

13 November 2003

Cover letter to LUTSF

My proposed project of a creative professional and personal development in New York was during the months of April and May lasting approximately seven weeks.

I had two aims and the first of them was to expose myself to new practices in movement and dance and to develop a relationship with practitioners and performers who informed and inspired me. I focused predominantly on improvisation and contact improvisation through the teachings of Kirstie Simson. I was later invited to challenge these discoveries through several performances with Kirstie Simson and a member of the Cunningham Dance Co. I have already begun to share this information through classes I have led in improvisation and I am developing some ideas that I plan to create a performance piece.

Secondly, I had intended to explore my interest in photography and develop my understanding of the relationship of movement and dance to this visual artform with Aaron Rose, an artist whom I admire and respect. This time in the company of Aaron was invaluable and inspirational.

Overall I believe this to have been a successful project thanks to the funds awarded to me by the LUTSF, and the relationships that I have developed in New York will continue to creatively grow. I am hopeful that I will return next year to further continue my studies.

Yours sincerely,

Matthew Morris

#### CREATIVE PROFESSIONAL AND PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT PROJECT REPORT

My intended project was to pursue a creative professional and personal development in New York. Firstly, I was interested in establishing a relationship with dance practitioners and to view and experience the work that they create and the techniques that they teach. In doing so I would acquire knowledge that would further develop my performing, teaching and choreographic skills. The professionals that I was fortunate to contact and to share some time with were Kirstie Simson, Wally Cardona, and Ashley Chen and some other dancers from the Merce Cunningham Dance Co.

Secondly, I have been interested in photography for some years now and I wanted to pursue my understanding of how the qualities of dance and movement could be realised in an alternative visual artform such as photography, therefore I had planned to spend time with a photographer that I deeply admired, Aaron Rose.

Upon arrival I contacted Kirstie Simson and was happy to be informed that she was teaching several classes a week for a dance organization, Movement Research, and she would also be leading several workshops for a Latino American Dance Festival at the Greenspan Centre. I attended the majority of these classes and workshops, this enabled me to develop and understand some of the fundamental principles of the contact improvisation technique. Kirstie leads these workshops with a charismatic charm and the qualities and principles of the technique are introduced throughout the class in such a way that your personal exploration is supported and challenged. This was apparent as the experience in dance and movement of the participants was varied and yet we were able to dance collectively and cohesively. These classes and workshops offered me valuable skills that I am able to apply to my work such as the use of improvisation as an alternative to conventional techniques for a daily class, for a group of dancers to familiarise and connect themselves with one another before and during the development of a new work and as a choreographic tool.

During the period that I spent time with Kirstie we developed an understanding of each others work and movement and she invited me to perform with her and several other artists in two events that had been organized. The first event was for a memorial dance evening at The Brooklyn Lyceum. We had 40 minutes to improvise and inhabit the performance space whilst the audience settled themselves. The second event Kirstie had arranged herself with fellow artists and it was more impromptu and intimate than the previous. The Frying Pan is an old disused boat moored on the Hudson River and it is now used for performance, corporate functions and videos etc. The performance started at sunset on the deck and the audience was then led into the interior of the boat and they were encouraged to walk throughout the labyrinth of passageways and rooms as various performances were happening everywhere. This culminated with the performers and audience back on deck with the lights of the city illuminated on the shore. Kirstie and I remain in contact and we plan to perform together when we have the opportunity and are both in the same city.

I was fortunate to be offered another performance opportunity with a member of the Merce Cunningham Dance Co., Ashley Chen, who was choreographing a piece for an evening of dance. Radical Low presented Dance and New Media @ The Merce Cunningham Dance Studio. Ashley had already choreographed his piece though he needed someone on stage in a particular character to present another idea. He knew my background of performance and it required only one rehearsal as I had an idea of the piece. He wanted me to improvise with the task of shaking my head in as many ways as possible throughout the entire piece. This was another fantastic opportunity to explore improvisation for performance. The performance was for two nights and I had the honour on the first evening of performing to Merce Cunningham. Ashley had these performances video-ed but as yet I have not received a copy.

After many phone calls and messages I managed to arrange a couple of hours with Wally Cardona to have coffee and talk. Wally is an Artist with whom I had the opportunity to work with when I was with Ballet du Grand Theatre de Geneve and since then he has established his own company of a renowned reputation. We expressed a great interest in working with one another, although we are aware of the difficulties of getting work permits etc. within the U.S.A. We will remain in contact and if the time and opportunity arise to work together we will pursue that.

As a result of this experience of dance in New York I have since led several classes of contact improvisation with the company I am currently working with and I have been in contact with Movement Research to initiate the possibilities of teaching for them next year. I am also currently developing ideas for a dance event that will incorporate many of these principles and techniques that I have acquired.

Aaron Rose and his wife, Louise, had invited me to come to New York earlier than I had initially planned because they were expecting a child and their living and working environment needed some attention. Aaron proposed that I work for them during my stay in New York, thus giving me invaluable time in the company and environment of his life, and for the hours that I worked, he offered to aid me financially. I worked approximately 2-4 days of the week from 10.00 a.m. until 5.00 p.m., depending on when I had workshops or classes. Aaron would set me a task at the beginning of the day and then I would be left to my own devices to achieve my goal. Many of these tasks involved working directly with the photographic apparatus that he used daily, spending time in his archives and helping his assistant, handling and sorting of precious optical objects and collectables, the re-organizing of his extensive library, to the smaller tasks which were putting collars on his dogs, running errands and sorting through this and that. Throughout the days Aaron would spend time with me talking and questioning, allowing me gracious insights into his world and to how he observes and responds to the environment around him. We spoke of photography and the artform, but never worked practically on location or in his darkroom.

I have not arrived at any conclusive decisions on my understanding of dance and movement with its relation to the photographic image, this I believe comes with time and experience and the opportunities that one is exposed to. Along with the ideas that I plan to develop through my experience with improvisation I will explore the possibilities of the visual image to complement and challenge a performance piece.

The funds awarded to me by the Lisa Ullmann Travelling Scholarship Fund allowed this experience in New York to be possible and it gave me invaluable time and exposure to the disciplines that I had initially set out to explore, thus enriching my knowledge in these practices and creatively inspiring my professional and personal life.