

The Alexander Technique Applied to Dance and the Choreographic Process:  
Freeing Physical Expression from Trauma-Based Tension

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### **Abstract**

Ballet, contemporary, and modern dancers have expressed incurring trauma during their training and professional dance experiences; in a 2020 survey, 41% of professional dancers and 30% of ballet students reported experiencing or witnessing sexually inappropriate behavior in their respective workplaces and schools (DDP). This is just one example of a potential source of trauma for dancers. The physiological effects of trauma cause physical effects, creating tension in a dancer's body. Dance relies on physical expression, the expression of thought and feeling through movement, to connect with the audience. Trauma-based tension inhibits a dancer's range of physical expression and connection to the audience. Therefore, the release of trauma-based tension is particularly relevant to the dance community. The goal of this research is to apply the Alexander Technique to the choreographic process, with the intent of freeing the body of trauma-based tension and exploring its effect on physical expression. This Creative Thesis will culminate in the presentation of an original choreographic piece, that explores the physical expression of the emotional release of trauma.

**The Alexander Technique Applied to Dance and the Choreographic Process:  
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**Introduction**

The application of The Alexander Technique to dance and the choreographic process is a vast yet undeveloped research topic. Even more so is the additional focus on how the release of trauma-based tension affects physical expression. This thesis will define and establish trauma as a dance-specific issue, uncover the psychophysical effects of trauma on the body, explore tension's effect on physical expression, offer an introduction to The Alexander Technique and its application in dance, and culminate in an original choreographic piece. This research is not trying to deal with trauma itself, but to use the Alexander Technique to mitigate the psychophysical effect of tension resulting from a dancer's experience of trauma.

**Defining Trauma**

It is an incorrect, albeit common belief that trauma can only be defined as, “the result of a deeply catastrophic event, like severe abuse or neglect” (LePera 41). However, in her book “How to Do the Work” Dr. Nicole LePera proposes a broader definition of trauma. She highlights that the Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) test, used by mental health professionals to assess their clients' level of trauma, has no questions about racism, or other kinds of bigotry and bias. Furthermore, LaPera treated many clients who exhibited signs of trauma and yet scored a 0 on the ACE test or could not point out traumatic events in their lives. She concludes that the ACEs framework cannot fully assess an individual's range of emotional and spiritual traumas, “[it] doesn't even take into account the myriad of ways that the outside environment- really, society at large- can traumatize us” (44). According to LePera a more accurate definition of trauma includes, “a diverse range of overwhelming experiences or, as the

neurologist Peter Scaer defined it, any negative life event ‘that occurs in a state of relative helplessness’” (44).

A parent’s upbringing has a large influence on the level of trauma a child experiences, even well-intentioned parents may, subconsciously, condition their children under the influence of their wounds. One example of generational trauma, as observed by Dr. LaPera, is a parent who suffered from resource scarcity as a child. Manifesting in a parent who defines parenting success as providing for basic needs often leaving little energy left to engage with their children’s emotional needs. According to LaPera’s research, this disconnect with a parental figure and subsequent invalidation of a child’s emotions make it difficult for children to properly regulate their emotions and learn how to trust their intuition. It may also result in their future being decided before their talents and passions have been fully developed, resulting in unfulfilled adults. Utilizing an updated definition of trauma infers many people have or will experience trauma without recognizing it as such. Because of this Dr. LaPera establishes trauma as universal:

We all carry unresolved trauma. As we’ve seen, it’s not necessarily the severity of the event itself but our response to it that determines the imprint it makes . . . The first step toward healing the mind and body is knowing what you’re dealing with- identifying the unresolved trauma. (59)

If trauma is universal, it can then be asserted that many dancers carry some form of unresolved trauma from their personal lives. In addition to trauma from their personal lives, many dancers also experience trauma as a direct result of dance culture or the physical act of dancing.

### **Trauma as a Dance-Specific Issue**

Dance-originated trauma often goes unnoticed and untreated due to the cultural status quo. In dance cultures of the European aesthetic particularly it is commonly believed that a

dancer isn't committed or strong enough if they cannot bear the trauma that has become an industry standard. Sarah Farnsley, a professional ballet dancer in the U.S. and Europe, choreographer, and dancer advocate, speaks about the consequences of this mindset in professional ballet culture.

A dancer's expendability is reinforced throughout her training and into her career, and she is always acutely aware of how quickly she could lose the 'privilege' of employment . . . [and is] expected to make physical and personal sacrifices for the company that are rarely reciprocated by the organization which employs her. If she becomes injured, or simply displeases those at the front of the room, her contract may be terminated. (25)

In her 2019 article "Big Little Secrets: Traumatic Experiences in the Dance World" Clinical and Dance psychologist Jo-Anne La Flèche identifies four main sources of dancers' trauma: self-abuse: normalization of discomfort, pain and injury, director/teachers' verbal abuse, sexual abuse: The dancing body as an object, and secondhand trauma: Portraying roles that involve extreme violence, sexuality and/or emotional distress.

The topic of dance-related trauma is an ongoing discourse and since this article's time of publication concerned parents, teachers, and other advocates have been diligently working to change the status quo. There are wonderful advocacy groups like Youth Protection Advocates in Dance (YPAD) and Dance Awareness: No Child Exploited (DA:NCE) who strive to protect child dancers from exploitation and trauma. However, young adult dancers may still be negatively affected by the trauma they incurred in their training 5-10 years ago (La Flèche). Therefore, an understanding of dancers' main sources of trauma and how it may continue to affect dancers negatively even years later, is valuable despite the positive changes that have been made.

### **Neglect of Physical Needs**

According to La Flèche, dancers often learn to deny their bodies' needs in the pursuit of their craft early on in their training. They repress their body's signs ignoring hunger cues, bleeding feet, sore

muscles, and more. This can manifest in dancing injuries, the development of eating disorders, or overworking the body to the point of exhaustion. Because this has been viewed as the status quo, “Many dancers feel insecure, so most of them won’t ask for a[n] overdue break, during a rehearsal; won’t express their pain nor take a day off, when needed” (La Flèche).

### **Verbal Abuse**

As confirmed by Dance/USA Task Force on Dancer Health via La Flèche’s article, dancers consistently report enduring verbal abuse from authority figures, including public comments on a dancer’s physicality or ability, and sexual remarks. This verbal abuse can aggravate eating disorders, sparking unhealthy relationships with food and resulting in malnourishment and severe weight loss.

Due to a power imbalance, dancers become victims of repeated verbal attacks that can remain in the psyche and cause damage for years, dancers are so easily replaceable, because the offer exceeds the demand. In order to maintain company position or job status *among the chosen few*, a dancer may become vulnerable to abuse. As a result of repeated verbal attacks, one may develop an overcritical inner voice and feel *never good enough*, despite objective success. (La Flèche)

Unlike visual artists, like painters or sculptors, a dancer’s body is her art. The line between critique of the art and critique of the artist as an individual is remarkably thinner than in other visual art mediums. This means verbal corrections, even those without malicious intent, can hold greater weight when impacting a dancer’s perception of their identity and body image.

### **Sexual Abuse**

Sexually traumatized dancers may experience an altered perception or disconnection from their bodies. In Tatum A. Schwartz and Dr. Amy Dellinger Page’s article, “Dance and the Violated Body: Trauma-Informed Framework for Dance in Non-Clinical Settings”, they study how sexual trauma can alter a dancer’s movement and interaction with dance spaces. Out of the 21 participants

they interviewed all of them expressed an altered perception of their bodies in relationship to space. Some participants reported a “shrinking back” from their bodies that they attributed to a dissociation between the mind and body (3).

Unfortunately, sexual abuse has been present in European aesthetic dance culture, dating back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century Paris Opera Ballet, the first professional theatrical ballet company. Where *le petits rats*, young, impoverished dancers in training, were encouraged to service *abonnés*, wealthy men subscribed to the opera house for special privileges. These *petits rats* were as young as six to eight years old. They were encouraged not only by the Opera itself but often by their mothers as well to “supplement their incomes and advance in the ranks at the Opera by offering sexual favors to the *abonnés*” (Coon). Though young dancers in the North American competitive dance circuit do not experience such graphic exploitation, they still suffer from premature sexualization.

In her 2023 article “‘In the Land of Dance’: Unpacking Sexualization and the Wellbeing of Girls in Competitive Dance”, Lisa Sandlos discusses the prevalence of sexualized choreography in competition dance across North America. Scanty costumes, sexual poses, and flirtatious expressions have become synonymous with competition dance, including genres like hip-hop, jazz, acro, lyrical, and even tap. During her participant observation fieldwork, she found that if dances in these genres are not sexually provocative, they will often suffer in the competition circuit. According to Sandlos these learned behaviors can negatively affect young dancers for the rest of their lives. Through her fieldwork and interviews with several concerned mothers, she concluded that:

Early and prolonged reiterations of sexualized movements may, over time, become ingrained in girl dancers’ bodies, psyches, and self-identities so that self-objectification can also begin to occur and be perpetuated from within. In this sense, girl dancers who are



sexualized may be in danger of bearing the burden of a long-term struggle to know, express, and assert themselves as full subjects. (239)

Though many dance educators and parents are pushing back against the hyper-sexualization of child dancers, Sandlos' article is a testament to the work still needed to end the hyper-sexualization of young girls in competition dance.

Historically men have made up the majority of leaders in classical and ballet-influenced companies (Farnsley). In April of 2023, Dance Data Project (DDP) published a report analyzing the gender distribution of leadership of ballet and classically influenced professional performing companies. According to a DDP webpage article, the report examined 198 of the largest ballet and classically influenced companies to gain a fuller understanding of the dance leadership ecosystem. Of the 198 global artistic directors, DDP identified only 29% as women leaving 71% as men. According to DDP President and Founder Elizabeth Yntema they found that “the bigger the company, the more impact, the more likely it is to be led by a man, not just in the US- but globally” (DDP). A large concern this power imbalance presents is the potential for sexual assault and harassment to go unchecked. A 2020 survey by Makeshift Company surveyed 400 respondents in pre-professional ballet schools and professional dance companies. 41% of professional dancers and 30% of ballet students reported experiencing or witnessing sexually inappropriate behavior in their respective workplaces and schools (DDP). Some victims are coerced into silence through the promise of lead roles or threatened with the ruination of their careers (La Flèche).

In recent years a wave of new efforts to combat exploitation have arisen. DDP has wonderful resources available on its website including advocacy groups, legal guidance, codes of conduct, and more. Though passionate members of the dance community are paving the way for the next generation, many dance advocacy groups with a focus on combatting sexual misconduct

did not exist a mere decade ago. DDP itself was established as a nonprofit in 2019, DA:NCE was founded in 2016, and the oldest of the three, YPAD, was founded in 2012. It is encouraging to see new efforts being made; however, dancers may still suffer from trauma they incurred years prior. Trauma can remain stored in a dancer's body for years and even decades after the traumatic incidents or experiences occurred (La Flèche).

### **Psychophysical Unity in Relation to Trauma**

There is no question that trauma affects the body negatively. Aside from physically traumatic experiences, traumatized individuals often experience somatic symptoms.

According to the Dutch psychiatrist and best-selling author, Dr. Bessel van der Kolk:

After trauma, the world is experienced with a different nervous system. The survivor's energy now becomes focused on suppressing inner chaos, at the expense of spontaneous involvement in their life. These attempts to maintain control over unbearable physiological reactions can result in a whole range of physical symptoms, including fibromyalgia, chronic fatigue, and other autoimmune diseases. This explains why it is critical for trauma treatment to engage the entire organism, body, mind, and brain. (82)

Unresolved trauma causes the nervous system to adapt, becoming hyper-vigilant and creating a near-constant state of fight or flight. "Once our immune system gets the signal that we're living in a near-constant threat state, it repeatedly sends out chemicals that cause inflammation throughout the body" (LaPera 69). Chronic inflammation can cause a plethora of issues, 75% to 95% of human diseases can be linked to stress and inflammation (Hanaway). Some results of chronic inflammation are joint stiffness, tendonitis, and muscle pain. A common symptom of inflammation is muscle tightness or tension. In summary, unresolved trauma triggers a near-perpetual state of fight or flight, which signals the nervous system to send out inflammation-causing chemicals,

resulting in body discomfort. In other words, trauma creates tension in the body. Muscular tension can restrict movement inhibiting a dancer's effectiveness in communicating emotion through their movement. Tension limits the range of physical expression, meaning using movement to express emotion by giving it a physical form.

### **The Effect of Trauma-Based Tension on Physical Expression**

Professor Michael Luger is a distinguished author and a researcher of the physical, psychological, behavioral, and aesthetic aspects of human expression. He equates tension to what he calls bound movement, "when the flow of the energy in the body is bound, muscular tension inhibits the body's movement", he explains that because of this, "the 'held' part of the body is unable to participate freely in the expression of thought and feeling" (Lugering 96). Dance is a visual and physical storytelling medium that relies on movement to communicate thought and feeling, making it a transcendent form of storytelling across different cultures and languages. Without words to tell the story the dancers' use of their bodies is paramount. Humans are gifted with the ability to draw conclusions from other's body language or movement in mere seconds if not instantaneously. This reading of body language and movement often occurs unconsciously, yet palpably affects human emotional thought and feeling. Suppose a dancer's range of physical expression is restricted, even minutely. In that case, it will affect the audience's understanding of the story. Luger says to effectively communicate thought and feeling the body must be free (of tension), "free-flowing movement patterns allow for each part of the body to integrate in full-bodied physical action . . . creat[ing] an ideal physical environment for the expression of thought and feeling" (Lugering 96). As previously established in this research a psychophysical symptom of trauma is often tension, and according to Luger tension can be understood as bound movement. As Luger stated, bound movement inhibits the physical range of expression.

Therefore, trauma can cause unnecessary bound movement that limits a dancer's range of physical expression. While there may be moments when bound movement is useful as a choreographic and storytelling device, it should not be the default state of a dancer. If we understand bound movement as muscular tension, and that this tension inhibits physical expression, it means freeing the body of tension is required to effectively communicate thought and feeling.

### **The Alexander Technique**

Dr. Fredrick Matthias Alexander, creator of the Alexander Technique, dedicated his life's work to discovering and teaching how to free the body of tension and maladaptive physical habits. The Alexander Technique is elusive in definition. It has been said by several students of Alexander, that it cannot be fully understood until it is physically experienced. According to the Society of Teachers of the Alexander Technique (STAT), it is a skill for self-development. It teaches self-awareness, "you learn to become aware of, and then gradually strip away, the habits of movement, tension and reaction that interfere with natural and healthy coordination" (STAT). It is a tool to re-establish the natural balance of the head, neck, and back, and is effective in relieving pain and stress. Trauma is a frequent and universal cause of tension, John Gray, author of *Your Guide to the Alexander Technique*, explains: "We all have traumas, difficult situations to cope with or worrying periods over our lives, and these can set up a great many harmful tension patterns in the body . . . almost as though we are carrying around a whole lifetime's problems in our poor, weary bodies." The Alexander Technique is a re-education physically, mentally, and emotionally, in freeing the body of tension and maladaptive habits, in pursuit of natural balance and movement. When applied to dance it is a tool that can be used to free a dancer's body from trauma-based tension and improve their range of physical expression.

### **Principles of The Alexander Technique**

In his book *The Use of The Self* Alexander introduces the basic principles of his new technique, “a method for developing conscious use of oneself in all activities of living”. A basic understanding of these concepts is crucial to understanding the reasoning behind the original choreography that this research will culminate in and how The Alexander Technique can be specifically applied to dance as a choreographic device.

### ***Psychophysical Unity***

The foundational principle of the Alexander Technique is *psychophysical unity*, he states that the mental and physical portions of the body cannot be separated and:

that for this reason human ills and shortcomings cannot be classified as ‘mental’ or ‘physical’ and dealt with specifically as such, but that all training, whether it be educative or otherwise, ie, whether its object be the prevention or elimination of defect, error or disease, must be based upon the indivisible unity of the human organism. (23)

He recognized that his physical struggles could not solely be fixed by physical means. For every mental or physical event, there is a corresponding mental or physical correlation, “every thought has a physical manifestation, and every action has a mental connection. The body and the mind are integrated and trying to deal with them separately as if they were two different entities is detrimental” (Nettl-Fiol 24). The final choreographic piece will utilize the exploration of this concept in pursuit of freeing the body from trauma-based tension.

### ***Primary Control***

Alexander believed the head, neck, and back to be the primary influence on the rest of the body. In his understanding of psychophysical unity, the head, neck, and back, were crucial to every other function or movement of the body. After decades of observation, both of himself and his students Alexander said, “My experience has shewn that in cases where the knowledge of how to direct primary control has led to a change for the better in the manner of the whole organism”

(51). He believed that the correct direction of primary control was the key to unlocking freer movement for the whole body. This will be translated into the original choreographic piece through primary control led movement intending to free the body to explore expressing the emotional release of trauma.

### ***Unreliable Sensory Appreciation and Habit***

As Alexander began to examine his use of self, one of the first things he realized is that he could not trust his kinesthetic sense. His habitual patterns of movement “felt right” even though they did not serve him well, thus he discovered *unreliable sensory appreciation and habit*. He concluded that the first step was discovering these habits and acknowledging that one’s feelings of right and wrong may not reflect what serves the body best. When choreographing this principle will be a first step in applying The Alexander Technique.

### ***Use Affects Functioning***

An important skill when practicing The Alexander Technique is self-awareness. The use of the body will always affect its function. To improve his functioning as an actor and orator Alexander had to adjust his use of self. Alexander believed in many cases that many medical diagnoses lacked nuance in the understanding of how use affects functioning:

Since the medical curriculum does not include training in the knowledge of how to direct the use of the human mechanisms, the medical man does not bring into his understanding of ‘use’ in the sense I have defined, and so does not recognize the relationship between misdirection of use and that unsatisfactory standard of functioning which is always found in association with disease; any deduction he may make, therefore, will be based on incomplete premises, and the value of his work limited both in the field of prevention and of cure. (88)

Throughout his career, Alexander repeatedly found specific symptoms associated with wrong functioning, through his discoveries he diagnosed and improved functioning for chronically ill, falsely diagnosed, and injured students. Adjusting the self may take extensive practice during the

choreographic process. The focus on process over product is instrumental in Alexander's teachings.

### ***Direction***

Once Alexander identified his "habitual use" of self it led him to a crucial question, "what is this *direction . . . upon which I have been depending?*" (35). He found that he had solely been relying on what felt right to direct his use of self. Because his habits had permeated his unconscious direction of self his feelings were compromised as a trustworthy means of direction. Though he was discouraged in this discovery he decided, "if it is possible for feeling to become untrustworthy as a means of direction, it should also be possible to make it trustworthy again" (36). He then endeavored to learn to guide movement with intent, rather than unconscious feeling. But he knew to accomplish this he had to inhibit his habits, his automatic responses to stimuli. Many dancers rely on muscle memory to execute movement, and learning to guide movement with intent will be important to integrate The Alexander Technique into dance and the choreographic progress.

### ***Inhibition***

To break his habitual use of self when reciting Alexander practiced giving himself stimulus to speak and inhibiting any immediate response, he had to start a sentence. Through this repeated inhibition of habits, he opened the door for other, more intentional means of direction to occur. In her book *Dance and The Alexander Technique: Exploring the Missing Link*, Rebecca Nettl-Foil explains the principle of inhibition like this:

Inhibition can also be thought of as eliminating interference. If a habit interferes with optimal functioning, and you are successful in inhibiting this habit, then what you have left is an easier, freer way of moving that resembles the conditions of a healthy, happy toddler or young child. It is through taking away that you find it, rather than by adding something. In other words, you are getting out of your own way. (25)

This principle encapsulates the ‘re-education’ focus of The Alexander Technique, instead of piling onto their poor habitual use of self, Alexander students learn how to engage with their body intentionally and effectively.

### ***End-Gaining and Means-Whereby***

He found *end-gaining*, a hyper-focus on the result of movement, to be his main adversary in correcting his misuse of self. *End-gaining* caused him to act quickly, relying on his habitually informed instinctual direction, instead of allowing himself to consider the new directions he had surmised served him better. He then shifted his focus in his process to the *means- whereby*, how he attempted to accomplish something rather than his projected result of the process. Concerning tension, “this philosophical viewpoint asks you to consider releasing unwanted muscular tension rather than countering tension with more unwanted tension” (Nettl-Fiol 26). Though the choreographic process is invested in cultivating physical expression through releasing tension-based trauma, the focus must remain on the process of physicalizing emotion through choreography and not a desired result or perceived effectiveness of communicating thought and feeling. Application of The Alexander Technique will not be complete without a commitment to process over product.

### **The Alexander Technique in Relation to Dance**

The application of The Alexander Technique in dance is a widely underdeveloped topic. Rebecca Nettl-Fiol and Luc Vanier are the authors of the only book on this topic on the market today, *Dance and the Alexander Technique: Exploring the Missing Link*. They surmise this is due to the discrepancies in methodologies, specifically, principles they identify as belonging to ballet, contemporary, and modern dance training. All the following discrepancies in methodology are observations made by Nettl-Fiol and Luc Vanier during their research and experience as dance



instructors, specifically ballet, contemporary, and modern dance. These methodologies do not apply to the full scope of dance training, and it should also be noted that there have been efforts made by the dance community to change some of these methodologies since the year of publishing, 2011. However, these observations still provide valuable insight when establishing the basic merits and limitations of applying the Alexander Technique to dance.

One example of methodology discrepancies is the format of a class. Alexander classes, in the style he instructed them, are most often private and relaxed, whereas dance teachers often have a much larger group of students to divide their time between. There are major discrepancies in philosophical viewpoints. Dance training often looks at the body as individual parts while the Alexander Technique is deeply rooted in a principle of psychophysical unity. Traditionally there has been a focus on results at the expense of process, and the Alexander Technique is fundamentally opposed to this habit of *end-gaining*. Dancers are often pushed to “over doing” while the Alexander Technique promotes “non-doing” as seemingly counterintuitive concept for disciplined dancers. Dance technique classes frequently push students to achieve certain lines, shapes and positions, at whatever the cost. Conversely, The Alexander Technique, “addresses the way in which the energy is directed more than the shape the student’s body is making” (13).

Though The Alexander Technique may seem the antithesis of certain dance forms Nettl-Fiol and Vanier believe it has the potential to enhance dance rather than strip away style and tradition. They state their viewpoint:

We are not looking to change the traditions of ballet or other dance forms. We are not interested in developing a dance style or aesthetic based on The Alexander Technique. We are not in favor of watering down or diminishing a choreographer’s movement palette. We are interested in adaptability. We are invested in adaptability. We are invested in helping dancers find the appropriate dynamic balance between parts in action. We want dancers to access a range of dynamics, to empower or enhance style. We are eager to offer dancers choice over habit. (15)

Later they discuss the application of The Alexander Technique to, ballet, contemporary, and modern. The authors consider primary control to be the one organizing principle that guides their work. Here they explain how the proper use of primary control affects pirouettes, “it is not vital to lock the neck in order to facilitate the free movements of the limbs required in ballet . . . A common misconception is to think of tossing the weight of the head around in an effort to turn rather than leaving it on the top of the spine so that it can support the turn by responding freely” (134-135). Nettle-Fiol and Vanier then provide an exercise to explore spiraling naturally focusing on letting the eyes and head lead followed sequentially by the shoulders, ribcage, and hip joints/pelvis. Applying Alexander’s concept of direction facilitates replacing core stability with Rudolf Laban’s concept of spatial support (170). Recent studies, like Dr. Eyal Lederman’s “The Myth of Core Stability”, have shown pinpointing engagement in one area of the body, in this case, the abdominals, to be ineffective and harmful. Utilizing Alexander’s principle of direction supports movement with spatial intent, our systems are designed for expansiveness, and if they are allowed to function as designed, the strength required for the movement at hand will come about through a distributed use of the whole,” this process is aligned with whole body connectivity, while core stability creates tension through over engagement of the abdominal muscles, “Muscular bracing only serves to shorten the muscles and create excess tension” (151). Nettle-Fiol and Vanier encourage readers that an understanding of their material cannot be fully grasped without a personal exploration of their exercises. Though the written research portion of this thesis is concluded, there is a great deal of physical research to be explored in the creative portion of this thesis. The following creative pages include an outline of the piece including movement choices, concept images, questions that inform the physical exploration of releasing trauma, and how the Alexander Technique will be applied.

**Name of Piece: Liminal**

- Merriam Webster's definition of Liminal: of, relating to, or being an intermediate state, phase, or condition: IN-BETWEEN, TRANSITIONAL.
- Like the body can be stuck in a prolonged state of fight or flight after experiencing trauma, processing trauma emotionally can feel like living in a liminal space. After the initial trauma but before healing.

**Choreography:** <https://youtu.be/WB9Js64H57k>

**Dance Style: Ballet, contemporary/modern.**

**Theme: The process of emotionally releasing trauma.**

- What does the physical expression of processing trauma look and feel like?
- How is the trauma-based tension in my own body inhibiting my range of physical expression?
- The process of emotionally releasing trauma is illustrated by a struggle to stand after being washed ashore.

**Guiding Principles:**

- Primary Control, movement led from the head neck, and spine. Especially when turning and rolling.
- Psychophysical unity/Whole body connectivity and committed integration of the entire body in the support and facilitation of movement.
- Direction, moving with spatial intent to organize the system to move most efficiently.
- Focus on the "means- whereby" (process).

**Act I: Safety and Stabilization (0:00-0:27)**

- First image: face down on floor, right leg bent.
- Primary control: begin with movement originating from the head/neck/spine, utilizing stabilization of the body to physicalize emotional stabilization.
  - Begin with lifting the head from the ground.
- Floorwork movement
  - like a shipwrecked man dragging himself ashore.

- (0:03 – 0:14)  
Reaching the right arm out and pulling forward, rolling and repeating on left side.

- (0:00 – 0: 24) Slow, grounded, movement to support the theme of finding safety and stabilization.



*Act I: Shade and Darkness—the evening of the Deluge, exhibited 1843, Joseph Mallord William Turner. Tate / Tate Images.*

- Hugging the

floor when rolling over and pulling the body forward.

**Act II: Remembrance and Mourning (0:28-1:02)**

- Allow the center (emotional core) to be affected by grief.
  - (0:24) alternate between contracting into the fetal position and expanding out.
- Establish one piece of a motif that will be built on as each musical part enters the song.

Mirror the layering of sound with the layering of movement.

- (0:24 – 0:48) Establishing the main motif:  
contracting and expanding to move the body forward.  
This motif builds as it increases levels until standing.

- Imagery- Laocoön and his sons writhing in the snakes.

- Writhing- spiral movements led by primary control.
  - (1:00) rolling over the back, leading with the head.

- What does grief feel like?
- Where does it rest in my body physically?



*Act II: Laocoön and His Sons, 40-30 B.C., the sculptors of Rhodes. Vatican Museums, Photo: Julia Johnston.*

- What does it look and feel like to physically express grief without unnecessary tension?
- Allow the movement to build to an emphasis on whole-body connectivity as the music builds in intensity.
  - This does not mean rejecting the principles whole-body connectivity and psychophysical unity in Act I.
    - More bi-lateral movement.
    - (0:24 – 0:42) Movement that originates from the spine and travels out, supported by the whole system using direction and spatial support.

### **Act III: Reconnection and Integration (1:03-1:41)**

- The Act III concept image depicts Moses writing the book of Genesis and represents God's redemptive work in Israel. Reconnection between God and his people.



*Act III: Light and Colour (Goethe's Theory) - the Morning after the Deluge - Moses Writing the Book of Genesis, exhibited 1843. Joseph Mallord William Turner 1775-1851. Tate / Tate Images.*

- Movement that emphasizes whole-body connectivity and full-body integrated committed movement, to support the ideas of reconnection and integration explored in this section of the piece.
  - (1:23 – 1:27) Crawling forward, highlighting bi-lateral movement.
- Movement gains speed and momentum.
  - The use of primary control and direction will facilitate freeing unnecessary tension, allowing the body to physicalize freedom.
    - (1:29 – 1:35) The full extension of the bridge (led by the hips) builds in momentum to extending all the way to standing.
- Final image: standing looking up and reaching up.
  - A reconnection with God.

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