Dance Research. This opportunity led to expanding my network of dancers, choreographers, practitioners and scholars from around the globe. An international roster of dance researchers presented lectures, and I was particularly drawn to the presentations regarding Duncan. There were many different approaches to practicing Duncan dance. Some practitioners focused on re-creating Duncan's choreographic repertoire, while others pursued

her movement philosophy to simply cultivate a more natural dance experience. I was enthralled by the global appreciation for Duncan dance, and eager to share my new insight with York University's Dance Department.

In Courmont's dance sessions we primarily focused on cultivating energy and flow through the simulation of waves. I would practice this concept during my visit to the Greek Island Hydra while frolicking in the Mediterranean Sea. I observed the fluidity and continuity of waves as they drew forward crashing into island rock and then seamlessly retreating backward out into the sea. I noted this wave movement to be effortless, cyclical and natural. The water surrounding the island was translucent, a mixture of aqua and light blue. By submerging my body into the sea, I could play with the resistance and fluidity the water added to my movement quality. Simulating these movement qualities on dry land, I was able to re-create the treading movement quality I had experienced in the water. Exploring movement in natural landscapes like the sea was a source for inspiring new movement qualities, rhythms, energies and visions for choreography.

On July 2, 2016 I proudly performed in Courmont's choreography, *The Dance of the Muses*, at the Veakeio Theatre in Piraeus, Greece. Rather than feeling weighed down by technical requirements, I felt confident in trusting that the combination of group unity and internal energy would lead the performance. For the first time I experienced pure bliss and freedom on stage. Connecting with the audience and my colleagues during the performance created a heightened sense of inclusivity and community. There was a synergistic exchange between the audience, fellow performers and myself that I was curious to explore in the case study with the YDE. I will forever be grateful to have had the opportunity to follow Isadora's footsteps in Greece. My embodied research in Greece gleaned new possibilities for developing a Duncan-inspired movement vocabulary for choreographic creation. Thank you (Ευχαριστώ).



Veakeio Theatre in Piraeus, Greece pre-performance July 2, 2016 photo by Ashley Ann Burton



Ashley Ann Burton exploring movement at the open air Veakeio Theatre pre-performance July 2, 2016 Piraeus, Greece timer photo by Ashley Ann Burton



Ashley Ann Burton and Fabienne Courmont performing *Dance of the Muses* choreographed by Fabienne Courmont at the Veakeio Theatre in Piraeus, Greece July 2, 2016 photo by Theo Lian



Ashley Ann Burton performing solo section in Fabienne Courmont's choreography *Dance of the Muses* at the Veakeio Theatre in Piraeus, Greece July 2, 2016 photo by Theo Lian

Leaving the tranquility of Greece I eagerly ventured to bustling New York City to further my Duncan studies. I was awarded a scholarship to participate in a two-week Duncan intensive at the Isadora Duncan Dance Foundation to train with third-generation Duncan dancer Lori Belilove. Belilove is recognized internationally as one of the most accurate technicians of Duncan technique and repertory. Her primary teachers were second-generation Duncan dancers Mignon Garland, Hortense Kooluris and Julia Levin. Additionally, Belilove studied with Anna and Irma Duncan – two original “Isadorables.” I researched Belilove and her teachers via the online Isadora Duncan Archive.² It was pertinent to integrate Duncan technique in my embodied research to gain a broader perspective of Duncan’s natural movement vocabulary.

Each morning the intensive program began with a two-hour Duncan technique class. The format for technique class was similar each day, beginning on the floor with a series of breathing exercises to engage internally or, as Duncan would say, “to turn on the motor.” The technique classes combined a series of floor barre exercises and standing barre work as preparation for centre practice and travel. Considering Duncan’s strong opposition to ballet, I was surprised to discover that the

² For more information visit: <http://www.isadoraduncanarchive.org>

format of a Duncan technique class unfolds similarly to that of a ballet technique class. However, reflecting back on my literature research in combination with my embodied experience, I theorize that Duncan drew from ballet to create a freer dance genre by loosening the positions and movement vocabulary she believed restricted the dancing body.

It was imperative to thoroughly warm up and mobilize the chest, back, ribs and hips exceptionally well in order to achieve the three-quarter lines of the body and two-dimensional movement aesthetic required in Duncan technique. The drawing up of one side of the rib cage in Dionysian lines required the recruitment of postural muscles I had not engaged in this type of mobilization in the past. I noted that when both sides of my body were not fully warmed up trying to achieve the Duncan lines and technique aesthetic felt static and unnatural for my body. Duncan technique requires a strong sense of vertical alignment with an expansive chest, back and ribcage. I visualized the lifted chest observed in the ancient Greek sculptures as imagery to assist the erect alignment and mobilization of the solar plexus, which is fundamental in Duncan technique.

At Belilove's request I visited the garment district to purchase fabric for the tunic making session being held at IDDF. Belilove taught the technique for tunic making as passed down through the Duncan lineage. I would utilize this new tunic making skill when costuming the YDE for my Duncan-inspired choreography.



Tunic making with Lori Belilove at the Isadora Duncan Dance Foundation in New York City on August 2, 2016

While studying at the IDDF, I learned the fundamentals of Duncan skips, runs and jumps often executed in circular or figure eight patterns in the repertoire. Technique classes were building blocks for the movement required in the Duncan aesthetic and repertoire. It was helpful to learn the vocabulary before learning choreography. I would employ this teaching strategy with the YDE. Belilove and her company teachers played the great classical composers like Beethoven, Liszt, Gluck Schubert and Wagner in technique classes. The classical music enhanced a keen sensitivity to imagery, melody and the rhythm required in Duncan dancing. Through practicing Duncan technique and repertoire I realized the harmonious qualitative connection between dancer and music. This interconnection was experienced while learning various pieces of Duncan repertoire. While in New York I developed a greater appreciation for classical music. I listened to the melodies that inspired Duncan and imagined how I could incorporate a component of classical music in my choreography with the YDE.

During technique and repertoire classes with Belilove she spoke in great detail about the Greek bas-relief scriptures and art that inspired Isadora. She arranged a visit to the Metropolitan Museum to broaden our understanding of how ancient Greek art influenced Duncan's movement vocabulary. In Greece I examined how the ancient art and architecture informed Duncan's posture and her use of the chest. Now, after embodying Duncan technique I could visualize how the Greek bas-relief scriptures and art informed the development of Duncan's natural dance vocabulary and repertoire. For example, the bas-relief scriptures depict figures representing human interaction and stories, and the vase paintings illustrate two-dimensional lines of the body in perpetual motion. Embodying Duncan technique and repertoire in combination with observing the ancient Greek art shed light on Duncan's formulation of a more natural dance style.



The Metropolitan Museum of Art August 5, 2016 New York City bas-relief photo by Ashley Ann Burton for non-professional purposes



The Metropolitan Museum of Art August 5, 2016 New York City vase painting photo by Ashley Ann Burton for non-professional purposes

The culmination of the two-week intensive with IDDF was the opportunity for workshop students to perform alongside Belilove's company members at the Alice Austin House in Staten Island. I was selected to perform in three Duncan repertory works: *Tanagra Figures*, *Infinity* and *Southern Roses*. This venue offered another opportunity to perform outdoors in nature with water as my backdrop. Unlike performing in the studio, dancing on grass surrounded by the scent of luscious flowers and trees at the Alice Austin House created synchronization with nature, music and Duncan repertory. Connecting with the natural environment and my fellow dancers brought me joy in performance. I experience a unique energy when performing Duncan dancing outdoors in nature and near water. My mind, body and soul connect with the universe and for me this feels natural.

After the intensive concluded I spent an additional week in New York City visiting the New York Public Library. I was particularly interested in viewing the Irma Duncan Archive Collection.

There I sat for hours. Reading Duncan's handwritten letters and private journal entries gave me goose bumps. Her vision always pointed to the future of dance and education. In Duncan's writings to fellow artists and her pupils she persistently shares her mission for creating a new dance, which will unshackle dance from its entertainment aesthetic, encouraging instead a holistic connection between movement, nature and one's self. Included in the Irma Duncan Archive Collection is a piece of silky red fringe from the scarf Isadora wore at the time of her tragic death. Isadora's best friend Mary Desti collected the scarf at the scene of the accident. Later Desti passed the fringe to Irma, who included it in her archive. Through literary description I could only imagine the look of the infamous red scarf that tragically ended Duncan's life. I sat in awe while gently tracing my fingers over this preserved relic and in that moment I humanized Isadora Duncan.

Although Duncan did not create a dance syllabus in her lifetime she did inspire something more profound. Her vision for dance places value on self-identity, exploration, and freedom of expression. Duncan's dance philosophy guides the dancer to generate movement internally as a vessel for communication. Unlike a constructed dance syllabus, Duncan's philosophy gives the dancer permission to connect one's self to the dance, rather than solely concentrating on achieving a specific technical vocabulary. In 1937 Irma Duncan wrote *The Technique of Isadora Duncan* to "propagate Isadora's conception of movement in relation to the dance; and to preserve her creations for future guidance and inspirations" (IX). Irma recorded Duncan technique as taught to her by Isadora. The book highlights natural movement patterns of the body that Duncan and her pupils explored like skipping, running and jumping, providing the reader with an overview of how a Duncan technique class unfolds.

Visiting Greece and embodying Duncan's inspirations prior to learning Duncan technique in New York City developed a greater kinesthetic awareness and sense of imagery in my movement.

For example, during the Dionysian-inspired jumps in Duncan technique I recalled the sculptures of the Greek gods and goddesses with chests displayed upward towards the sky to help me achieve the Duncan technique aesthetic. My embodied research in Greece and New York City provided me with different facets of Duncan movement. In Greece I explored the spirituality and internal landscape of Duncan's natural movement philosophy. In New York City I gained access to the technique and repertory as preserved by generational Duncan dancers. This combination allowed me to develop my own Duncan-inspired movement vocabulary for the purpose of choreography and performance. I would continue to develop this new vocabulary with the YDE as part of my choreographic research.

Looking at various archives, photographs and ink drawings of Isadora Duncan helped to determine which facets of my embodied research with Courmont and Belilove I would incorporate in my Duncan-inspired movement vocabulary. This allowed me to formulate my own ideologies of Duncan's natural movement philosophy and how I could transmit this vocabulary to the YDE. The inspiration of Abraham Walkowitz's 1909 ink drawings of Isadora in movement helped clarify posture, sculpture, gesture and the freedom Duncan displayed in her movements. Walkowitz's series of drawings became an interpretative tool for furthering my somatic understanding of Duncan's natural movement patterns guiding my later choreographic movement choices with the YDE. He depicts the two dimensional shaping Duncan used in her continuous movements and I see the fluidity of the body and the tunic creating that sense of movement beyond movement.



Isadora Duncan, 1909, pencil and pen and ink on paper by Abraham Walkowitz photo found on Pinterest March 14, 2017 <https://www.pinterest.com/spyros946/abraham-walkowitz-draws-isadora-duncan-dancing>

In the book, *Sensing, Feeling, and Action*, Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen describes the act of sensing and feeling as “One of the things that I think is essential with sensing, is that we reach a point where we become conscious and then we let it go, so that the sensing itself is not a motivation; that our motivation is action based on perception” (63). In an interview with dancer and co-founder of *Contact Quarterly*, Nancy Stark Smith, Bainbridge Cohen says, “It’s different if you sense something than if you feel it, than if you simply do it” (64). Therefore, I felt compelled to re-enact on my own body the hand gestures illustrated in Walkowitz’s ink drawings. By physically re-enacting the gestures and positions of Duncan’s hands, I sensed a connection between the earth and sky as my hands moved from a downward action to an upward reach. Duncan’s hands are often depicted as open, illustrating a sense of energy exchange between the human body and the universe. During this delightful and interactive process, I developed a greater appreciation for my hands beyond their physical capabilities, discovering that they can also be a gateway into my expressive and somatic body. I noted the motif of Duncan’s hands in this open position reaching upward, which I interpret as an offering to the universe. I would build on this hand motif in my choreography with the YDE.

To garner a deeper understanding of what Duncan’s natural movement philosophy offers the millennial dancer, I will apply her ideas of internal force/energy, nature and the wave, movement from the soul, connection between earth and sky as a method to discover joy and freedom in natural movement. Through my embodied research I realize that Duncan dancing requires openness and an intrinsic connection between one’s self and the universe. It is my hope that the case study with the YDE will enhance their flourishing artistry by bridging the interstice between the expressive dancing body and the technical dancing body.

En route to my first rehearsal with the YDE at York University I listened to the classical composers that inspired Duncan’s dancing. Schubert’s *Symphony No. 5 in B flat major* began to play

and I noticed the leaves on the trees blowing in the wind, dancing in perfect synchronization with the rhythm and melody of the music. Here was Duncan's ethos – music, motion and nature – in complete harmony. Inspired, I decided to include this particular classical composition in my choreography with the YDE as a paean to Isadora.

Chapter 4: The York Dance Ensemble Case Study Choreographic Research *Ode to Isadora*

Australian visual artist and scholar Graeme Sullivan states that art practice as research is “creating a powerful visual statement and an equally powerful aesthetic” (99). He further explains that art practice frameworks serve as a reference for theory construction during the research process aiding experiences, observations, and reflexive understanding (2010). Sullivan writes, “research is a practice that uses knowledge, experience, and inquiry structures to increase the human capacity to intervene, interpret, and act on problems, issues and questions that reveal new insights and understandings about who we are and what we do” (101). In Sullivan’s framework for art practice as research, the art practice is the “core around which inquiry unfolds” drawing from knowledge and experience (102). He proceeds to explain that when compared to empirical, interpretive and critical modes of inquiry, art practice as research “opens up several relational and transformative research practices that are found within and across, between and around the framework, as visual arts research proceeds from a stable state to a liquid form of understanding” (102).

Adapting Sullivan’s framework for visual art practice as research for my choreographic practice with the YDE provided a model for incorporating Duncan knowledge and embodied experiences to produce the core art practice of choreography. My knowledge of dance education and Duncan scholarship in conjunction with my embodied research experiences will externally influence my choreography with the YDE.³ This framework informs the creation for *Ode to Isadora*, a full-length choreographic research project that results in the development of a new movement vocabulary for the millennial YDE dancers. The case study choreographic process reveals how Duncan’s natural movement philosophy enhances expressivity and performance engagement in the millennial dancing body.

³ For a visual diagram of Sullivan’s art practice as research see his framework on p.102 Figure 4.1 in *Art Practice As Research* (2010).

On October 4, 2016 my case study with the YDE began. Over the fall and winter terms I led sessions with the dancers for a total of fifteen weeks. These sessions consisted anywhere from two to eight hours of studio training each week. The case study introduced Duncan's natural movement philosophy to a group of millennial dancers who had no previous exposure to Duncan technique or Duncan dance performance. During the fifteen weeks I created a piece of choreography titled *Ode to Isadora*, which was presented at York University in February 2017. The YDE consisted of sixteen female dancers and two male dancers. Weekly sessions with the YDE were documented by photography, videography and student journal reflections. Digital photos and video links are included throughout this chapter as support material archiving the research process.

My first question to the YDE members was, "What do you feel you need to develop as performers/dance artists?" There were similar responses for six desired improvement areas: self-confidence, use of breath, to study more styles of dance, to break habitual movement patterns and to move with more ease. This initial query was a great reference point to gain perspective on the YDE members' artistic and performance goals, sparking ideas for implementing Duncan's natural movement philosophy to address these areas.

Initially, I was hesitant about the prospect of working with male dancers for the Duncan-inspired choreography. Duncan's dancing reflected her ideals of feminine beauty and the female body. Therefore, I was apprehensive about the potential challenges of appropriating Duncan's dance for the two YDE male members. However, during the process I quickly realized that the presence of the male dancers created a universal and humanistic approach to Duncan's natural movement philosophy conducive for all bodies. Following our first session a journal entry from one of the YDE male dancers confirms that Duncan's natural movement philosophy impacts the millennial male body as much as the female body.

“I feel inspired.
 What is natural? I like instinctual.
 I saw the sun and felt at home,
 Nature and the waves brought me back to my rock, my island.
 I feel comfortable.
 Gender is fluid. Gender is created, embodied and lived.
 No box will hold me.
 Male or female? Who cares?
 I can be Aphrodite today and Apollo tomorrow.
 If I so choose.
 Though I prefer Iris.
 Goddess of the Rainbow.”
 -Josh Murphy

As the sessions continued and the ensemble dancers explored Duncan’s natural movement philosophy through group exercises my earlier uncertainty of appropriating Duncan’s work for male bodies was no longer relevant. The male dancers were absorbing as much as the female dancers in this process, and collectively they began developing a new dance vocabulary.



YDE dancer Evan Winther in rehearsal November 1, 2017 at York University photo by Ashley Ann Burton

Duncan used the description “natural dancing body” to describe a freer more connected body. I asked the YDE members what natural movement meant to them some of the responses were:

“Movement that is most pure to an individual’s being, to their whole.”

“Taking responsibility, but allowing room for spontaneity and freedom.”

“Finding your body’s own movement, movement that flows from within.”

“What starts from the inside and projects out through movement.”

“When movement starts to take over my body rather than my body take control of the movement.”

“Personal, individualized.”

“Movement that feels right for the dancer.”

“Natural will never look the same from person to person.”

“Movement that brings comfort.”

“Raw, organic, authentic, pedestrian, moving from inner impulse, releasing not pushing.”

During an interview with Duncan historian Paul-James Dwyer we discussed Duncan’s use of the word ‘natural’ to describe her dancing. He responded, “Isadora wrote ‘natural’ dancing should mean only that the dance never goes against nature, not that anything is left to chance” (Duncan, *The Art of the Dance*, 79). He furthered this by saying “The students who studied with Isadora got this knowledge about strength and grace in natural movement. Now it is not just a feminine thing and is something that a male student can also interiorize because it does work for all. It is a nobility of carriage and a strong internal thought process carried through into all movements of the body. There is flow and there is 'Divine Continuity' for the human body.”



YDE rehearsal building structures and sculptures November 10, 2016 York University photo by Michelle Johnson

As an extension to the knowledge gained during my embodied research in Greece and New York City, I continued to draw from Duncan repertoire videos, ink drawings, photographs of Duncan dancers, and ancient Greek art and sculptures while developing movement for my choreography. When learning Duncan technique from Belilove in New York City I experienced firsthand the physical challenge of initiating movement from the solar plexus. I practiced the movement independently and discovered that when leading movement with my eyes, my chest and solar plexus would naturally engage. I shared my embodied experiences with the YDE to help assist their mobilization and movement initiations from the solar plexus. It was imperative to include warm up exercises for the head, neck, back, chest, hips, legs and feet in combination with breath to prepare the body from the inside out.

While teaching Duncan-inspired runs to the YDE I invited the dancers to imagine running barefoot on grass or running along beach sand to help create a smooth and subtle floating quality. This took some time for the dancers to achieve due to their habitual darting running patterns learned in Graham and Limón technique classes. The darting run does not serve the required flow and delicacy of a Duncan run.

Examining Duncan's natural movement philosophy through literature and history before embodying the dance helped to further interpret her natural dance. Therefore, I incorporated brief historical lectures during each session with the YDE and often read passages written by Duncan to offer the dancers more context and theoretical knowledge of Duncan's dance. Although most of the dancers heard the name Isadora Duncan and knew how she died, they admitted to not knowing much about her dancing, natural movement philosophy or vision for the future of dance.

It was paramount to develop group cohesion before diving into the choreographic work. During the initial sessions with the YDE I led improvisation exercises playing with direct and

indirect eye contact to heighten the dancers' awareness of the environment and bodies around them. This encouraged an openness and unity in the dancers while they explored key elements of Duncan's natural dance like the use of imagination, curiosity, sensitivity, joy and unity.



YDE rehearsal finding unity November 15, 2016 York University photo by Michelle Johnson

I spent time discussing Duncan's dance principles with the YDE to construct a Duncan-inspired body and movement vocabulary that felt natural for the millennial dancer. We examined the softening and expanding of the head, neck, shoulders and chest that is required when activating the solar plexus, the soft supple feet required during walks and runs, and the eye gaze outward toward the horizon and universe. These facets of Duncan's natural movement philosophy would help create internal and external awareness between the dancers and their surroundings. Drawing from imagery like the warmth of the sun allowed the YDE dancers to channel natural elements as a method to enhance movement qualities and intentions.

Conveying the connection between the heart chakra (as taught to me by Fabienne Courmont) and the solar plexus (as taught to me by Lori Belilove) made the concept of initiating movement from the chest transferrable and relatable for the YDE. By linking the heart chakra and solar plexus the dancers moved with a sensitivity and empathy amongst one another and they were open to developing genuine connections through movement. When the dancers were present in the

space/environment engagement amongst one another became simple, natural and human. Their faces softened, their eyes widened and the expressivity in their movement became palpable.

Utilizing a fabric prop helped the dancers develop smooth, steady even-paced runs simulating a stream of water. In addition the fabric encouraged the YDE members to be more aware of space and engagement. The fabric prop was used to help extend the dancing body, which generated newfound performance awareness within the dancers individually and collectively. Enraptured with conducting their fabric the dancers played with flow, freedom and joy in movement. As artist-researcher I observed that the fabric offered the dancers a tangible tactic to experience meaningful connections organically through movement while expanding spatial awareness and group interaction.



The YDE discovering flow, freedom and joy in rehearsal October 25, 2016 York University photo by Ashley Ann Burton

As part of my research I allotted time at the end of each session for the YDE to reflect and journal. By reading their journals I gained insight on how they were connecting to my facilitation of Duncan's natural movement philosophy. The journals also shed light into their most intimate thoughts, feelings, concerns and discoveries. As a teacher the journals allowed me to check in with the students on an individual basis, helping guide my lesson plans for the following sessions. Drawing from the YDE journal reflections I compiled a list of quotes from the students that illustrate seven qualities Duncan's natural movement philosophy offers the YDE millennial dancer. These seven qualities include: 1) playfulness, 2) heightened awareness, 3) connection between the

internal/external dancing body, 4) discovering new movement initiations, 5) finding flow/freedom/joy, 6) developing meaningful relationships and 7) enhanced performance quality.

1) Playfulness: Getting in touch with one's inner child and finding love for movement.

“Child-like, play, flow, intelligence, less judgment, primary over dance and technique.”

“I felt like a kid again in class today, one that feels empowered, free and unreserved, finding happiness.”

“Inspired to deepen thoughts and ideas of artistry, memories of dancing in grade school, sense of freedom.”

“Today's session seriously inspired me, the experiences brought out my inner child, jovial, free brought back sense of love, appreciation, gratitude. I was the air. I was the sun.”

“Session was inspirational, fell back in love with movement again, often get caught up in ballet technique and needed this refreshing change.”

“Remnants, memories, muscle recollection, old sensations in new light, rehearsal felt spectacular, freeing movement, awakening body, release, traces study of self and inter-connectivity.”

“Enjoyed moving in this way, reminds me of my dance classes in high school and I've missed dancing like that.”

2) Heightened awareness of environment, natural elements, breath and energy.

“We're creating light and beauty, breathe and dive in.”

“I am really enjoying where the work is taking me, I find myself breathing and finding the corners of my movement.”

“Today was exhilarating. I absolutely adore the breathing and suspension work with the wave and wind.”

“Today imagining nature environments like moving in the wind helped me connect to my breath.”

“Today's class was delicious, connecting to my breathing in warm up I was able to fully release connecting me with the environment.”

“I can feel my breath and heart beat in tune with the rhythm of the music and my fellow dancers, the wave pictures really helped me visualize and internalize the sensation of the waves.”

“Observed and experienced the importance of breath to change the mood, shape of movement and energy.”

“Whole body connected through wave movement, freedom, after first rehearsal was inspired to go outside and dance in the trees.”

“Felt energy and momentum in the wave, nice to let go and allow my body to take a journey in its own flow through space.”

“Waves, breath, sounds, blowing, ‘natural’ free flow.”

“Connecting breath to wave images helped, I discovered that combining wave and wind elements creates a cycle that propels quality of movement (tempo).”

3) Connection between the internal and external dancing body.

“Forming a unity, relationship & presence between deep inner awareness + deep outer awareness.”

“This process has definitely taught me how to be a more open dancer. It has taught me how to bring my internal movement outwards which makes my movement bigger and allows me to engage more with the audience and fellow dance mates. I find it has helped me to become a more confident and mature dancer, or at least on the way to becoming one.”

“Natural movement is functional and in the spirit of Duncan, brings your body joy. My inner landscape is smiling.”

“Today I could really feel the sensation of my solar plexus moving from within outward, sitting on the floor and feeling that for some time was helpful.”

“Finding the fundamental internal feeling of the solar plexus was difficult at first, but once you find it, it really is an amazing feeling.”

“Using the solar plexus in the wave runs allowed me to feel more in tune with my internal body, I really like how the choreography encourages us to engage with each other not only with our bodies but also our eyes.”

“Wave exercises allow me to feel movement coming from the centre of my body, it feels good.”

“Working with the idea of wave allowed for me to connect with my body warming up from the inside, felt connected with the other dancers.”

4) Discovering new movement intentions and initiations.

“Using eye focus makes me more present and gives more intention to my movement.”

“Being open, open chest (solar plexus), open eyes, open arms. It creates such a freeing feeling.”

“Felt alive when I engaged with the audience, like a communal dance, conversation between the audience and the dancer through energy, eye focus and smiles.”

“This experience has added another layer of movement vocabulary and an overall new way of openness to my dancing. I feel more aware and connected to my surroundings, the dancers, the sky and the space around me. My movements have become bigger and I have learned to dance with a softer quality. It is possible to move big and soft at the same time.”

5) Finding flow, freedom and joy.

“Waves crashing, sea salt air.
Cliff side seagulls, wind through my hair.
Connections meaningful, made eye to eye.
Enter the soul, we will soar, we will fly.
I feel grounded yet transported.
Things familiar, things new.
Thank you.”

“Reconnect after the pause to rediscover weight and breathe, let the breathe flow through, move together souls in unison, waves crashing together, breathe again move flow connect.”

“Finding joy, fleeting emotions, I was able to ride the same waves as my partner, swinging motion, we enjoyed ourselves, smiling, finding the essence of freedom.”

“Fabric exercise joy made visible beyond the body, streaking forth its trail, openness banished anxiety, my original intention.”

“Wearing the tunic for rehearsal gave me a sense of lightness and continuous movement.”

“Wearing the tunic today gave me a certain energy, not only an extension in movement but gave my limbs freedom.”

6) Developing meaningful relationships with nature and humanity through movement.

“The letter read about Isadora today brought her to a human level that I could connect with, working on movement vocabulary expanding, sharing and leading with the heart connecting with humanity and nature.”

“I didn’t understand how ahead-of-the-time Isadora was until this process. In history she always seems like mythical creature, but I’ve gotten to know her as a human and artist, and that her philosophy wasn’t to please others or to satisfy conventional notions of dance but to “play” in a world that was very sacred to her, her dances were a gift to her audiences.”

“For the first time I actually saw people while dancing, it was much more enjoyable, carefree and exciting.”

“Relating dance to the universe, everything has a soul and everything is interconnected, to look at the world and life in this light is enlightening discovering deeper connections.”

“Making meaning of how my expressive movement flows into my everyday human body.”

“Amazing how human connection can automatically make me smile, I wonder what the world would be like if we walked around our everyday lives and connected with strangers like this.”

7) Enhanced performance quality.

“I believe that what we have learned most is how to work as an ensemble. The process inspired me to not only connect with other dancers but with the audience as well. My performance quality has improved and my movement quality enhanced by dancing with others and for others in a safe community. This has helped me develop more confidence in my dancing.”

“As a performer I pride myself on my ability to connect with my fellow dancers and this practice has only deepened that for me.”

“Showed me how to be physical and artistic without being contrived or imposing an aesthetic. Less physical contact with other dancers, but in every way, more connected and more engaged with others.”

“First and foremost expressivity in my dancing has improved. This process has allowed me to really explore all of my technique within my performance.”

“During the lessons and in the choreography I feel confident to express my love of movement.”

“Overall, the Duncan-inspired work offers a heightened sense of community, expression and personal investment, all of which are highly endearing to witness and experience.”



The YDE writing journal reflections after each studio session at York University photo by Ashley Ann Burton

The YDE journal reflections provide qualitative data supporting my hypothesis that Duncan’s natural movement philosophy gives the millennial dancer a new lens for accessing expressivity. During workshop sessions the YDE dancers gained knowledge about the origins for Duncan’s natural movement philosophy, and somatically experienced one’s self in harmony with the universe as the central source for natural movement cultivation. Isadora approached her dances like sacred high-art

and I believe it is essential to embody and transmit her natural dance as a work of art. My role as artist-researcher taught me that knowledge and inquiry continue in performance. It was during the performances of *Ode to Isadora* that the YDE were able to transmit their new knowledge and appreciation for the magic of dancing in the spirit of Duncan.

The next phase of my practice-based research examines the choreographic process and performances of *Ode to Isadora*. Transitioning into the choreographic process I referred to my earlier observations discussed in Chapter 1 pertaining to the exhibition of dance in social media and television impacting the millennial dancer. I utilized Duncan's natural movement philosophy as a compositional tool guiding the dancer to decipher the difference between natural dance movement and technical dance movement. Through embodied research I discovered that natural dance movement required the same energy and commitment to physicality as technical dance movement, but offered my dancing body more freedom for exploration and self-expression. My research discovery was utilized while developing a natural movement dance vocabulary for the YDE. Initial attention in the choreographic process focused on movements that felt natural for the YDE dancers, and latterly as choreographer I addressed and refined the technical aesthetic. To craft a Duncan-inspired aesthetic and choreography I incorporated elements from my literature, embodied and archival research. Working from photos and ink drawings of Duncan together with ancient Greek art helped to shape the movement and group patterning in the choreography. Reference to Duncan repertoire videos guided the quality of movement and choreographic structure for *Ode to Isadora*.

Referencing Duncan Repertoire

Preceding my choreography with the YDE, I studied many variations of Duncan repertoire via videos available through the Isadora Duncan Archive. I embodied Duncan technique and repertoire in New York City with the IDDF and the online videos were a great reference for

recalling movement qualities and details of Duncan's choreography. I observed Duncan dancers using their arms in sweeping and fluid motions during walks, runs and traveling movements. Duncan dancers commonly use a softening/hollowing of the chest before a run or jump sequence and then an expanding/opening of the chest at the climax of the movement. The use of the solar plexus is central for initiating movements like running, skipping and jumping. Detailed hand and arm gestures frame the body articulating meaningful connections between the dancer and their environment.

While embodying Duncan repertoire I discovered the use of repetitive movement phrases mirroring the repetition in the music composition. For example, in Duncan dancer Sylvia Gold's performance of Schubert's *Moment Musical* her movements repeat in synchronization with the repetitive phrasing of the musical composition.⁴ Gold says, that Duncan's Schubert's *Moment Musical* "is probably the most difficult dance to perform well. The feeling of surprise must be present. Never anticipate the music" (1984). It is important to be mindful of the harmonization between dancer and music when choreographing in the style of Duncan.

During my interview with Duncan historian Paul-James Dwyer he shared a review of his performance by Susan Walker, a writer for the Toronto Star. Walker's review, "Baroque Music and Modern Dance: dance OREMUS danse Covers Three Centuries," captured the Duncan-inspired performance by Dwyer. She wrote, "At first glance it appears to be very free form, but on closer examination, Duncan's adherence to classical form and baroque repetition becomes clear" (2, October, 2001). When I asked Dwyer to elaborate on Walker's observation and Duncan's use of repetition in her choreography he responded, "Yes classical music has a large part of this idea

⁴ <http://www.isadoraduncanarchive.org/video/63>

of (ABA, ABCA, ABACDA, etc.) repetition. Nature also utilizes repetition with variation. Repetition is intrinsically Duncan. For her the variations inside the repetitions are what keep the dance alive and fresh. It also comes back to the internal structure or choreographic libretto. If it is strong enough you still carry the message or textual ideas even inside variations within the movement repetitions. Isadora utilized repetition to enforce her schemata on a subconscious level for the audience. It also is part of classical architecture, geometry and mathematics, which she utilized and embedded on a sub or secret level into her choreographies. I also believe her use of repetition and variation has something to do with her ideas of the human will. Duncan dance repetition is also tied to the lyrical construct tradition” (Paul-James Dwyer, 2017).

To reflect my research findings I adapt the movement qualities observed in Duncan repertoire and feature repetition in the compositional structure of *Ode to Isadora*.

Music Selection for *Ode to Isadora*

The music selection for *Ode to Isadora* includes parts of four contemporary compositions and one classical composition. The choreography begins with an ethereal call to Isadora. As the vocalist in George S. Clinton’s *Main Title* hums, the dance soloist looks to nature for her movement inspiration. To portray both a mythical and earthy ambiance *Sarajevo* by Max Richter enhances the sculpture-inspired movement and elemental aspects of the choreography. As the piece transitions Ludovico Einaudi’s piano composition *Walk*, is a quiet backdrop as the dancers share wonderment and curiosity with one another while exploring Greek antiquity. Lavinia Meijer’s harp rendition of Phillip Glass’s *Metamorphosis* offers a melody that is tranquil. During this section of the choreography the dancers simulate water and waves in their movement. The melody enhances the dancers’ fluid gracefulness during the running sequences and weaving patterns. The closing section

of *Ode to Isadora* features classical composer Franz Schubert's *Symphony No. 5 in B flat major, D. 485: I. Allegro*. Schubert's opus conveys joy, rhythmic structure and musical repetition accentuating the choreographic repetition of crisp jumps and quick skips inspired by Duncan dance technique.

Costuming

Throughout rehearsals the YDE dancers took turns wearing the three tunics I had made during my studies with Lori Belilove in New York City at the IDDF. The dancers experienced the freedom and extension the tunic offers the body in movement. It is essential to practice Duncan dance in a tunic. Inspired by the Mediterranean Sea in Greece, I chose a mixture of blues and aqua fabric shades to construct the tunics for *Ode to Isadora*. Employing my knowledge of tunic making garnered from Belilove, my grandmother and I customized eighteen tunics for the YDE. The tunics for the female dancers are light blue and the tunics for the male dancers are dark blue. Adding to the color palette of the Mediterranean Sea, aqua ribbons are attached by Velcro to the upper shoulder of the tunic. The Velcro appliqué allows the dancers to easily attach and detach the ribbons throughout the choreography. Dancers use the ribbons to simulate the fluid movement qualities of water and waves. The choreography concludes with the dancers tossing the ribbons upwards towards heaven paying homage to Isadora.

Choreographic Framework

To illustrate my compositional framework for *Ode to Isadora*, I utilize photographs of Duncan and still shots from the YDE film shoot performance at York University to demonstrate how the movement vocabulary and choreography parallel and relate to Duncan's dance inspirations. The choreography was built in six sections: 1) an opening solo, 2) creating bas-relief scripture and natural environments, 3) exploring ancient Greek art, sculpture and architecture, 4) simulating water and waves, 5) connections between the earth and sky, and 6) Duncan-inspired

technique.

Section One: Opening Solo

To portray Isadora Duncan's natural movement, the choreography opens with the soloist posturing human universal activities such as laying, kneeling and standing. As Duncan states that nature was her first teacher, the soloist seeks a connection to the natural world as a source for movement inspiration. A connection between humanity and nature is the foundation for Duncan's natural movement philosophy.



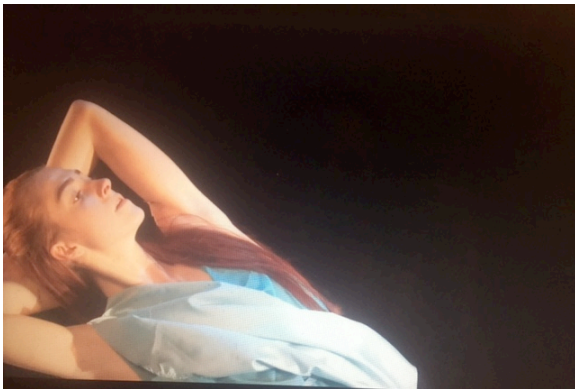
Isadora Duncan by Arnold Genthe, 1919



YDE soloist Robyn Bedford connecting to nature photo by Ashley Ann Burton



YDE soloist Robyn Bedford connecting to nature photo by Ashley Ann Burton



YDE soloist Robyn Bedford connecting to nature photo by Ashley Ann Burton



YDE soloist Robyn Bedford connecting to nature photo by Ashley Ann Burton

Section Two: Creating bas-relief scripture and natural elements

Duncan's natural movement philosophy evolved in Greece. She admired the beauty of ancient Greek art and culture. The two-dimensional human body movements depicted in bas-relief scripture influenced Duncan's formulation of a new dance genre. Greek bas-relief scripture is a proportionate background sculpture illustrating the natural contours of figures, often capturing human interactions and stories. I created a bas-relief scripture with the YDE dancers inspired by the poses examined in

literature and ancient Greek art museum research. Reviewing bas-relief images with the YDE inspired our collaborative crafting of the bas-relief sequence in *Ode to Isadora*. While the soloist is gathering inspiration from nature downstage the remaining dancers gradually enter upstage from the wings in the shadow to create a bas-relief scripture. The soloist now fueled with elements of nature runs past the bas-relief like the wind bringing the scripture to life. The elemental energy of the wind propels the scripture to separate in swirling and fluid motions simulating the rippling of water.



Isadora Duncan at the Portal of the Parthenon by Edward Steichen, 1921



YDE cast creating bas-relief scripture and natural elements photo by Ashley Ann Burton



YDE cast creating bas-relief scripture and natural elements photo by Ashley Ann Burton



YDE cast creating bas-relief scripture and natural elements photo by Ashley Ann Burton



YDE cast creating bas-relief scripture and natural elements photo by Ashley Ann Burton



YDE cast creating bas-relief scripture and natural elements photo by Ashley Ann Burton

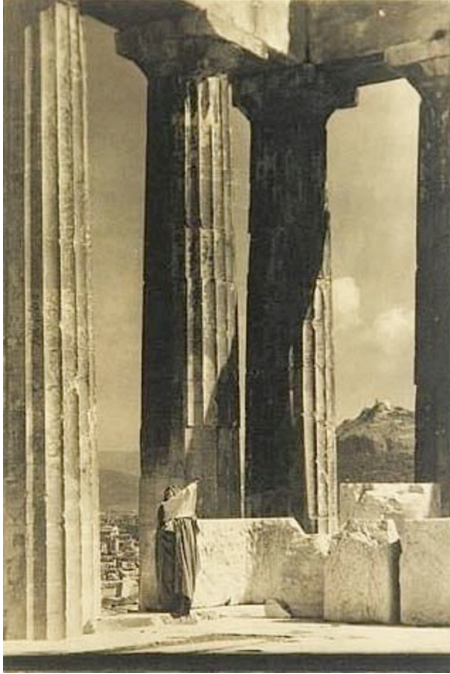


YDE cast creating bas-relief scripture and natural elements photo by Ashley Ann Burton

Section 3: Exploring ancient Greek art, sculpture and architecture

I shared images of ancient Greek art, sculpture and architecture with the YDE to provide contextual knowledge and visual representations. The dancers drew from these images when building their individual poses in the choreography. By encouraging the dancers to interpret and embody visual art depictions a deeper engagement with the choreographic material developed. Collectively they created movement phrases by transferring visual art illustrations to their bodies. As choreographer I examined the proportions and symmetry of the movements proposing suggestions for shaping and gesture. After examining the poses created by the YDE dancers, I designed the transitions by imagining what type of movements would have been before and after the poses.

Influenced by Greek architecture and the temple columns at the Acropolis, particularly the iconic Parthenon, I replicated the verticality in the YDE Duncan posture. As discussed in Chapter 3 the verticality of the temple columns and the position of the chest in the god/goddess sculptures informed the postural aesthetic. The visual images of Greek art, sculptures and architecture provided a foundation for the dancers to build their individual body shapes. The dancers' process for building their body architecture provided greater range of movement in the chest from the solar plexus.



Isadora Duncan at the Portal of the Parthenon by Edward Steichen, 1921



YDE cast exploring ancient Greek art, sculpture and architecture photo by Ashley Ann Burton



YDE cast exploring ancient Greek art and architecture photo by Ashley Ann Burton



YDE cast exploring ancient Greek art, sculpture and architecture photo by Ashley Ann Burton



YDE cast exploring ancient Greek art, sculpture and architecture photo by Ashley Ann Burton



YDE cast exploring ancient Greek art, sculpture and architecture photo by Ashley Ann Burton



YDE cast exploring ancient Greek art and architecture photo by Ashley Ann Burton



YDE cast exploring ancient Greek art, sculpture and architecture photo by Ashley Ann Burton

Section 4: Simulating water and waves

In her memoir, Duncan describes that from an early age she had a fascination with the natural flow of water and waves. During my embodied research with Duncan practitioner Fabienne Courmont, I developed sequences of wave movements to simulate the continuity, rhythm and harmony of water. The YDE dancers gained more upper body freedom when they incorporated water/wave movement qualities integrating an organic use of the solar plexus. The use of the ribbons added continuous flow of motion extending the dancers' movements.



Isadora Duncan by Arnold Genthe, 1910



YDE cast simulating water and waves photo by Ashley Ann Burton



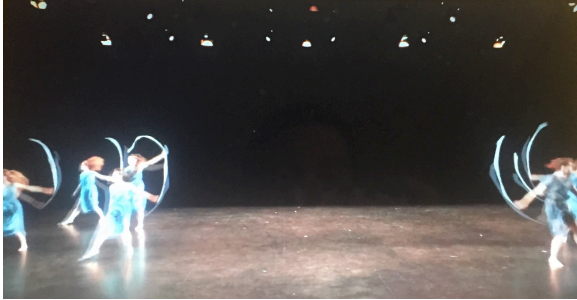
YDE cast simulating water and waves photo by Ashley Ann Burton



YDE cast simulating water and waves photo by Ashley Ann Burton



YDE cast simulating water and waves photo by Ashley Ann Burton



YDE cast simulating water and waves photo by Ashley Ann Burton



YDE cast simulating water and waves photo by Ashley Ann Burton



YDE cast simulating water and waves photo by Ashley Ann Burton

Section Five: Connection between the earth and sky

Duncan arm and hand gestures expressively symbolize truth, honesty and oneness between humanity and the universe. The image below captures Duncan positioning her arms upwards with open palms communicating her synergistic connection with the universe. In Duncan technique this reaching upwards with both arms and hands is called the universal gesture. In Duncan repertory the dancer positions the arms and hands downwards to connect with the earth and upwards to connect with the sky. To illustrate a simultaneous connection with the earth and sky Duncan dancers will

position one arm and hand downwards and the other arm and hand upwards. I included gestural motifs in *Ode to Isadora* to highlight the dancers' connection with the earth and sky.



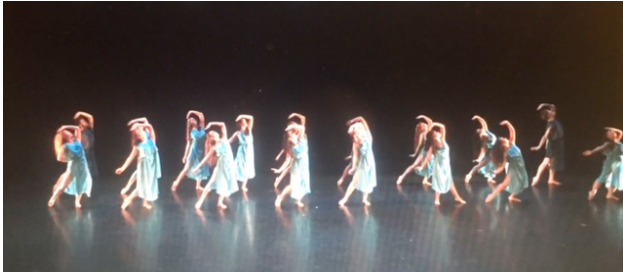
Isadora Duncan at the Portal of the Parthenon by Edward Steichen, 1921



YDE cast connection between the earth and sky photo by Ashley Ann Burton



YDE cast connection between the earth and sky photo by Ashley Ann Burton



YDE cast connection between the earth and sky photo by Ashley Ann Burton



YDE cast connection between the earth and sky photo by Ashley Ann Burton

Section Six: Duncan-inspired technique

The final section of the choreography concentrates on harmonizing movement and music. I included Duncan-inspired technique like movement initiating from the eyes and solar plexus during walks, runs, skips, jumps and leaps. The choreography was built in synchronization with a Schubert classical composition. The YDE dancers perform intricate weaving patterns and repetitive skip and jump lines while seamlessly entering and exiting from the wings. The choreographic repetition, a method Duncan employed in her repertoire, provides the dancers opportunities to discover a sense of renewal each time the movement sequences repeat in harmony with the music.



Isadora Duncan at he Theater of Dionysus, photo by Raymond Duncan, 1903



YDE cast Duncan-inspired technique photo by Ashley Ann Burton



YDE cast Duncan-inspired technique photo by Ashley Ann Burton



YDE cast Duncan-inspired technique photo by Ashley Ann Burton

When the choreographic process for *Ode to Isadora* was completed I asked the YDE to reflect and journal about how the Duncan-inspired workshops and choreography differed from other compositional processes. The following quotes are journal entries from five YDE members.

“This process was like a history lesson, a self-discovery and connective process (the ensemble to the earth) all in one. It is a refreshing experience.”

“Duncan’s approach to movement is liberating and free within every individual’s own body. It was nice to feel how my body moves with my own internal wave moving inside and outward. Including the audience and acknowledging/engaging with them creates a more lively performance and experience for both dancer and observer.”

“We were able to open up as dancers and people and enjoy the pure happiness of movement. Other choreographic pieces often want dancers to be very invested in their own dance, but this allowed us to open up and engage with the audience and fellow dancers. I am really enjoying my time so far.”

“This compositional process has been a vital historical lesson. It has also made me think much more in my performance engagement with an audience. I am not simply dancing internally for myself. In regards to movement cultivation I am thinking much more about where the movement comes from.”

“It’s different because in other workshops/choreographic processes we generally jump into creation/choreography. In this process we actually addressed engagement and performance/artistry in every rehearsal which has been extremely helpful.”

I argue that Duncan’s natural movement philosophy can be used as a choreographic and performative tool to enhance movement cultivation and performance engagement awareness in the millennial dancer. *Ode to Isadora* encourages the YDE dancers to connect with their inner impulse and movement intention as a method for self-expression. Duncan’s dance philosophy places value on developing meaningful connections between the dancer and the audience during artistic engagement.

Performances of *Ode to Isadora*

Ode to Isadora was performed by the YDE in three venues; McLean Performance Studio at York University, the Heliconian Club of Toronto, and the Sandra Faire and Ivan Fecan Theatre at York University. As artist-researcher each performance presented me with new observations and inquiry. The performances provided the YDE dancers opportunities to deepen their connections with the choreographic material and Duncan’s dance principles. During performance the YDE dancers develop an intensified connection with one another, and dancing for a live audience brought to fruition the engagement principles we concentrated on in the studio.

Film Shoot: McLean Performance Studio at York University on December 1, 2016

Duncan's mantra 'To dance is to live' was the theme for our film shoot. I invited videographer Edward Platero to film the YDE's work in progress performance of *Ode to Isadora*. Viewing the choreography in a theatre setting allowed me to step back from my role as choreographer to appreciate the choreography from an audience perspective. The dancers were mindful when navigating their use of space during travelling sequences and group patterning while adapting to the stage. This initial performance gave me information about the gestures, shapes and motifs that required clarification for future performances. In rehearsals I focused on constructing the Duncan posture and freedom in the upper body compulsory for Duncan dancing. During the film shoot performance I was delighted to see the YDE dancers finding these body landmarks with more ease. From the film shoot footage Platero created a trailer and full length video of the choreography which I uploaded to Vimeo and Youtube.⁵ The video footage archive was used as a tool by me and the dancers to study the choreography and to engage in critical dialogue and analysis for continued development.

Visual artist Kristyn Watterworth photographed moments of *Ode to Isadora* during the film shoot performance. She beautifully captured the choreography reminiscent of Greek ideals and Duncan-inspired technique. Watterworth's photos illustrate the use of arm and hand gestures, bas-relief scripture and the dancers in flight during skips and jumps. The photos inspired ideas for lighting design that highlighted the contours of the body. When collaborating with the lighting designer for the final performance of *Ode to Isadora* in February 2017, I shared Watterworth's

⁵ Footage from the December film shoot can be viewed by visiting the following links:

Ode to Isadora Trailer: <https://vimeo.com/198533621>

Ode to Isadora full-length video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2d0OnyeT_5Q&t=318s

photographs and Platero's video footage. The visual archives served to reference the sculptural aspect of the choreography and to express my vision for the lighting design. A selection of Watterworth's photos are inserted below.



The YDE performing *Ode to Isadora* December 1, 2016 photo by Kristyn Watterworth



The YDE performing *Ode to Isadora* December 1, 2016 photo by Kristyn Watterworth



The YDE performing *Ode to Isadora* December 1, 2016 photo by Kristyn Watterworth



The YDE performing *Ode to Isadora* December 1, 2016 photo by Kristyn Watterworth



The YDE performing *Ode to Isadora* December 1, 2016 photo by Kristyn Watterworth



The YDE performing *Ode to Isadora* December 1, 2016 photo by Kristyn Watterworth

At the end of the film shoot, I suggested that the YDE dancers reflect and journal about their experiences performing the choreography in a theatre setting, what they wanted to continue

developing in future performances, and how they were connecting with the Duncan-inspired sessions. Below are those journal entries from each member of the YDE.

“Full force, driving through the material
 Diving into the cool blue waters. Crashing like waves
 Beginning, middle, end. Truthfully we always begin again.
 Genuine, honest connections made true
 Eyes like the ocean. Big, beautiful and blue.
 Ode to Isadora, Almighty above
 Atop Olympus she ascended
 Let us jump, let us fly, let us love.”

“Today I really created an atmosphere for myself. Duncan work has enhanced my awareness to those I’m dancing with, the audience, and the space around me. I found this has really helped my performance not only in this rehearsal but in other forms of dance as well.”

“Duncan work has encouraged my use of breath as a means of initiation for my movements and to use eye focus. It has helped me to understand how to project my internal energy outwards.”

“What a great process this has been. It has really opened up new doors and shown me a new layer of dance and what it can be. My goal for the final performance is to really bask in the joy of movement.”

“Performing the piece in the theatre was a great experience, Duncan movement brings more range to my dancing, being “open”, more released, more enlightened and enlivened, and living in the experience.”

“This process has helped me open up both physically and mentally in my other dance classes and other pieces of choreography.”

“Duncan work has offered me a new layer of theatrical performance. Really getting into character and creating that environment and committing.”

“Performing today has set the wheels in motion, the end goal is achievable and in sight. I am ecstatic. Performing this work is a pleasure.”

“Today, I was able to commit more to my dancing even though many mistakes were made. This particular way of dancing brings attention to eye focus and seeing the space and the people I’m dancing with. I find it powerful to really see people while on stage. This piece takes its time to allow us to feel and breathe with each other. This process is amazing!”

“Working on this piece I have been able to discover more about myself as a dancer. During the initial questionnaire I couldn’t think of words to describe myself as a dancer and artist. I struggled and pondered this question for a while. This piece offered me self-discovery and a confidence in myself as a dancer/performer.”

“Duncan’s work has offered me fun! To express and engage with my fellow dancers and audience during the piece creates a new experience each time.”

“Duncan work has pushed me to dance in a different quality than I usually do, more delicate and soft and focused on the audience.”

“I found it harder to connect with the outside world (audience) in MacLean performance theatre because the lights created a black curtain and I have been used to the open, bright expansiveness of the mirror. I really want to work on the joy aspect. I want to find magic in every section and to answer the question “why am I doing this” for each initiation of movement, I want to find genuine initiations and intention. I feel Duncan work has brought grace, beauty and simplicity to my movement.”

“This work is always very uplifting and has an endearing quality to it (to me as a performer). It is virtually impossible to not incorporate expression and personal feelings each time that we are rehearsing the movement, especially now that the piece is completed. There is an overwhelming sense of community, through connections between each of us as well as unison sections, which is something I would like to continue to foster in the New Year. Overall, Duncan work offers just that...a heightened sense of community, expression and personal investment, all of which are highly endearing to witness and experience.”

“Performing on stage, filmed with lights was a totally different experience for this piece. I have learned that I will really need to work on throwing the gaze and projecting my performance to the audience. Duncan work offers me a dance to develop my performance and artistry, working on always having a developing story while I am dancing and taking the audience on the journey too.”

“Dancing in the theatre made me aware of how I need to project further out into the audience. I felt more pressure being in the theatre. Duncan dance is a reminder to use my eyes when I am dancing. I often look down when performing but this dance has reminded to look at and make eye contact with people when I am dancing.”

“Through this process we have come to work as an ensemble. Duncan work has brought a whole new experience to my dance career. It has helped me to feel more secure in a new environment. I feel more mature, the breathing techniques and use of gaze elements in performance are now being included in my own improvised movement. I am glad to feel these aspects are being absorbed by my body.”

“After performing this piece in a more theatre-like space, I felt a sense of release. Although there were some mix-ups and obstacles I was even more confident that by February we could move together as a beautiful ensemble. I believe filming the piece in such a setting was beneficial in moving us forward. I plan to dig deep in my internal self and emotions and let them shine. I will do that by letting go and just dancing. Duncan work and these rehearsals have allowed me to truly see the connection between dancing and the outside world. It has taught me to let my heart guide the way, and I feel confident that I will get to that place within this piece and hopefully as well for future works.”

“Performing in a theatrical space had really made the piece come to life. With the lighting and costuming I was experiencing a new environment. Characterization had really come to life especially when interacting with other dancers. The costumes had played a significant role in putting me into character and giving me confidence. Duncan work has offered a performance quality I rarely explore. The head and eye connection is taught and explored in other styles of dance, but the eyes used to connect with the audience was always forgotten.”

“Performing the work in a theatrical space with lights and a few audience members was really influential. It evoked my performance drive to truly push myself forward. Duncan work has offered me freedom of movement, freedom of expressivity, freedom of play with uplifting movement.”

When reading the journal reflections post-performance I felt confident that we were on a path to performance success. The dancers were feeling more invested in the choreography and discovering new aspects of artistry and performance. Heading back to the studio for rehearsals in the New Year I continued to build on the performative aspects of the choreography and refine the Duncan-inspired aesthetic.

I shared the footage from the *Ode to Isadora* film shoot with Duncan historian Paul-James Dwyer. In response he sent me a personal review of the choreography.

“*Ode to Isadora* is fresh, powerful and more DUNCAN than many modern works in her style I have seen in the last 30 years, and you are so new at the form. It shows your own development as a choreographer in your own right...highly developed massings of bodies in a concentric central idea realized in a vibrant charged atmosphere of light, freedom of spirit and pure joy! The dancers are all in blue but I felt the green earth, the winds rushing, and the earth underfoot, the waters swirling in eddies, unfolding and vortex’s rising heavenward! What you have proven is that diligent research, and born talent can revive this art and secondly you have been outside the form for most of your artistic and professional development, proving also that it can be assimilated by those who have not started at the beginning of their development as dancers and choreographers...i.e. as children. This is a very important point. You are very sensitive to the Duncan form Ashley.”

Paul-James Dwyer
dance OREMUS danse
January 8, 2017

The Heliconian Club of Toronto Performance January 18, 2017

As dance artist in residence at the Heliconian Club of Toronto, I had the opportunity to share my Duncan research with club members and invited the YDE to perform *Ode to Isadora*. The building that houses the Heliconian Club was constructed in 1875 and is a National Historical Site. For months I had coached the YDE on raising their centre of gravity in Duncan-inspired skips and jumps to emphasize suspension in the vertical plane. This was always practiced in a large studio environment. Now dancing in an intimate setting like the Heliconian Club with limited spatial width it was imperative for the dancers to execute their runs, skips, leaps and jumps vertically. During the performance the dancers collectively and intelligently made spontaneous choices to rotate their bodies sideways during intricate weaving patterns, and modified the original choreographic movement adapting to the space. As artist-researcher I observed these unprompted moments and adaptations as a manifestation of mindfulness and harmony in the YDE dancers.

Performing at the Heliconian Club for an audience consisting of distinguished dance choreographers, educators and scholars offered an incredibly unique research opportunity for acquiring feedback on *Ode to Isadora*. Prior to the presentation of *Ode to Isadora* I asked the audience to write about their observations. Following the performance a Q & A ensued between the audience and the YDE, which gave the dancers a platform to articulate their experiences and discoveries during the choreographic process and the Heliconian Club performance. Below are excerpts of the audience's observations regarding *Ode to Isadora*.

"It felt natural, the beginning gave me goose bumps."

"Beautiful to watch. I see a sense of developing company/ensemble sensibility in the YDE, through breath, movement and energetic connection."

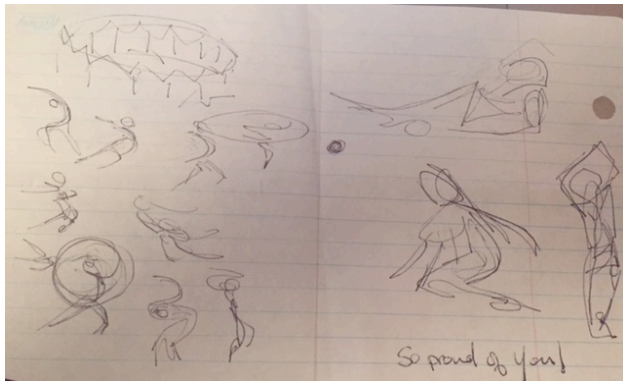
"Tunics, breath, arms gestural, tableaux, suspension and energy, unison, circular, waves, ribbons, skipping with music melody, orchestral."

"Joyous movement but also a great sense of individuality."

“Mesmerizing undulating themes, movements in nature are seen developing, shifting and unfolding in real time interaction among the dancers, tunics facilitate the movement.”

“A breath of fresh air. I saw every one of the dancers faces. They each shone brightly and I saw them as themselves.”

“Very fluid and free flowing, there is a unity and connection, I felt like the dancers were driven by an inner energy that expressed through their faces and movements, I saw ocean, water, the sky and free spirits moving in sync.”



Sketch by audience member at the Heliconian Club of Toronto January 18, 2017



YDE perform *Ode to Isadora* at the Heliconian Club of Toronto January 18, 2017

Following the Heliconian Club performance I asked the YDE to journal about what *Ode to Isadora* offered them in terms of performance and artistic development. The following are some of their reflections.

“Improved eye contact and engagement with other dancers and the audience.”

“Explore new movement initiated from the solar plexus.”

“To connect internal energy with external movement.”

“More confidence and maturity in performance.”

“Enhanced movement quality and expressivity.”

“Sense of openness, connectedness and community.”

“Deeper understanding of Isadora Duncan and her dance.”

“Freedom of spirit.”

In preparation for the final performance in February the YDE and I incorporated the discoveries and experiences from the film shoot and the Heliconian Club performances to continue fostering the physical, emotional and spiritual essence of Duncan dance.

YDE: Space/Time/Line Performance at York University February 15-17, 2017

The final performances of *Ode to Isadora* took place at the Sandra Faire and Ivan Fecan Theatre at York University for three consecutive evenings. I had the opportunity to collaborate with a lighting designer to create an ambiance for the piece. Adding haze created a mystical atmosphere. Amber tones were used to simulate the warmth of the sun and to highlight the dancers' gestural and sculptural movements. Drawing from the Mediterranean Sea the use of blue and aqua colours intensified the water and wave movements. The lighting palette supported the elemental theme of the choreography.

The proscenium stage setting offered distance and a wider perspective for viewing the choreography. I appreciated viewing the work from this perspective as it allowed me to observe the totality of the sculptural design and shaping of the movement. The YDE dancers achieved the verticality, sensitivity, grace and beauty in my Duncan-inspired choreography. The final performances of *Ode to Isadora* gave me great joy as I watched my scholarly and embodied research unfolding on stage.⁶

⁶ To view the performance of *Ode to Isadora* on February 16, 2017 at York University visit: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ULT-ucM5fj0&feature=youtu.be>

Dance historian, writer and founding director of the MA and PhD programs in Dance at York University, Selma Odom, reviewed *Ode to Isadora* for the Heliconian Club bulletin. She writes,

“*Ode to Isadora* by Ashley Ann Burton filled the Hall to the rafters with musical motion the evening of Jan. 18. This year’s Dance Artist in Residence brought along eighteen dancers to share the exuberant Isadora Duncan-inspired choreography she was in the midst of making for her MFA in Dance at York University. As often happens in Heliconian Club dance programs, the audience had the chance to see work close up, hear about the sources and experiences behind the work and interact with the artist. After the ensemble performed the dance, which is set to music by three contemporary composers and the opening of Schubert’s fifth symphony, Ashley invited viewers to write brief responses and join in discussion with her and the dancers. People were intrigued by movement in the flowing tunics of aquamarine and blue; by the dancers’ immersion in the rhythms of different ways of walking, running and skipping; and by their joyous explorations of freedom and energy. The two male dancers in this dynamic realm contributed to a sense of community and humanity that went beyond gender. Primed by the Heliconian preview, I was transported by the full staging with magical lighting I saw Feb. 17 at York. I could enjoy how the choreography unfolds from complete stillness, beginning with Robyn Bedford’s solo of awakening from a reclining pose up into light vertical skipping. The group arrives to introduce scenes evoking Duncan’s fascination with animated friezes, with the lines and circles of choral patterns and with the surging patterns of waves breaking. Finally, for the Schubert allegro, all the diverse bodies merge into collective action to make large sweeping charges of running and leaping through space. The unity and heightened attention of the dancing affirm the power of Duncan’s partnering of dance and music. How delightful to learn that a video screening of Ashley’s work will represent Canada at the Isadora Duncan International Symposium in San Francisco this summer.”

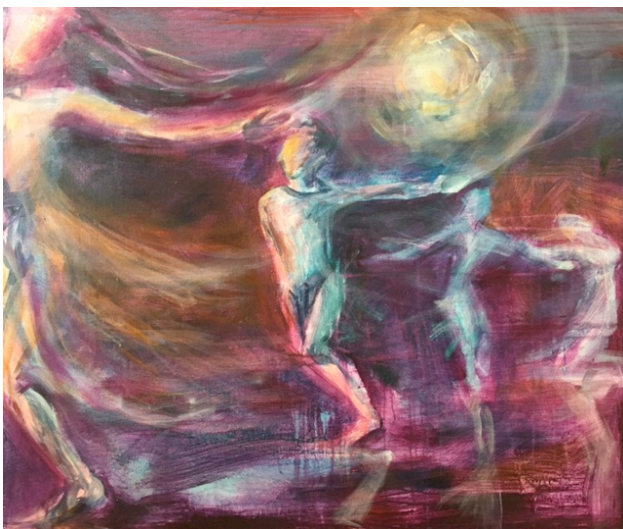
I asked other audience members who attended both the Heliconian Club and the York University presentations to write a reflection comparing the performances. The following are three excerpts.

“Chatting after the Heliconian showing in January several of the dancers remarked that performing with awareness of the upward space in the Hall gave them new understanding and sensation of the Duncan motion - its sweep and 'inspiration' - breath and the infusion of spirituality - the intent of freedom and intelligence Duncan referred to. This devotional sensibility and the use of breath were evident - as a progression - in the York University performance. Also the sense of ensemble was far stronger in mid-February. The lighting and the freedom of the movement within the proscenium arch enhanced the framing and ambiance of the piece.” (Audience member)

“I observed a great sense of intimacy in the performance at the Heliconian Club. The space, with its low lighting and storied past, contributed to a sense of otherworldliness that I felt Isadora would have appreciated. Though the dancers were adjusting to a new performance environment in this rendition, I felt that there was a level of comfort and embodied knowing to their dancing. Seeing the piece a month later on a large proscenium stage was in many ways different, but not entirely so. While the separation of dancers and audience took away the particular intimacy found

at the Heliconian, there was instead a sense of intimacy between the dancers that could only exist due to their distance from the audience. This distance also provided a variation on the otherworldliness felt previously: rather than feeling as if I was an invited guest to this fantastical moment, it was as if I was watching it captured in a box or a camera, truly emphasizing the role of the tableau vignette in the work, even when the dancers were in motion. The lighting in the proscenium performance also changed the imagined setting for me. Rather than feeling like I was with the dancers in a secluded forest or glen, I placed them in an ever-shifting world of fields, rivers, and caves. The lighting supported the shifting tone of the music and the dancing to create a journey that I did not perceive in the Heliconian performance. Yet somehow, despite the fleshed-out technical details, the proscenium performance still felt more like a snapshot, a recorded moment in time, as opposed to a living, breathing, immersive experience. Perhaps this contradictory impression is due to the vast difference in audience closeness and open staging versus a framed, distant proscenium.” (Audience member)

“I was lucky enough to see the progression of Ashley Ann Burton's dance choreography, *Ode to Isadora*. It was amazing to see the development of the dance and the cohesion of the group build. The first time I saw the piece was in November, in the studio. While it was powerful and the beauty of the piece was starting to show, the next performance I saw was far beyond. In the next show, performed at the Heliconian Club, the dancers were much more free and playful. They seemed to have come to a point where they really had embraced the sense of Duncan, and were performing from their hearts. The space was much more intimate and it felt very close, having the dancers swirl around the room almost embracing the audience with their movements. They were exploding in the space, much livelier and rambunctious than before, possibly because the space was smaller and they were used to filling a bigger space. It seemed like they were elevated from the previous filmed performance, dancing upward, and connecting closely with one another and the audience. The final performance was a beautiful culmination of all the efforts and dry runs put together. The dancers were totally on point, full of energy and channeling the full gamut of Isadora Duncan's naturalism. The lighting and background fog created an ephemeral scene, painting the dancers as Greek sculptures brought to life, their strength, power and grace fully alive on stage.” (Audience member)



Ode to Isadora inspired painting by visual artist Kristyn Watterworth February 23, 2017

YDE Reflections Post-Performance

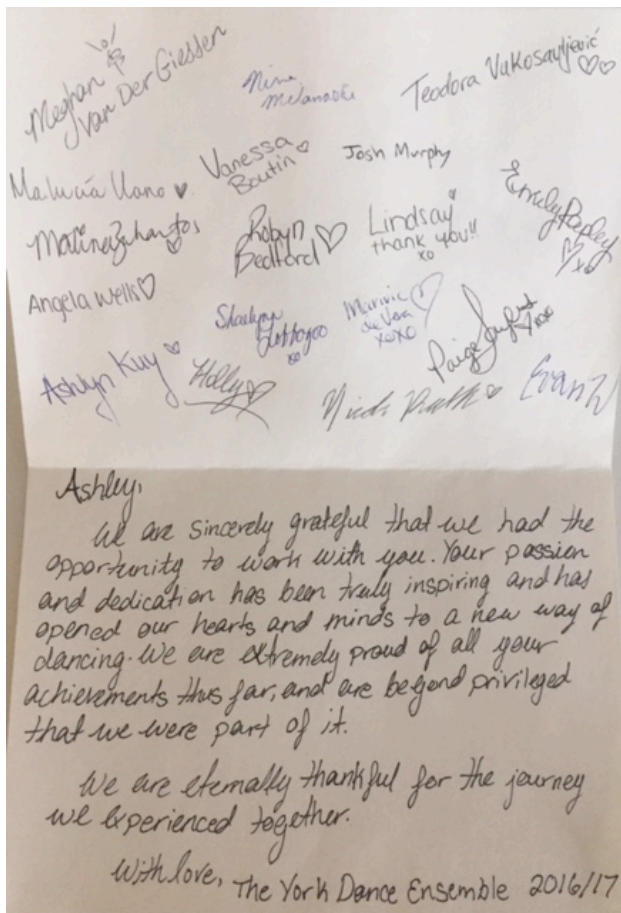
“Being a part of this piece has definitely been a journey. Since stepping into the first rehearsal, I have not only grown as a dancer but also as an individual and team player. This piece has taught me how much more there is to dance, and it really pushed my physical limits and performance skills. Being in a seventeen-minute dance piece demands stamina, and this piece of choreography tested me to keep up my energy the whole way through as well as making sure that my facial expression never showed that I was tired. It also educated me about Isadora Duncan not just through books, but also through a physical experience, which really made me appreciate the kinds of things that she valued and concentrated on, and how important it is for live performers. I felt that it physically strengthened me in certain areas and artistically it helped me realize things I could do and incorporate into my everyday dancing that would help my movement become more dynamic. An element that I really took for my own was eye contact and intention. It may seem like something that would be common sense, but I have always struggled with it and didn’t quite understand how or why to use it, until it was brought to me in a different manner, which was using it for connection. The connection it creates with the audience and other dance members really brought interest into the movement and excitement to the piece. I am really thankful that I was able to learn from this experience, and now able to say that I have a bit of Duncan technique in my training, because I think that it is very valuable and can really help dancers in this day and age become more artistic and bring back those human values to their movement, rather than just being able to do tricks.”

“I felt performing Ode on the stage really helped me incorporate my gaze. I felt surprisingly more connected to the piece knowing that there were people present in the dark. I think that after doing this piece multiple times my body went on "auto pilot" (not in a bad way), as I was able to concentrate on leading movement with my eyes and upper body. I enjoyed doing this technique because of the theatrical element of performance, which I rarely experience in contemporary dance. I'm a theatre lover and having the opportunity to really indulge the use of eye contact with each other and the audience in a positive way really made me feel happy and more connected to the choreography and fellow dancers which translated into the movement shapes and qualities. We were dancing a story, rather than just dancing set movement. I'm very thankful that YDE had the opportunity to go on this Isadora journey. I learned more than I expected and I am incorporating the knowledge of eye contact/gaze in my own choreography, which is super awesome!!”

“While on stage I felt a strong sense of community. I am grateful for the energy of the group as it carried me through the performance. Isadora's principles and ideas brought us together and we were able to create a setting onstage. I felt the sun in the sky, the warmth on my skin and the grass under my feet.”



Thank you card from the YDE closing evening performance February 17, 2017 at York University illustration by YDE member Meghan Van Der Giessen.



Thank you card from the YDE closing evening performance February 17, 2017 at York University.

The YDE Case Study Conclusion

The practice-based research methodology for *Ode to Isadora* included my acquired Duncan research knowledge in combination with my dance experiences to develop a Duncan-

inspired movement vocabulary for the YDE. This practice-based research approach corresponds with Graeme Sullivan's framework for art-practice as research; whereby, knowledge and experience inform the core artwork. Employing Sullivan's framework assisted in my transmission of Duncan dancing to the YDE millennial dancer. Drawing from academic and embodied research I was able to somatically transfer my knowledge, experience and interpretation of Duncan's natural movement philosophy with a group of eighteen dance students who had no previous exposure to Duncan technique or performance. As a result, the choreographic research with the YDE presented the dancers and me as artist-researcher with an alternative approach to movement creation and performance.

As artist-researcher I accumulated qualitative research data by reading and analyzing journal entries written by the YDE dancers. The content of the journal entries reveals that the facilitation of my practice-based research methodology enhanced performance engagement and rejuvenated artistry in the millennial YDE dancers. For example, the dancers expressed a heightened awareness of engagement with one another and with the audience during performance. The YDE members noted that using Duncan's natural movement philosophy and dance principles in the choreographic process for *Ode to Isadora* provided a fresh outlook for dance training and compositional methods. According to the YDE journal entries, the process of the case study has influenced their artistic transformation and performance development during and beyond *Ode to Isadora*.

Prior to starting the choreography for *Ode to Isadora*, I facilitated workshop sessions with the YDE to help familiarize the dancers with Duncan's dance philosophy and her nature-inspired movement qualities. In the past my choreographic process introduced dancers to the movement first and then I would coach intention, performance quality and characterization. During the

choreographic process of *Ode to Isadora* I practiced an opposite approach by coaching intention, performance quality and characterization before introducing the YDE to the movement vocabulary. A YDE member journals, “We really worked on performing and connecting with the audience before starting the choreography of the piece, which I think helped in terms of understanding right from the beginning what the movement should feel like instead of learning choreography and then exploring the performance aspect. We got to learn the choreography with that performance aspect in our minds and bodies so we could further our abilities from there.”

I observed during the case study with the YDE that Duncan’s natural movement philosophy inspires the dancers to make a connection with their mind, body and soul, which in turn cultivates a greater empathy and relationship between humanity and the universe. Dance scholar Kathryn Daniels and author of *Teaching to the Whole Dancer Synthesizing Pedagogy, Anatomy, and Psychology* writes, “The traditional dance training model was widely accepted in previous eras when the professional environment preferred dancers who aspired to become obedient tools. However, as the dance world evolves, we have seen an increase in the desire for thoughtful dancers: artists who can bring the depth of themselves and their training into the studio and onto the stage. To prepare dancers for current professional expectations and support their technical, artistic, and personal growth, we must invite the whole person into the dance studio. In doing so we must move from training, which emphasizes skill acquisition, to education, which addresses development of the whole person” (8). I see a correlation between the ‘desire for thoughtful dancers’ that Daniels’s refers to above, and Duncan’s vision for dance education as a holistic and human experience.

During the case study I encouraged the YDE dancers to engage critically and physically with the choreographic material to consciously discover the internal source of the movement. One

YDE member journals about this process, “Duncan process is different because it starts with intention and then afterwards you can dissect and master the movement. It is more important that there is a spark/intention first before the movement execution.” In addition, Duncan’s natural movement philosophy offers the YDE dancer an opportunity to engage artistically and creatively rather than solely being a technical dancing body. Daniels says, “By teaching dancers to value and trust their own perceptions and experiences, a learner-centered education also cultivates a strong sense of self, inner direction and self-esteem. These qualities enable artists to become creative collaborators who can participate fully in the choreographic process and access their own creative voices as both interpretative and generative artists” (9). Implementing a learner-centered approach during my case study motivated the YDE to explore individuality and discover self-expression in the movement. The dancers had a voice in the choreographic process giving them ownership of the material perpetrating permission to take on the work and run with it.

Epilogue

During the case study with the YDE I referred to the solar plexus as the heart of the movement and when the dancers worked from that place I observed a sensitivity and compassion develop toward one another. Eye contact among the dancers and the audience members created a human interaction and a sense of familial trust. I argue that the case study process cultivated a transformation in the millennial YDE from the inside out.

Throughout the choreographic process and the performances of *Ode to Isadora*, I observed an evolution in the millennial YDE dancers as they accessed internal intention/energy in their movement with more ease. Initially the dancers were mostly focused on achieving Duncan-inspired movement. However, throughout the process they exhibited wisdom in their desire to elicit more freedom and joy in their movement. They were now truly embodying Duncan's natural movement philosophy.

Isadora Duncan sought freedom for the dancing body. She found the dance styles in her era to be technically rigid, unnatural and exploitative of the human body. In contrast, she advocated for artistry and freedom of expression in a new form of dance. I argue that the emphasis on hyper-technicality and the technomania-body championed in dance competitions and social media in the millennium is unnatural and exploits the human body. The Duncan inspired choreography introduced the YDE dancers to a movement vocabulary that centralizes on initiating movement from internal expression rather than relying exclusively on technical virtuosity. My case study research confirms that utilizing Duncan's natural movement philosophy as choreographic and performance tools, enhances expressivity and performance engagement in the YDE millennial dancers.

Duncan was a brilliant dance philosopher. She provided intelligent, philosophical and descriptive explanations for her natural dance through writings and speeches. Through literary mediums she conveyed her vision for dance as a vessel for peace, unity and human universality. She believed that all children should be educated in music, dance and philosophy in order to harmonize the mind, body and soul. Duncan's method for exploring expressivity through human connection of the mind, body and soul in movement is a treasured gift to the world of dance. When dialoguing with Duncan historian Paul-James Dwyer, we concur that Duncan is indeed a dance archaeologist. Duncan is an archive and a historical dance fossil representing the evolution and transformative power of dance as a high-art.

During the case study my strategy for introducing the YDE to nature-inspired photography, poetry and soundscapes was successfully utilized to rouse their imagination when connecting organically to the elemental nature of the choreography. Due to scheduling and time constraints, I did not offer the dancers an opportunity to embody movement outdoors in nature's natural elements. Therefore, I included imagery as an alternative method to help the dancers tap into natural environments. This offered the YDE a tool for internalizing and discovering a harmonic connection between their dancing body and nature for movement inspiration. Visualization and embodiment of nature is the foundation for *Ode to Isadora's* choreographic process and movement vocabulary. Within this practice the millennial YDE dancers and I found a relevant connection to an interpretation of Duncan's natural movement philosophy in the twenty-first century.

If provided another opportunity to work with the YDE I would structure rehearsal time in site-specific natural environments like dancing along the shores of lakes, walking and running in sand, skipping and leaping in grassy fields, gliding and falling in snow. I am excited to move

forward with site-specific concepts to strengthen my contemporized approach of Duncan's natural movement philosophy. This will serve to expand my investigation on how natural dance principles can be accessible for all bodies and adapted universally for choreography and performance education.

Ode to Isadora is not a reconstruction of Duncan's natural dance, but rather a construction of my interpretation and contemporization of her natural movement philosophy. The choreography was created in four phases representing my research journey and connection to Isadora Duncan's pursuit for a more natural dance form. As Duncan claimed nature to be her first teacher, I too looked to nature for inspiration during my research journey. Therefore, in Phase I the elemental ambiance for the choreography is set with the opening soloist portraying Duncan's desire to merge nature and movement. Phase II highlights Greek antiquity featuring tableaux, sculptural movement and postural gestures inspired by ancient Greek art and architecture. Phase III weaves the nature element from Phase I with the Greek antiquity from Phase II symbolizing Duncan's primary influential movement sources. Incorporating the use of ribbons during Phase III helped the dancers attain a free-flow movement quality. Phase IV accentuates Duncan's unwavering fervour to coalesce dance and classical music. Schubert's 5th symphony offered my choreography a rhythmical dynamic quality that interlaced musicality and Duncan-inspired technical movements like skipping, running, jumping and leaping. Compositionally, I used gestural motifs and repetition in the movement sequences to represent the cyclical patterns in nature. For example, the cycle in a wave pattern has a beginning, climax and resolve making way for a new wave to emerge. The compositional structure and movement vocabulary designed for each phase of *Ode to Isadora* was my way of contemporizing Duncan for the YDE millennial dancer and the twenty-first century audience.

Throughout my journey to better understand what natural movement means in the context of the twenty-first century, I experimented with altering the phrase “natural movement” to “intrinsic movement,” “intuitive movement” and “instinctual movement.” These alternative phrases offered a varying lexicon to help the YDE and myself identify and connect with Duncan’s use of the word natural. During the case study process it became evident that Duncan’s natural movement philosophy did indeed provoke a more intrinsic, intuitive and instinctual artistry in the performance quality of the YDE.

Although I argue throughout this exegesis that the emphasis in the current millennial dance climate and dance competition culture promotes extreme technical virtuosity, I acknowledge that the movement vocabulary in *Ode to Isadora* accesses the technical dancing body. As trained dancers in ballet, modern and jazz genres, the YDE and I undeniably have an ingrained technical dancing body. As the choreographer for *Ode to Isadora*, I developed movement from our technical dancing bodies and leaned on Duncan’s natural movement philosophy as a conduit to merge technical and natural dance principles for the YDE. I observed that the mergence of technical and natural dance principles offers the YDE millennial technical dancing body a heightened awareness of breath, an openness of the chest and solar plexus, an amplified sensitivity to environmental surroundings, and a permission to humanly internalize intention of movement.

As millennial dancers, embodying the fundamental nature of Duncan’s natural movement philosophy provided a method for the YDE and myself to draw from internal intention to cultivate external expression through movement. Employing this method enhanced expressivity in the YDE millennial dancing body, strengthened performer-audience engagement and inspired a new approach for constructing choreography. Duncan’s dance principles inspire an organic spiritual flow with oneness and the universe.

The process of researching and embodying Duncan's natural movement philosophy has further piqued my interest to investigate dance and spiritual ideologies as sites for deepening my ancestral connections and acquiring new knowledge for artistic creation. The process of creating *Ode to Isadora* resurrected my artistic spirit and sensitivity to nature, igniting an enthusiasm that had eluded me since my residency in Banff almost a decade ago. Through my quest for Isadora, I had finally found my way back to that most interesting rock.

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Appendix

York Dance Ensemble Cast of *Ode to Isadora*: Robyn Bedford, Vanessa Boutin, Holly Buckridge, Marie-Victoria De Vera, Ashlyn Kuy, Shaelynn Lobbezoo, Maria Lucia Llano, Lindsay McBride, Nina Milanovski, Josh Murphy, Emily Rapley, Nicole Robb, Paige Sayles, Meghan Van Der Giessen, Teodora Vukosavljevic, Angela Wells, Evan Winther, Matina Zaharatos.



The York Dance Ensemble Space/Time/Line program February 15-17, 2017 performances at the Sandra Faire & Ivan Fecan Theatre at York University.