

5-6-2014

The Dance of Politics: “All for One, and None for All”

Caitlin E. Mahon

The College at Brockport, cmaho1@u.brockport.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.brockport.edu/honors>



Part of the [Dance Commons](#), and the [Political Science Commons](#)

Repository Citation

Mahon, Caitlin E., "The Dance of Politics: “All for One, and None for All”" (2014). *Senior Honors Theses*. 87.
<http://digitalcommons.brockport.edu/honors/87>

This Honors Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Master's Theses and Honors Projects at Digital Commons @Brockport. It has been accepted for inclusion in Senior Honors Theses by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @Brockport. For more information, please contact kmyers@brockport.edu.

The Dance of Politics:
“All for One, and None for All”

By: Caitlin E. Mahon

Part I: Personal Journey

PERSONAL JOURNEY

Introduction

Dance has always filled my mind and spirit with the most amazing inspiration and joy. Its mind body connection has made a huge impact, on me, since I was a very young dancer. However, my love of dance has not always been understood by extended family or academically respected by my teachers. From the time I was a junior in high school, whenever I expressed my desire to study dance in college it was received with a great amount of disapproval and skepticism. People would comment by saying “you are such a good student why would you go into that field?” or my favorite was, “what are you going to do with that?” It is interesting to me that fields of study such as history and philosophy—which are just as stereotypically limited in regard to job placement—are deemed in higher esteem, due to the instant “academic” connotation associated with them. It is my opinion that this is due to the fact that the general population believes that dancers are mindless robots who simply prance around on a proscenium stage. Also, it appears to be widely thought that the kinesthetic aspect of a dancer’s brain must be much more active than any intellectual part. When in actuality, both are constantly being stimulated and challenged in my collegiate dance classes. Dancers understand that technique classes require a lot more internal mental work than the public would generally think. The thinking dancer is a key component of The College at Brockport’s dance program. When you are a student of the department not only are you expected to perform the physicality of dance but you are also expected to articulate yourself in a written as well as a verbal fashion in terms of dance.

It is of vital importance, to me, to bring to the forefront the written and choreographic works of academic intellects and academic writers of the “dance world”. I have noticed that it is difficult for an academic framework to enter into the general consensus regarding dance. Most people do not realize that dance is an academic field of study. For instance, as a student in The College at Brockport’s Dance Department, along with modern and ballet technique classes, we are required to take courses in: Kinesiology, 20th Century Dance, Music History, History and Development of Dance, as well as Pedagogy. It is also required, in our technique classes that we write many academic papers and truly think about our movement, space, and connection to our fellow dancers. Additionally there is a science to dance and the laws of Physics are quite evident.

It is as equally important to my study of dance as it is to my study of political science that I am able to present, in written format, my research and findings at a high academic level. Another crucially important aspect of my thesis research is to demonstrate that dance in itself can be a political art form or a portrayal of a political act even in the realm of political science academia. I truly believe that art can make statements beyond what mere words, textbooks, or peer reviewed journals can accomplish. Sometimes presenting an idea through a different perspective, or lens, can have a grander effect on those perceiving it. A political act is defined as any act which is intended to have an affect on the established social order (*Merriam-Webster*). Dance, like political speeches, political demonstrations, and political writings can serve to invoke social change.

Thesis Process

As an undergraduate student at The College at Brockport, I am pursuing a double major in dance as well as in environmental policy. My second major was created by me and

my advisors as a C.L.A.M., Contractual Liberal Arts Major. My thesis topic brings these two seemingly non-related subjects together as it bears witness to how dance can be deemed as a legitimate political act. Dance writers such as Mark Franko have taken similar positions and have made similar arguments by bringing the two worlds together. In addition to presenting my thesis in written format, I have put this concept into play by choreographing a political dance, "All For One, and None For All", thus making a legitimate political statement through this art form.

The initial idea for my thesis sprang up while watching a talk show whose guest was Bernie Sanders, a United States Senator from Vermont. During the broadcast, he presented a book he had written from an eight and a half hour speech which he had presented on the floor of the U.S. Senate, on December 10, 2010, entitled *The Speech*. The focal point was the collapse of the middle class and the growth of millionaires through corporate greed. As an environmental policy major, I am very interested in individual rights and the question of how these rights can be impeded upon and how much power American citizens truly have. "Corporate sovereignty" seems to be running rampant over popular sovereignty in today's present world (Sanders).

Senator Sanders argued, in his speech and in his book, that although the United States Supreme Court has deemed that corporations are protected under the constitution, just as any United States citizen, it has given them too much power and control perpetuating their tremendous greed. This protection given to U.S. corporations should be deemed as unconstitutional due to the fact that these "equal" power entities, that are corporations, have actually acquired more rights than those given to individual citizens. An important example from the book is:

“Last year [2009], our friends, at Exxon Mobile—...has historically been the most profitable corporation in the history of the world... only made \$19 billion in profits. Based on its \$19 billion profits, you might be surprised to know that Exxon Mobile reported to the SEC [Securities and Exchange Commission] that not only did it avoid paying any federal income taxes... [it] ... [received] a \$156 million refund from the IRS [Internal Revenue Service]... When we try to understand why we have such a huge national debt and a \$1.3 trillion deficit, it is also important to understand that many large and profitable corporations avoid virtually all of their tax responsibility” (Sanders 45).

In my dance— excerpt as well as its full version— which I have choreographed, I hope to demonstrate to the audience at The College at Brockport that a political statement on corporate greed can be achieved through dance. I also hope that by witnessing my political dance work my audience will be prompted to think about their role within their government and how popular sovereignty does not exist as it was intended by our founding fathers.

Research Question(s) and Methodology

Questions of inquiry which I am focusing on are, "How is the art of dance able to justify itself as being political, in respect to the field of political science?" and "How can I portray my research regarding the abuse of power which corporations maintain as a result of having been given the same rights as the citizens of our nation, through dance?" To research my thesis, the methods I have used for the written paper portion required that I read various sources from academic dance writers and academic political science writers in order to discover where there are overlaps and connections in their ideas.

My action of choreographing a dance is going to be the more difficult component of my project. I believe this due to the fact that I need to take what I learn from researching the topic of my paper and apply it to my dance, in order to communicate the message to my audience in a way that presents the ideas and concepts of my political views to them.

Choreographing Process

Originally, while creating and synthesizing my choreography project, I merely thought about how the final product or performance could convey a political ideology or a subliminal statement within the framework of political science. However, just as vital to consider is the politics of one's own choreographic process.

Being the head, leader, creator, choreographer or whatever you wish to call it is a unique dynamic while working amongst your peers, who are also your friends, as opposed to working with a younger or less experienced demographic than yourself. I even noticed, during the first week of my rehearsal process, that my dancers were extremely vocal and freely provided feedback when I solicited it as well as when I did not. I do not know if the manner in which I conducted my sessions was in such an open format that they felt comfortable to voice their opinions or if it was merely the fact that I am on their level as a dancer/choreographer. Could it be possible that I created a sort of Knights of the Round Table atmosphere? The interesting aspect of this is that I believe were I older or more renowned such interchanges would not have occurred. If Alvin Ailey, for example, had risen from the dead to set a piece of dance work, on my cast of dancers, I doubt that even a peep would have been spoken.

Within my process, it is just as interesting to note how I have addressed my dancers. Due to the fact that we are in the same demographic I often hesitated, at least initially, to give specific notes to certain people. I did not want to offend anyone or for them to take critiques personally. Also, I needed to be tactful with the feedback, to my dancers, because I did not want my friends to take something more negatively than I intended and did not want them to hold a grudge outside of the rehearsal space. I have also noticed quite a difference, in my approach, when I am teaching high school aged dancers; I am much more strict and demanding. Although I still try to maintain a positive and fun atmosphere, at the same time I am more apt to bring the hammer down on them.

Now it is important to remember that I am not negatively critiquing my dancers, or myself, for the previously discussed actions toward me. I am just stating that I believe it is curious and important to notice the politics of such actions even within a rehearsal setting. The atmosphere, surrounding my dance sessions, was more of a democracy than I had anticipated. I believe that once I came to this realization I discovered how democracy, so to speak, facilitated a more satisfying atmosphere and made the final product a more dynamic and fulfilling one.

Speaking of democracy— a concept important to my dance work as well as to my life—brings me to the notions of: democracy in life, democracy in politics, and even democracy of the body. As trained dancers, we tend to emphasize the mobility of our legs, hip joints, and even our arms more so than any other body parts. While I was receiving feedback from Stevie Oakes, visiting assistant professor at The College at Brockport, she expressed curiosity regarding the notion of democracy of the body and told me to think

about it a little more. Due to her recommendation, I discovered that I have utilized another part of the body, of equal value, in my dance. In my piece, I also emphasize mobility of the neck joint in an attempt to give this part of the body equal value to the legs, hips and arms. Placing emphasis on another body part has made the movement richer, due to the fact that the entire body is working as a whole. Similarly, if an individual or a group of people who may not appear to be as valued by society is given an opportunity to stand out and grow, then the result is the generation of self-worth and value which contributes to their well being as well as to our society's, on a grand scale, thus making for a richer community.

One of the most fulfilling rehearsals occurred when I was in the midst of videotaping under the direction of my brother— Thomas F. Mahon III who has earned a bachelor's degree from SUNY Plattsburgh in Communications and Film Production. I gathered footage as my dancers performed my piece. Under my brother's artistic guidance, he suggested that I get unusual angles of them, as they performed, so that he had a wide variety of shots to work with, during the editing process. The end result was a promotional video used to advertise my dance work for Scholars Day and the Hartwell/Dance Concert. During the filming, I thought that it would be an appropriate time for me to ask my cast what "popular sovereignty" meant to them and what they thought about it in terms of our showing of the movie "V for Vendetta" during our movie night. This movie which is based on Alan Moore's political graphic novel strongly demonstrates popular sovereignty and the power of people banding together (V for Vendetta).

Before our process began, none of my dancers were exceptionally well versed in political science; however, throughout our rehearsals and discussions regarding "corporate

sovereignty”, influenced by Bernie Sanders, what came out of their mouths when I interviewed them was astounding. I was so proud that through witnessing another art form, and being submerged in a political piece themselves, how much political ideology they obtained from it. Then even further they expressed that they truly believed that what we were doing in this dance piece is important to society. They also stated that they felt that it is important for people to see our dance piece performed. This was the most wonderful compliment they could have paid me.

I have a personal political background from interning in Washington D.C., our nation’s capital, as well as having been submerged in SUNY Brockport’s political science department, over the past three years. It was astonishing to me that some of my dancer’s thoughts and words were more profound than my own. I was very proud of them and how far they had come in their political thinking. For instance, one of my dancers, Lexi Hills, stated essentially that she is coming to terms with the fact that something is skewed with the distribution of power in this country; and that often times, when individuals are in power, they gravitate toward corruption. For this reason, she was unsure whether or not changing a system or electing new politicians would change the ultimate problem of abuses due to the fact that people will be people. Also, when specifically asked about popular sovereignty my entire cast either thought it was an ideal of hope not yet possessed or presently it was guided independence being a misconception and masking control.

The primary reason that I was so happy about the rehearsal, recording interviews of my cast, was because they were thinking about and commenting on political concepts which they would not have necessarily thought of without having been involved in the

creation of this dance work. When audiences see the excerpt or the full length work I wish for them to have a similar experience. Invoking thought provoking material is the point of why and how I create what I do.

According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary popular sovereignty is, “a doctrine in political theory that government is created by and subject to the will of the people” (*Merriam-Webster*). This literal sense of the political concept does not exist in present day society as the forefathers may have intended. Maya Gonzalez states this definition during my full thesis work –presented on Scholars Day [April 9, 2014]. When I initially looked it up and read it at the beginning of my process it was eye opening because in all actuality it is nonexistent in present day politics. This may be due to the current size of our country or the way in which society operates, presently, but still shocking nonetheless. My point of including this spoken definition in my dance piece is to prompt the audience into thinking about how far our country has strayed away from its literal definition.

When I began the creative process for my thesis project in January of 2013, I had already put a lot of thought into the verbal text that I wished to incorporate into my dance work. I was quite inspired by the concepts as well as the direct quotes from Bernie Sanders’, United States Senator from the state of Vermont, book *The Speech*. The statistics which he presented pertaining to Exxon Mobile and the notion of popular sovereignty seemed to be contrasting elements that would aid in my physical depiction of how corporate sovereignty cripples the notion of popular sovereignty, also known as “We the People...” in the Constitution of the United States of America.

Manifesting these concepts into the movement was a far more challenging task. I wanted the concept to be accessible to the general public but still not be so literal. Simultaneously, it was important that I kept my artistry intact. As part of my process, I broke up my nine dancers, including myself, into two different groups within the work. One was essentially “the people” in the statement “We the People” and the other represented United States corporations. I purposefully made the corporation group larger in number so there was already a sense of overpowering domination just by the mere fact that there were more bodies in one group than the other. A distinct difference, which I instilled in their actual movement, was apparent in the qualities possessed by each of the groups. Group A, “the people”, had qualities of fluid movement, being less prescribed, and giving them more freedom on how they went about executing it. I gave them a phrase and then I let them have a structured improvisation within that. I wanted to give them some sense of choice and opportunity within the actual work so they were given the ability to show their genuine individual choices. This was demonstrated particularly in section one with the “Opening” track from Linkin Park’s Reanimation Album. It was important to me that my choreography methods matched the specific groups.

In terms of Group B, the corporate group, I made specific regimented movement. The phrases that this group performed were expansive, angular, linear, as well as dynamically changing. I wanted their power on stage to be evident from the moment they started moving— or even the intent that Robin Wonka and Zach Frazee had in stillness. I wanted Group B’s presence to be commanding continuously so I gave them specific prescribed movements. It even turned out that their movements unintentionally possessed militaristic qualities. This unintentional quality attached to Group B seemed to potentially

result in multiple meanings. Due to this, it could even be perceived as if the military or police became involved in restricting or controlling the protests and movements of the New Left when people were practicing their first amendment rights.

Various rehearsals were spent on the character development and intent of each of the groups. Within this group, Robin Wonka's character could be considered the CEO of the representative corporation which I generated on stage. She was a catalyst throughout the work often "talking at" and directing other members of Group B but even more so talking at Gonzalez's character specifically. Through much of the piece Wonka's character has a fixed gaze on her. She interacts in a more direct dialogue towards the end while Maya Gonzalez is giving her Exxon Mobile advisory. During this time Robin has a "freak out solo" making powerful, expansive, fast, and crazy movement drawing from previous vocabulary. Almost in a sense she was "shouting" what she, and the rest of her group, had been telling Group A throughout the piece. At the end of Robin's solo, she is hovered over Maya Gonzalez literally looking down on her having a threatening intimidating presence with her final attempt of suppressing her individual voice.

The interactions between these two groups were probably the most interesting undertaking of the entire process. Maya Gonzalez's trajectory became a major proponent within the work. Maya is the last dancer in Group A to stick to her original movement choices throughout the largest portion of the piece. In a sense, Gonzalez's character could be deemed as being a protestor. All of the other members of her group succumbed to the movement styles of Group B, the corporations, almost seeming to be manipulated by them. Maya faces her own battles with going in and out of the movement styles of Group B as they

dominate the movement through all of the other dancers. Her ability to speak even dissipated in the middle of that work having Group B, the “corporation”, silence her right before everyone on stage joined in unison succumbing to Group B’s movement. All she could muster was the impetus to speak having no words or sounds actually come out. This overtaking of Group B’s movement was meant to symbolize how corporations control a wide range of decisions made which affect the individual citizens of the United States. This notion portrays how the concept of popular sovereignty gradually dissipates demonstrating how the action of voting with one’s dollar and supporting corporations holds greater importance than voting in the booth for the politicians who will do what is best for society. These corporations who offer their financial support are able to play puppet master to the politicians knowing that their funding could be pulled out from underneath them if their voting record does not match up with those of the corporate supporters.

Part II:
David Dorfman Dance
Case Study

DAVID DORFMAN DANCE CASE STUDY

David Dorfman Dance has been a company of interest to my life recently. Due to the fact that I have attended two David Dorfman Dance performances, I thought that it would be beneficial to visit the **daviddorfmandance.org** website. On this website there were various tabs— one being “repertory”, or choreography. In this tab, a piece entitled *Underground* was discussed. This piece was inspired by the 1960s. It delves into political activism and the activities of the Weather Underground, more specifically. This dance tries to answer the questions of: when and/or how can activism morph into the act of terrorism? And are the acts of killing and destruction ever justifiable in our society or the world we live in? For instance, many Americans were cheering in the streets when Osama Bin Laden was taken out and murdered, but by acting in such retaliation are we terrorists ourselves or are we justified in gaining pleasure out of such an act? These questions are ones that I toss and turn with at night. This website relates to my thesis because it has helped me to think about possible pathways to travel down throughout the process of the creation of my political thesis dance (*Underground*).

Watching an excerpt of *Underground*, on daviddorfmandance.org, was of great interest as it presented several bodies, on stage, wearing pedestrian clothing. The dancers, male and female, start repeating a phrase over and over again. From my perspective, it looked as if everyone was in their rightful place of being stuck on the assembly line which is life. Slowly within this excerpt, the viewer starts to see bodies drop out of repeating the phrase going into a side plank with their fists raised in the air, reminiscent of the Black Panther fists. Raja, one of the company members, starts reciting text about being angry and

about change which he is trying to bring about in order to better his community, but he is angry because action does not seem to be taken to benefit the people. The text cuts out and dancers start to trickle off stage leaving only a duet (*Underground*).

The Weathermen, of the Weather Underground, were a group of American extreme left-wing radicals founded on the Ann Arbor campus of the University of Michigan, in 1969, as a faction of Students for a Democratic Society (SDS). Their goal was to create an underground revolutionary party to overthrow the United States Government. This group disagreed with peaceful protest strategies. It was involved in the planned bombings of several government buildings. So that they did not cause physical harm, they issued evacuation warnings along with information on their target and its relevance to their protest. No one was ever killed in their acts of property destruction. They wanted action immediately but due to the destructive way in which they chose to invoke change some looked upon them as a terrorist group. This group was on a mission to carve their name into the oak tree that was the United States. They justified their drastic actions due to the fact that they wanted to gain support from others and be noticed for attempting to make the United States a better place. Even presently it can be debated, especially in college level classes such as American Foreign and Domestic Policy, whether certain groups are terrorists or activists (*The Weathermen Underground*).

Through Dorfman's dance work *Underground*, he clearly demonstrated with his dancers the anger and frustration that can result when people want to break the chain of society when they believe that certain social norms may not be right. This depiction of mankind through dance could be argued to be clearer to an audience than if one was to read a political science textbook. In a sense there is a reenactment not necessarily of a

specific occurrence from a group but of ideals which the human race continue to struggle with even today. Having this come to life before one's eyes and by actually witnessing the struggle these dancers face—especially due to the fact that David Dorfman generally presents human beings doing taxing movement that is perfectly imperfect as opposed to something that is so practiced and effortless looking— as an audience member you feel as if you were brought to various times in history when these feelings, hardships, and politics were occurring. It may even arise in oneself a moment when you yourself had similar feelings (Underground).

David Dorfman Dance superbly brings political strife to its audiences. During the Spring 2013 Residency which David Dorfman conducted at The College at Brockport, there was a talk back session, February 28 2013, called the Politics in Dance. During this talk back session, Dorfman stated that in terms of relation to the “terrorists” of the Weather Underground that he related to the honesty which they demonstrated with their actions as well as their beliefs. He wondered whether people take responsibility for themselves and communicate with each other about it? He wishes to provide a spectrum through his work in terms of bodies, ages, levels, pain, situations, and loss. With his political work he wishes to, more so, embrace moments and steer clear of unnecessary trauma as well as to attempt not to say exactly how the work should feel but leave it open for individual interpretation. This brief portion of the talk back captured what Dorfman deems as important in his dances. He believes in human beings ability to make choices and essentially be in the driver's seat of how they ride through the work. He seems to be completely for people's choices in terms of democracy. He simply builds a political platform for them to think off of (Dorfman, The Politics in Dance).

Witnessing David Dorfman's Work

David Dorfman is an extremely open and inviting man whose work is not without risk though. He warps his audience members into places that they may face, within the scope of their daily lives, for which they generally do not want to revisit. Dorfman brings a sense of democracy through the collaborations he creates with people in the mixed media field as well as with live musicians. All of these parts seemed equal to the greater whole, by bringing a greater sense of democracy through dance to the forefront. The democracy of the process, as touched upon previously in my process, shows how there is politics in the final product as well as in the journey to the end result. His piece *Come and Back Again* utilized props, dialogue, athleticism, as well as minimalism. On February 28, 2013 and November 1, 2013 I was able to witness two different versions of this dance. Witnessing this work was watching a slice of the earth unfold within an hour and twenty minute timeframe. I went on a rollercoaster ride of pain, love, death, and life. The changes that were made to this work brought the grit of the world to the forefront in an even more earth shattering manner. Dorfman's trajectory, in the dance work, demonstrated how one man's journey can truly relate to the entire world (Dorfman 2013).

In his dance piece *Come and Back Again*, Dorfman showed how the human race is struggling through life together. Popular sovereignty is a notion that should aid us in breaking this chain of suffering, but would human nature exist without it? I believe Dorfman truly wants to ignite a fire within his audience members in order to make them think about and take action toward achieving the betterment of humanity as well as the politics within their own lives. He wants us to push through our own limits as human beings, to go beyond what we deem possible, and to act out as "hard" as we can for our own

survival and for the betterment of our human race, governments, and life situations which we find ourselves in (Dorfman 2013).

The estimated hour and twenty minute long piece starts with all of the dancers on stage making passes across the space from one another. They all seem to be happy doing the taxing phrase work of cross lateral battements into a swirl of spirals and turns. They are together in happiness showing how when individuals are united they can perform amazing tasks, such as the rigorous movement the dancers are performing on stage. However, as the dance gets stripped down and as the dancers get stripped apart the issues that torture people's minds, when they have too much time to think, seems to come up in the dance. This opening section of the work seems to have a sense of being democratic. It demonstrates showing the politics on stage as the piece progresses and issues seems to arise (Dorfman 2013).

As the work progressed, I also found it extremely powerful when dancers Raja and Kendra discussed when they wanted to die and why. All of the scenarios presented for the various ages made sense due to their verbal logic. All of their reasons for dying at a young age - to never screw up and dying at old ages - to fix their screw ups was beautiful and gave me a great deal of cognitive dissonance due to the fact that all scenarios made sense. So what was the best answer? When is it, actually, a good time to die? As they delved deeper into their duet, it was intriguing how their intertwined bodies seemed to become one, as they literally wrestled with the notion of death and when the best time to die would be. The "blur" of their intertwining movements reminded me of the "blur" that is life, or the notion of how life can flash before your eyes before you meet your death (Dorfman 2013).

Another part that stood out to me was a structured improvisation that the company performed with Dorfman on a laid out floor. They seem to have a follow the leader mentality making the movements quick in step as well as incorporating athletic elements. When all of a sudden David Dorfman stopped his movement the dancers looked perplexed. Karl Rogers, company member, goes up to him and repeats a jump, spiral, tuck and roll movement several times that he had done with Dorfman before. Rogers performed this movement faster and faster when finally Dorfman holds his hand out to make Rogers stop. To me this sequences was about guiding people but coming to terms with the fact the leader may not always be there. It seemed as if he wanted them to be able to make individual choices and to build off of them. Dorfman waves good bye leaving those he had led. This to me resembles popular sovereignty. Giving people the chance to make their own choices and become their own leaders (Dorfman 2013).

One of the most incredible moments took place in between the performance ending and a talk back session beginning at the November 1, 2013 showing. There was a man who had never seen a dance performance before in his entire life. He asked me if I had seen this company perform previously and I said, "yes my professor performs in it". He proceeded to tell me that it was his first dance performance ever and that he was completely surprised and shocked. He said that it had been an incredible experience and that he was entertained, he laughed, it made him think, and he thought it was intellectual. It made me so pleased that a middle aged man could have such an appreciation of dance and that he got the entire message of how it can impact society, humanity, politics, and the world at large. Even more so I was pleased that he was able to see the legitimacy of this art form. Political dance can influence the masses. This idea came alive when the middle aged man shared his

experience with me after the performance. Personally, I laughed, I cried, and I thought incredible amounts about my own life. The trenches humanity gets dragged through, on a daily occurrence, is awe inspiring and how we choose to push back against these trenches or just keep our face dragging through the mud is even more awe inspiring to me. Political injustices occur and sometimes human beings may not know how to process such occurrences or how to act out. Seeing these human beings on stage go through it I believe helps us process our own ideals and standing in the world (Dorfman 2013).

Overall witnessing David Dorfman Dance in the two concerts was an emotional rollercoaster. He brings the grit of humanity to the forefront at times making the audience contemplate their own lives. I was simply inspired. Dance is and can be political! Dance can bring about change in the world unlike a written piece of paper or a peer reviewed journal. Dance abstracts life and brings humanity to it in an aesthetically comprehensible way. Dorfman did not wish to show perfect spectacles on stage. He simply wanted to show human beings. Showing how they are capable of extraordinary things but in addition that they are not perfect and that life can be a struggle and horrible things can happen. I am honored just to know this man and to have worked with him. He blows my mind with his genuine nature. He is the epitome of what humanity should aspire to be. He has changed my life and done so through dance (Dorfman 2013).

The power of visual-works and dancers and dance makers is vast. It is my personal belief that most scholars do not give dancers and choreographers enough credit for our works and the messages which we project to our audiences. Some view dance as a means of entertainment only for the pleasure of its audience but not for the making of meaningful

social statements. It is the opinion of most, whom I have come into contact with, that dance works are created only for the pleasure of others and the entertainment factor is merely a chapter in the book of what is significant about dance. I truly believe that we harness much more power than most of us even realize.

Capturing every moment of the Dorfman experience on paper is an impossible feat; although, when one reads about “movements” throughout American history, for example, they cannot capture every single minute detail either but the strong points and the essence of the cause stick out and continue to be passed on from generation to generation.

Part III: Political Movements

POLITICAL MOVEMENTS

It is interesting that in academia, or at least when I have discussed in my political science classes the topic of my thesis, most think dance is trite in terms of political science— believing that it inhabits a completely different wavelength. When in fact all along, we have been studying dance throughout history and its political importance has changed societal standards ever since the beginning of time. This is evident particularly during the United States' Civil Rights Movement which took place during the 1960's.

If said movements had not occurred and those in power had not been influenced by a visual of bodies banning and dancing together the world we live in, I would speculate, would be a grim one. What the rights of mankind— especially in the United States of America— have achieved through these movements, or dances, is extraordinary. People coming together and moving has changed the way we think about our politics so to see dance as irrelevant to the field of political science or lack of importance it has to the world at large is ignorant at best.

Mark Franko a scholar who received his PhD in French from Columbia University and danced professionally before becoming a dance historian, theorist, and choreographer stated, "It is justifiable and necessary to speak of dance as political in circumstances that are conjunctural, that is, in circumstances where forms of movement and socio-political life take shape simultaneously if apparently independently. Dance frequently attains heightened cultural visibility at such moments, which makes it productive to examine within the terms of our problematic. Dance can also intervene in political considerations in a proto-conjunctural context. Rather than being quintessentially visible because culturally central, it may in such cases be highly marginal and invisible. Since the 17th Century, dance

served to fashion and project images of monarchy, national identity, gendered identity, racialized identity, and ritualized identity. But in most of these areas it has also demonstrated the ability to stand apart, acting as a critical theory of society. It goes without saying that I would consider both functions as political” (Franko).

The study of Political Science is often the forum for analyzing movements which have resulted in revolution throughout American history, such as the Movements of the New Left. For instance, *The Movements of the New Left, 1950-1975*, is a book that begins with the understanding of various social movements which took place during that time period for collective change in the politics, the government, and the societal practices of the United States of America (Gosse vii).

While studying American History in elementary school, we learned about such movements, as the Civil Rights Movement. I believed that these actions were brought to the forefront by extremely brave people. Until I became better educated in high school and even more so in college, I did not realize that all of these movements were clearly calculated and arguably choreographed.

Rosa Parks was a National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) activist in Montgomery Alabama. As a young student, I truly believed that one day, on a whim, she decided not to give up her seat per the bus driver’s request to a white male. My elementary self was however misguided because this act was clearly calculated by the NAACP. On December 1, 1955, Rosa Parks made history through her site specific dance of staying in her seat and not sacrificing it to a white male. If she had performed such a dance in a different location the meaning would have been lost and her intent would have completely dissipated (Gosse 6).

Some background on site specific dances is that they are dances, or a series of movements, which are made particularly for a specific site as opposed to a typical theatre or stage. Additionally, other criteria for site specific dance works dictate that they are dependent on said site. It could not occur and have the same impact on another site or location. The site of such works is interdependent to the site in which it is performed. Rosa Parks' act, that was part of the Civil Rights Movement, would have lost all of its meaning and intent for the statement she was making if she performed said "dance" in another location. Site specific locations, such as in this case, tend to have higher stakes. The other players in the piece such as the bus driver and the white male were all involved in said dance whether they knew it or not. This calculated and choreographed movement by Rosa Parks was the catalyst which lit the fire under the Civil Rights Movement.

Individuals who do not study dance may be confused regarding how the act of sitting in a chair could be considered a dance; however, it is important for the general public to realize that stillness is frequently used in dance and at times can be more powerful and meaningful than vigorous movement. For instance in my own thesis work in the opening section Robin Wonka and Zachary Frazee are in stillness for about three minutes while Group A is navigating their individuality. This ominous presence that they have, even in stillness, makes their presence quite clear. Without them being present in the opening scene would have my work lose some of its own message and connectivity.

The term "movement" or "movements" according to the Merriam Webster Dictionary means: "the act or process of moves; especially: change of place or position or posture" and "a series of organized activities working toward an objective; also: an organized effort to promote or attain an end" (*Merriam-Webster*). These definitions are

quite synonymous with dance. Dance can be choreographed as a series of movements to make a phrase which can change place in space and in the position of the body. Also dance can be task based having objectives to be reached in the body or objectives for the body to convey a greater meaning or simply to spark the audiences' brains.

Susan Leigh Foster, a choreographer, dancer, scholar, and Professor in the Department of World Arts and Cultures at UCLA, stated, "When individuals choose to participate in these kinds of political demonstrations they commit themselves to physical action, whatever form it takes. Whether they become the reflexive body sitting at the lunch counter, the campy body lying on Wall Street, or the global body blockading Downtown Seattle, they choose to spend their day constructing [choreographing] physical interference, and this engagement with the physical imbues them with a deepened sense of personal agency. ... the process of creating political interference calls forth a perceptive and responsive physicality that, everywhere along the way, deciphers the social and then choreographs an imagine alternative. As they fathom injustice, organize to protest, craft a tactics, and engage in action these bodies read what is happening and articulate their imaginative rebuttal. In so doing they demonstrate to themselves and all those watching that something can be done. Could this be why they are called political "movements"?" (Foster 2003). Foster acknowledges that there is a broadened definition of dance and that dance whether on the concert stage or in public spaces in terms of these movements can in fact be political. She realizes that in past and present choreographed movements for social change are political and are in fact dance.

The Politics on Stage

Similarly to what I have done, politics can enter what is a proscenium stage as well. Whether a dance creator is in a professional company or refining one's skills on an undergraduate level dance is and can be political. In Mark Franko's article *Dance and Political: States of Exception* he discusses the fact that renowned choreographer Mark Morris "publically denounces the validity of a connection between dance and the political". Franko believes that, "His denial surely has something to do with the politics required to undergird his own canonical reputation as a choreographer" (Franko 5). He continues on in stating that he believes that dance and politics live closely together.

As Franko delves deeper into this notion he wishes to suggest to his readers, "that the representation of political reality itself is what allows us to understand aesthetics precisely as historical insight. Power cannot function outside of the representational field, and representation, along with its crises, is an aesthetic matter" (Franko 14). Franko brings out in his writing that we are in fact an aesthetic society. For instance, the saying that 'a picture is worth 1,000 words' deems this as true. Unfortunately, it is curious that even though as human beings we deem the visual and aesthetic aspects of life as crucial components to how we live and operate as artists, which culminate such culture in society, are not necessarily legitimized, or are held at as high of an esteem as a doctor or lawyer may be in American culture (Franko).

Within his own work, written and choreographed, Franko thinks, "The intertwining of research and writing with choreography and performance is, for me, also a political move, one in which dance accedes to the discourse of its own interpretation. ... Dance when conscious of its own politics, stands in the most unmediated or immediate relation to

itself.... The choreographic relationship between dance and the political becomes critical in relation to its own history. Methodologies of dance and the political could be construed in this context as interdisciplinary” (Franko 14). This term interdisciplinary in this statement is key. I truly believe that in academia dance departments as well as political science departments should have intermixing classes.

The New Dance Group

The New Dance Group was founded in 1932. This group of left-wing students from the New York Wigman School proclaimed that, “Dance is a Weapon of the Class Struggle.” They were adamant about promoting socialism through their art. Also to promote this notion, that is socialism, they offered inexpensive dance classes to professional workers, and children being very community based making it so anyone who desired to learn could. Socialism by definition is, “a political and economic theory of social organization that advocates that the means of production, distribution, and exchange should be owned or regulated by the community as a whole” (*Merriam Webster*). Even though I believe that my creative work was much more along the lines of democracy their work seemed to correlate with my own (100 Treasures).

In a specific choreographic work of the New Dance Group entitled “Time is Money” by Jane Dudley, a solo is presented having the soundscape of a ticking clock and a voice talking about various struggles in life and more crucially the struggles with physical labor and the working class in general. This seemed quite applicable to the aspirations they held in regard to socialism. They seemed to be demonstrating the frustration that people felt when they worked so incredibly diligently and hard but they did not receive the equal or communal compensation they believed they deserved. Such text as, “ragged suicide turns

and twists” seems to imply how hard work with not enough in exchange for it drives one to desperate thoughts such as suicide (Time is Money) .

Within this piece, intended or not, I found the equality of the use of the body to be interesting. The body as a whole seemed to have equal value. The mouth was even being involved especially in a segment where said soloist was on the floor in side plank where her mouth was more active than one would stereotypically associate with the dance form. Throughout the movement struggle is evident through the bound flow efforts that the soloist possessed on the vertical and horizontal plane. They were overtly political with their work. They deemed that the use of more literal text would aid the general audience in obtaining a firmer grasp on the frustrations said group portrayed corresponding to the politics of the physical movement. Being accessible to getting their point across seemed to hold value (Time is Money).

In my own choreographic work, “All for One, and None for All”, I chose to use accessible, or more literal, text as well. Having been so moved and inspired by the ideals of Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders, I knew that I wanted to use some of his own language within my dance work as previously discussed. The Exxon Mobile example seemed important to me due to the way in which it linked in my own brain by relating to popular sovereignty, or rather lack thereof. Selecting the excerpt, which I incorporated into my dance work, explicitly stated that the federal tax responsibilities of this profitable corporation were avoided while individual citizens still shouldered the responsibility thus creating an imbalance of rights that should be deemed as unconstitutional. I consciously decided to put the definition of popular sovereignty in the very beginning of my work and the Exxon Mobile plugs later on so that audience members would be able to chew on this

notion of popular sovereignty and compare and contrast their ideals and thoughts about that political concept with the movement occurring on stage and the discrepancies in rights in terms of corporations in America in general— using Exxon Mobile as an example.

Conclusion

Throughout the course of history, dance pioneers have been pushing the envelopes of what dance could be from *pau de deux* in traditional ballet to more postmodern movements of stillness. Mark Franko and Susan Leigh Foster do a superb job of showing their readers that dance can be political even if dance is not on a concert stage. Through a broadened sense of the definition of choreography, dance has been given a greater scope in terms of calculated movement in relation to time and space. Whether it is an organized march on Wall Street or a performance of *Sleeping Beauty* by the American Ballet Theatre (ABT) politics, culture, and history are imbedded within both genres. In terms of my own work— consciously having a political agenda—dance can be a way to instill change similar to the Movements of the New Left. Acting or dancing can have an enormous impact on humanity and our way of thinking—American history has demonstrated this.

Dance should be legitimized as being political regardless whether it is on a bus or on a proscenium stage. Artists, such as David Dorfman, are able to present political ideas and provoke thought from their audiences. One can make a political statement by simply suggesting their values by the compliment of bodies they choose to place on stage. The act of dancing can absolutely be political— even on “the stage” that is the academia of political science— and it is in fact up to par with the formulas and systems that coincide with the processes of what dance is and can become. In one of my favorite pieces of fiction *V for Vendetta* written by Alan Moore character V states “A revolution without dancing is a

revolution not worth having!" Dance is and can be a legitimate political act and should be widely respected in such a manner.

Works Cited

- "100 Treasures - New Dance Group." *100 Treasures - New Dance Group*. N.p., n.d. Web. 25 Apr. 2014.
- Dorfman, David. *The David Dorfman Company*. 2013. Dancers. Repertory, The College at Brockport & The University of Maryland.
- Dorfman, David. "Repertory." *Repertory*. N.p., n.d. Web. Oct. 2012.<
<http://www.daviddorfmandance.org/repertory.php>>.
- Foster, Susan Leigh. "Choreographies of Protest." *Theatre Journal* 55.3 (2003): 395-412. Print.
- Franko, Mark. "Dance and the Political: States of Exception." *Dance Research Journal*; 38 (2006): 3-17. *Proquest Direct*. Web. 2012.<
<http://docs.google.com/a/u.brockport.edu/viewer?a=v&pid=gmail&attid=0.1.0&thid=139c486fa5457758&mt=application/pdf&url=https://mail.google.com/mail/?ui%3D%26ik%3Dd3fd46014e%26view%3Datt%26th%3D139c486fa5457758%26attid%3D0.1.0%26disp%3Dsafe%26zw&sig=AHIEtbSDB9LZnQB31Dp1BV-seVyjA2ZHyQ>>.
- Gosse, Van. *The Movements of the New Left, 1950-1975: A Brief History with Documents*. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2005. Print.
- Merriam-Webster*. Merriam-Webster, n.d. Web. Jan.-Feb. 2014.
- Sanders, Bernard. *The Speech: A Historic Filibuster on Corporate Greed and the Decline of Our Middle Class*. New York: Nation, 2011. Print.
- "The Weathermen Underground -- "You Don't Need a Weatherman to Know Which Way the Wind Blows." -Bob Dylan." *The Weathermen Underground -- "You Don't Need a Weatherman to Know Which Way the Wind Blows." -Bob Dylan*. N.p., n.d. Web. 27 Apr. 2014.

Dorfman, David, Karl Rogers, and Maura Keefe. *The Politics in Dance*. Hartwell Theatre, Brockport. 28 Feb. 2014. Lecture.

Time Is Money. Dir. Jane Dudley. *YouTube*. YouTube, 26 Aug. 2009. Web. 26 Apr. 2014.

"Underground." *Www.daviddorfmandance.org*. David Dorfman Dance, n.d. Web. 27 Feb. 2013.

V for Vendetta. Dir. Alan Moore, David Lloyd, Steve Whitaker, Siobhan Dodds, Jeannie O'Connor, Steve Craddock, Elitta Fell, and Tony Weare. 2005. DVD.