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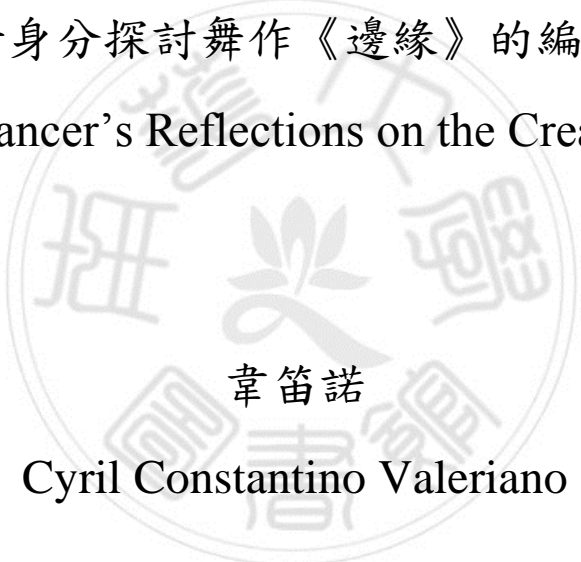
College of Arts and Design

Nanhua University

Master Thesis

以舞者身分探討舞作《邊緣》的編創過程

Limbo: A Dancer's Reflections on the Creative Process



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Finally, I want to thank you from the bottom of my heart to my family, friends, co-dancers, and classmates, for their mental and spiritual support in the journey of my MFA study in Taiwan.

Dedication

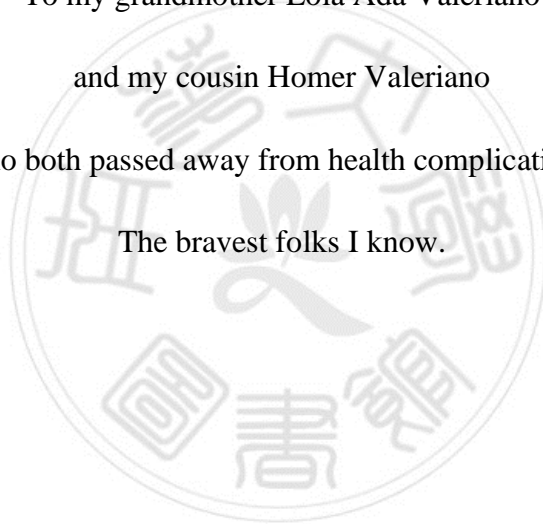
This thesis is dedicated

To my grandmother Lola Ada Valeriano

and my cousin Homer Valeriano

who both passed away from health complications.

The bravest folks I know.



摘要

此論文敘述我演出 Al Bernard Garcia 所編創《邊緣》的經歷，舞作符合南華大學碩士畢業門檻。論文聚焦在作為舞者反思舞作《邊緣》的創作過程，並從四個面向進行思考：編創初期階段、舞作理念、獨舞、物件符碼。在作品《邊緣》中，我採取實踐作為研究方法，以自我作為舞者身份，透過想像力並將動作具體呈現於編舞中。這個研究方法證實在創作過程的反思中，是對於作為舞者提升自己的關鍵部分。而透過這些反思，能夠激起自己對舞蹈表演本質理解的能力。

關鍵詞：創作過程、演出經驗、《邊緣》

Abstract

This thesis narrates my experience performing *Limbo* as choreographed by Al Bernard Garcia. The choreography project partially fulfills my MFA graduation requirement at Nanhua University. This paper focuses on four aspects of my reflections as a dancer on the creative process in the performance piece *Limbo*, the initial stage, performing philosophy, the solo section, and the props. I employed practice as a research method in this project to narrate my reflections on the creative process and to engage in knowing myself as a dancer by exploring my imagination and embodying the movements in the choreography. This process confirms that my reflections on the creative process are essential in my quest to improve myself as a dancer and to awaken my ability to understand the essence of the performance.

Keywords: *Creative Process, Performance Experiences, Limbo*

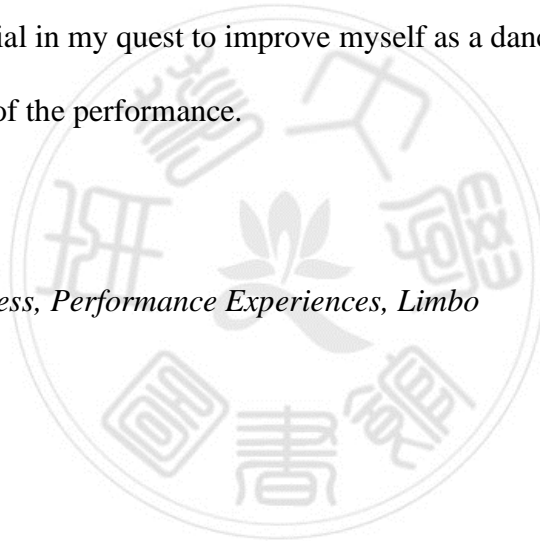


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Chapter 1: MY DANCE BACKGROUND

Venerable Master Hsing Yun is one of the most influential teachers in propagating Humanistic Buddhism around the world and has been serving humanity in his lifetime by spreading the dharma through Buddhist practices. The Venerable Master created a “pure land on earth” called Fo Guang Shan (FGS): “Fo” means Buddha; “Guang” means Bright Light; and “Shan” means mountain. “Fo Guang Shan” means “Buddha’s Light Mountain.” The institution aims to: 1) propagate the dharma through culture; 2) nurture talent through education; 3) benefit society through charity; and 4) purify people’s minds through cultivation.

With the specific goal of propagating dharma through education, Venerable Master Hsing Yun sent monastics all over the world to establish temples and schools such as Fo Guang University (FGU) and Nanhua University (NHU) in Taiwan, University of the West (UWEST) in the USA, Nan Tien Institute (NTI) in Australia, and Guang Ming College (GMC) in the Philippines.

Guang Ming College (GMC) is the fifth consortium of the Fo Guang Shan Foundation. A pioneering Performing Arts and Buddhist College in the Philippines situated within Fo Guang Shan Mabuhay Temple, the College has been adopting FGS Buddhist practices as part of its students’ daily activities since its inception. GMC offers bachelor’s degrees in Buddhist Studies, Theater, and Dance. Some of the courses offered in the Performing Arts Department include Dance Pedagogy, Music for Dance, Dance Anatomy, Dance Critique, History of Dance, Philippine Folk Dance, Semiotics, Dance Anthropology, Dance Research, Contemporary Dance, Modern Dance, and Ballet. I learned and evolved as a dancer and performer under the supervision of my dance teachers, namely Al Bernard Garcia (Contemporary Dance and Philippine Folk Dance), Michael

Barry Que (Contemporary Dance and Modern Dance), Sarah Samaniego (Contemporary Dance, Modern Dance, Dance Critique, and Ballet), Abbey Carlos (Contemporary and Ballet Technique), Jared Jonathan Luna (Semiotics and Dance Research), Ricca Bautista (Academic Writing in Dance and Dance Research), Marla Rivera (Dance Anatomy and Contemporary Dance) and Paul Alexander Morales (Artistic Director of Theater and Dance Department). These phenomenal teachers taught us aspiring dancers their knowledge and passion for dance and awakened us to the multiple meanings of dance in the fields of art. Personally, my professors have helped me develop into a well-rounded person who is able to apply the basic principles and skills that I have learned in continually paving the way towards my future artistic life.

As full-time scholars, the students in this institution were educated in both performances and academics. During my stay at GMC, I realized that the school not only wanted to give us knowledge through education but also to hone our skills and behavior. We were also expected to carry out our school's vision, that is, to master and balance both technique and academics. In addition, GMC exposed us to local and international stages and arts conferences. For instance, I had the honor to be one of the students who were selected on numerous occasions to attend various events, such as the International Research Conference (IRC) in California, USA; Taiwan; and various localities in the Philippines. As a student artist, I take my role to embody and honor dance in practice and academically seriously and strive to serve as an inspiration to younger generations.

One thing I realized from my experience is that I am fascinated by the act of performing on the theater stage. My first teacher in dance was Professor Al Bernard Garcia, who inspired me to be better every day as I witnessed his performances on various theater stages locally and internationally. He helped me mold my skills in classes such as the History of Philippine Folk Dances, Contemporary Dance, Ballet, and Dance Composition 1 & 2. Professor Garcia founded

the school's dance company Guang Ming Dance Project (GMDP) and I later became its second student vice president. The school-based dance company has increasingly been recognized by various performing arts schools in the Philippines in the past seven years.

1.1 The Guang Ming Dance Project (GMDP)

The Guang Ming Dance Project (GMDP) was the first dance company that was organized by Professor Al Bernard Garcia under the auspices of the Performing Arts Department of Guang Ming College (GMC). GMDP embarks on performances inspired by Karuna and Prajna, a dance for compassion and wisdom. It combines a multi-genre approach incorporating classical, contemporary, and cross-cultural dances, creating performances that inspire liberation and greater understanding. GMDP builds on works inspired by Filipino and other Asian Cultures as well as the principles and practices of Humanistic Buddhism, especially life education (GMDP 2020). The dance company helped me solidify my foundation and allowed me to enhance my dancing skills and experience different choreographic styles.



Figure 1. GMDP company members (Top, from the left: Rey Escobar, Daryl Desengano, Louise Biong, Wynvel Anguren, Dyan Panganiban, Karen Cabatana, Ted Gaje, Cyril Valeriano, Alexes Sandino, Mario Villariaz. Middle, from the left: Jennybeth Pico, Cychaina Jontillano, Mr. Paul Alexander Morales (Former Artistic Director), Kristine Agno and Lady Ann Ciriaco. Bottom, from the left: Shen Bernardo, Janille Apurillo, Ms. Sarah Samaniego, Mr. Michael Que, Dyna Rose Sulit, Mary Recto, and Ghealyn Undang). Photo credit: Guang Ming College.

1.2 My Past Performances

This subchapter introduces my past experiences in dance. These projects helped me to grow and develop my personal style in dance. These performances were all developed under Guang Ming College's (GMC) official dance company, the Guang Ming Dance Project (GMDP). These works were *Mata* (2016), *Sama-Sama* (2018), *Voyage* (2019), and *Walk-In/Out* (2019). These great choreographies were all performed under the supervision of Professor Al Bernard Garcia.

Mata (2016)

My first experience participating in a competition as a dancer was at a national choreographers' event in the Philippines. *Wifibody.ph*, the first tier of the Cultural Center of the Philippines Choreographers' Series, was designed and curated by Myra Beltran and Denisa Reyes. In the year 2016, Beltran established the competition under the larger WifiBody Festival, the first contemporary dance festival to be launched at this scale. The competition is held biannually and is only open to solo-duet performers. The competition aims to encourage a new generation of choreographers to focus on enhancing their artistic vision with an emphasis on intimacy and conciseness. The artistic objective of the event is to discover new choreographic talent to shape the collective creative abilities in contemporary dance performances in the Philippines today. Ghealyn Undang, a graduate of GMC and a finalist in the Choreographers' *WifiBody.Ph* series choreographed the performance *Mata*:

The eye ("mata" in the Filipino language) is perhaps one of the most used senses of any part of the human body. It grasps complex relationships quickly and retains an accurate

memory of them. “*Mata*” is inspired by a story of a man who sees nothing but can write everything that is wordless and unspeakable.



Figure 2. *Mata* premiered at Tanghalang Huseng Batute Studio at the Cultural Center of the Philippines. Photo credits: Guang Ming College and Rizalve Ancajas

As mentioned in the synopsis, *Mata* (2016) was inspired by a nearly blind noble monk who continues to support young individuals to reach their potential. The choreography of *Mata* explored movements such as calligraphy writing and hand gestures of the Buddha (mudras) that indicate different meanings, connotations, and symbols such as teaching, enlightenment, meditation, and wisdom. This piece has opened new possibilities and allowed me to explore movement techniques I learned from my contemporary and modern dance classes. *Mata* arrived at a timely and relevant moment in my life. Before the final competition at Tanghalang Huseng Batute Studio at the Cultural Center of the Philippines, I flew to Taiwan to attend a Buddhist monastic retreat for about two months and practiced mindfulness. The retreat helped awaken my

senses and consolidate what I have learned and understood, allowing me to apply dance techniques without uncertainty in my rendition of *Mata*.

Sama- Sama (2018)

Sama-Sama is a dance creation that means “celebration of life”. The piece seeks to embody the connections within the Badjao community in the Philippines. *Sama-Sama* means "you are welcome" in Bahasa Melayu. In Bahasa Indonesia and in the Filipino language, on the other hand, the word means “together.” This performance piece serves to remind individuals and communities of the merits of welcoming the idea of togetherness. The piece was created by Professor Al Bernard Garcia for the Sayaw Pinoy 2018 competition, in which the choreography won fifth place in the contemporary dance category.



Figure 3. *Sama-sama* premiered at Bulwagang Francisca Reyes Aquino Studio during the Pasinaya Festival at the Cultural Center of the Philippines. Photo credits: Al Bernard Garcia

The objective of the performance was to carry and embody the Badjao community as that was the meaning and inspiration for the creation of the dance piece. Participating dancers,

including myself, took part in a workshop for the “Pangalay” dance – a Philippine folk dance. The workshop introduced us to the background behind the “Pangalay” folk dance and allowed us to understand the meaning behind the movements of the dance. Eventually, I was given the role of the groom in one of the celebrations in *Sama-Sama* (2018). “Pangalay” means “temple of dance” in Sanskrit. In the Philippines, “Pangalay” predates both Christianity and Islam. The “Pangalay” dance form features one of the most varied movement vocabularies among traditional dances from the Philippines. It resembles a classical form of dance technique. The essence of “Pangalay” is pure dancing. The slow, precise, meditative, graceful, almost mesmerizing motions have a strong sense of anti-linear time. The Eastern concept of multi-level or anti-linear time, which has no clear beginning or finish, and the continually flowing or seamless unfolding movement from a central core are consistent with pre-modern modes.

Embodying this dance was a long process because it incorporates a new technique that highlights the precise movements of the hands and staying grounded throughout the whole piece. In Asian dancing styles, the torso of the performer is somewhat bowed forward. “Tabbo” is the term for unnecessary hip and torso movement. The knees are flexed or slightly bent. The extremely modest springing motion from the knees used by performers gives the impression of lightness. The arms and hands are mostly used to communicate feelings. Thumbs are typically separated and driven forward while the fingers are held rigidly together and curled back towards the dancer's wrists with controlled vigor. You can flick, flip, or flutter your fingers. Eloquent hand movements are amplified by the *janggalay* or metal claws. A wide range of expressions are suggested by postures and gestures that use emotional metaphors and symbols. For instance, extended palms and arms might signify greeting, welcome, or gladness and represent elements of nature like a palm leaf, flowers, sea waves, the wind, seaweeds, birds, and the flutter of wings.

Sama-Sama is close to my heart as the piece allowed me to revisit the experiences of all my ancestors, such as in the way we offered the rice we harvested to mother nature to give thanks for prosperity and a healthy way of living. We also had a leader called *Babaylan*, who communicated to the higher being and prayed for more blessings to come. While watching the *Baybaylan* when the offerings are being made, one will find the experience very grounding, meaning it starts with heavy footsteps. The ritual can change depending on what the higher beings are requesting. By observing how the *Babaylan* performs in the said ritual, I was inspired to mimic these movements into the performance. Through this personal experience, I had the opportunity to incorporate natural and more organic flows in the performance. Everything I learned about the piece and its intentions allowed me to liberate my body and fully embody the spirit of the piece as I performed the dance.

Voyage (2019)

“It’s time you realized that you have something in you more powerful and miraculous than the thing that affects you and makes you dance like a puppet.” – Marcus Aurelius

The Buddha once said, “Do not go with the flow. Be the flow.” This quote reminds us that we have the capability of finding our path by gracefully adjusting to every situation and by embracing the natural flow of life, accepting any outcomes it may bring us, and being gentle in handling things that are not meant for us. We should all learn to surf amidst the unpredictable current of life because our life’s true purpose and direction could only be realized from the waves of life’s impermanence. It is by finding our life balance that we can guide others’ voyages as well.



Figure 4. *Voyage* premiered at Guang Ming College Block Box. Photo credits: Guang Ming College

I choreographed *Voyage* (2019), which translates to "paglalayag" in Filipino. The inspiration for the piece is the paddling movement individuals engage in when riding waves in the water. The pace develops from smaller to bigger movements, starting from small jumps and progressing to higher jumps. There are no pauses in the performance and the piece flows throughout, depicting diagonal positions similar to bodies taking a journey in the seawater. The dance piece *Voyage* also shows how a person, from birth until death, constantly and unfailingly experiences adversities for as long as he or she lives. The movements in the performance – namely the flowing hand and body movements, the smaller and higher jumps, the smaller to bigger movements, and the straight to diagonal flowing lines – were all part of the choreography meant to embody the different adversities individuals encounter throughout their lives.

Walk-In/Out (2019)

My bachelor's thesis paper was accepted for presentation in the special panel called "Paglalayag: Journeys on Learning, Living, and Propagating Expressions of Dharma through Performing Arts," which was held as part of a research conference called "Expressions of the Dharma: Buddhist Art & Culture in Everyday Life" at Fo Guang Shan Hsi Lai Temple & University of the West in Los Angeles, California, USA. I presented my research topic, "Site-specific Dance: A Conscious Choreographic Process Informed by the Concept of Mindfulness" in conjunction with my dance partner and researcher Cychaina Jontilano. The following abstract of our paper is essential to understanding the piece:

Walking Meditation is a Buddhist practice that involves technical parameters to guide the body and mind to achieve mindfulness. In Guang Ming College (GMC), walking meditation is performed in the hallway of Mabuhay Temple at every meal. This study involves choreographic research that investigates mindfulness and walking meditation. Through a site-specific performance, the proponents of this study investigate how the body and/or the self-interacts with its immediate space during the performance of the said ritual.



Figure 5. Walk-In/Out premiered at Guang Ming College Hallway. Photo credits: Guang Ming College

I choreographed Walk-In/Out (2019) as guided by the Buddhist Codes and Conducts of a site-specific approach. It followed the technical parameters of a site, which, in this case, refers to the Buddhist Temple. The movements were inspired by Buddhist practices such as walking meditations and silent meals. The choreography emphasizes specific parts of the body, such as the arms, feet, eyes, and legs, through movements. The gestures were inspired by the bodily gesticulations of walking meditation and were broken down into two sections:

- I. *Behavioral Gestures*. These gestures were developed based on the physical behaviors that can be observed in individuals when doing the walking meditation, such as: 1.) variations in gait (slow and fast walking, back walking, walking on walls, walking on air, and walking in contact with bodies); 2.) swinging of hands (fast, slow, vertical, horizontal, and static swinging); 3.) hand movements involved in the removing of prayer robes (untying, folding, holding, and removing); 4. head positioning (frontal and horizontal positioning); and 5.) focusing on the gaze (focusing on the back of the neck and eyes with intention); etc.
- II. *Expressive Gestures*. The piece also sought to incorporate personal intentions, emotions, ideas, and the embodiment of choreographic movements such as sincerity, passion, happiness, achievement, and dedication.

The following subsection further discusses a few elements I incorporated in the choreography process for Walk-In/Out, namely “Here and Now” and architecture.

“Here and Now”

In Hunter’s (2005) study of site-specific dance performances, she applied the concept of “Here and Now” in her creative process of choreographing “The Basement Project: Beneath.”

“Here and Now” refers to the awareness of the “present,” wherein the spirit of the place, or what she termed “genius loci” and the “phenomenological energies and resonance” inform the choreography itself. To perform this piece, she chose an abandoned basement, making use and being aware of the experience left in the place and being open to the experience at present. In this choreographic dance piece, the site was revealed by making use of its physical structure that creates dynamics and form and translates them into movements. The recognition of the existence of the walls created division in the room, and the middle space, high ceilings, and dusty floors interact with the choreographer’s response to her creation. The ensuing rehearsals on a “moment-by-moment basis” were a constant production of “Here and Now,” embodied by the dancers through a form of dance. The choreographed piece was then the “there and then,” and the performance was another production of “Here and Now” in its present experience.

Architecture

Architecture denotes the physical environment of the piece. For the final performance, I chose the walking meditation path and the front door area of the tea room as the physical environments for my piece. The site had a tall ceiling, a glass sliding door in between the VIP room and the office, a tiled floor, and a hallway. Without having to incorporate additional designs such as crafts and decorations, the researchers, namely my thesis partner Cychaina Jontillano and I, took the actual space into account when shaping the movements of the piece, using the area as it was. Architecturally, the piece could be broken down into:

1. *Solid Mass* – this includes the sliding glass doors, grid lines on the floor, wooden doors, glass windows, and wooden walls

2. *Texture* – light and secure movements were applied on sliding glass doors and glass windows; jumps, hops, and rolls on thick floor tiles; and moderate touches to wooden walls and doors
3. *Light* – the lights from the VIP room, tea room, and office were used; the LED lights were also used to highlight facial expressions and body movements
4. *Sound* – the wooden Tapan, a Buddhist instrument used to signal the start of a meal, was used in the piece alongside metallic contemporary music to create a distinction between practice and performance

Mindfulness, when applied to the exploration of the site, deepens our awareness and allows subtleties to be sensed, such as the small breeze created by the swinging of arms, the transferring of weight in every step, and the embodiment of each movement made. It is a holistic device that can be used in creating a choreography that is framed with deep concentration and focus. The mindful choreographic process provides a space for reflection in thoughts, deeds, and speech, recognizing the essence of site, creation, and practice.

1.3 Reflection on my Dance Experiences

My dance experience at Guang Ming College (GMC) has been one of my greatest achievements. I had encountered so many obstacles along the process, yet I stood firm and continued what I started. As a result, my academic study and performances in dance has made me a more competent dance artist. GMC helped me develop positive attributes such as self-discovery, hard work, and social responsibility. The dance pieces I have performed have become a product of my understanding and proper discernment of a new culture I lived in within a different space. I

developed ways of creating art based on innovative ideals, creating a humble art piece that has gone through acceptance and openness in both concepts even within the demands of academia. Furthermore, it allowed me to adopt a wide range of movement forms in my repertoire that demanded that I develop a certain level of proficiency in both structured and non-structured choreography.

My professors at GMC urged me to give solo dance performances on different theater stages. They also encouraged me to engage in the dance community to accelerate my growth as a competitive dancer. One important thing I learned through these experiences is that I have been given the chance to touch other people's lives. As a young artist, my simple life changed through these experiences. I now value mindfulness in every action, deed, and thought as I learned and understood its significance to the art of learning and living.

Through my dance experiences, I learned to identify actions and feelings that arise, whatever those might be, and let myself be engaged and actively respond to them. I have learned to embrace mindfulness when lost, allow my feelings to arise and pass, and bring my mind and body together in practice as all part of being a dance artist. Finally, my growth and development were all thanks to my teachers' creativity and innovation, especially during the production and performance processes. An important value I learned through them is to know how to connect with the audience and to relate to the dance regardless of the complexity of its movements. As an individual, my life changed immensely as I continue to learn in school. I was afforded opportunities offered by the school's local and international connections, and was able to study and perform abroad for free. All of these experiences have led me to who I am today, an individual full of hope and a clear goal.

Chapter 2: OVERVIEW OF *LIMBO*

Limbo was choreographed by Al Bernard Garcia. The first public performance of the piece was intended for the 20th Century Music course at Nanhua University. The choreographer appointed three performers, namely myself, Wynvel Anguren, and Mary Evangeline Recto. *Limbo's* music is inspired by Olivier Messiaen's *Quatuor Pour la Fin du Temps* (Quartet for the End of Time). He integrated the compositional devices taught in the Dance Composition class. Using this technique, he creates little motions based on us dancer's body, space, and time to create dance phrases. As part of developing the choreography during the improvisation class, he also included elements such as negative and positive exercises, transferring weights, and body restrictions. Once he has a sufficient supply of raw materials, he starts combining the components he likes. He adapted this sequence to a rhythmical phrase, for example, an eight-count slow movement of my head followed by a four-count counterweight of my ribs pushing through an upside direction and taking a deep breath to signal my co-dancers to get ready for the movement they want to make in conjunction with my body. This process helped the choreographer to convey his interpretation of the music, especially the tempo and rhythm of the piece. The fact that we dancers have enough time to plan and explore our interpretations is an intriguing place to start, especially since my first concept for *Limbo* presents a unique viewpoint based on personal experience.



Figure 6. The first performance of *Limbo* for the 20th Century Contemporary Music course at YB11 Yuan Qi Lou Building Dance Studio. Photo credits: Wen-Chung Lin.

2.1 The Research Process of *Limbo*

According to Garcia (2020), *Limbo*'s performance was inspired by the music of Olivier Messiaen's *Quatuor Pour la Fin du Temps* (Quartet for the End of Time). The musical work was a conversation between Messiaen and another prisoner about the current social situation at that time. This particular piece was written while he was a prisoner in captivity in Gorlitz, Germany, where he spent years during the war. This important work was performed by his fellow prisoners and composed with the instruments (clarinet, violin, cello, and piano) that were available to them at the time. The piece was composed to ease the melancholy of the environment and situation he was in. The inspiration of movement in this work is also reflective of the Holy Bible, which adds a more ethereal essence to the piece. Each movement is based on the apocalyptic Book of Revelation, which is beautifully represented in *The Cloisters Apocalypse*, an illuminated manuscript that was published around 1330. The quartet's rage was expressed in whirling rhythms, while a vision of eternity sang gloriously in ethereal quiet alongside them. Messiaen indicated that

he wanted to give the feeling of timelessness, and this feeling is manifested in the work. Messiaen indicated that the inspiration for this work is from this excerpt from the Book of Revelation (Rev 10: 1-2, 5-7, King James Version):

“And I saw another mighty angel come down from heaven, clothed with a cloud: and a rainbow is upon his head, and his face was as it were the sun, and his feet as pillars of fire... and he set his right foot upon the sea and his left foot on the earth. And the angel which I saw stand upon the sea and upon the earth lifted up his hand to heaven, and swear by him that lives forever and ever... that there should be time no longer: But in the days of the voice of the seventh angel when he shall begin to sound, the mystery of God should be finished”.

To perform this piece, I did my research on the background of *Limbo*, which allowed me to learn through different perspectives and show my body’s potential rather than merely passively accepting the choreography at face value without knowing its historical meaning. I employed research as a tool to facilitate my embodiment of the movement phrases and add another layer of prompts as well as to explore the dance piece’s capacity. In this case, us dancers were able to gradually develop choreographed movements through body restrictions, improvisations, and circular motions. With these stimuli, *Limbo* emerged as a result of a collective effort that allowed the dancers to execute their performances based on their personal and intimate understanding of the techniques and expressions. With these prompts in mind, I read more literature to absorb its concepts that would allow me to further make developments in line with the choreographer’s creativity and ideas.

Through researching and dissecting information, I found works of literature that captivated my attention. For example, Dante’s *Inferno* can be used to reframe *Limbo* as the stages of hell. The

word *Limbo* comes from the Latin word "limbus," which can be translated as "edge," "fringe," or "boundaries." Using the framework of *Inferno*, *Limbo* can be used to denote the region "on the fringe" of the abyss of Hell or taken to refer to an uncertain period of waiting for a decision or resolution, a temporary state or condition, or a place in-between and yet unknown – a place where time and space are unknown, either as a temporary state or condition. In addition, the concept of *Limbo* in Christian belief refers to a place after death where one's soul stays until it is fully ready to go to heaven or hell. In *Inferno*, Dante awakens to discover that he has crossed the Acheron, with Virgil guiding him to *Limbo*, the first circle of the abyss, where Virgil resides. The unbaptized and virtuous pagans, who though immoral enough to merit damnation and do not accept Christ, are found in the first circle. Sayers (1975) states, "Those who refused choice are followed by those who have no option." The guiltless condemned are punished by living in a defective version of Heaven, as *Limbo* shares many traits with the Asphodel Meadows. This group lacks hope because it is something their rational minds aren't able to access except through baptism, which serves as the door to a religion that leads to that hope. When Virgil then leads Dante through the nine circles of hell, the circles appear to be concentric, signifying a gradual development in wickedness that culminates in Satan's enslavement in the earth's core. Each circle's offenders are punished for all eternity in a manner befitting their crimes; in other words, each penalty is a *contrapasso*. A *contrapasso* serves as the fulfillment of a destiny freely selected by each soul during his or her existence, rather than as divine vengeance. People who sinned but begged for forgiveness before dying are to be found in Purgatory, where they toil to atone for their transgressions. Meanwhile, those who go to hell have sought to rationalize their sins and have not repented. This place is full of wandering souls, waiting to be forgiven and given proper rituals here on earth. According to Sayers (1975), Satan's three faces are regarded by some to represent his rule over the three human

racess: red for Europeans (from Japheth), yellow for Asians (from Shem), and black for Africans (from Shem; the race of Ham). The three faces, according to all interpretations, depict a fundamental perversion of the Trinity, which views Satan as powerless, ignorant, and full of hatred. In contrast, God's nature is portrayed as all-powerful, all-knowing, and all-loving, which resonates with a feeling of transcendence – of going beyond time, space, and life to give people hope and to release them from all the anxiety, hatred, and fear. According to Summa Theologiae Supp, there are four Abodes, namely: 1. *Limbo* of the Fathers (a natural paradise of the Old Testament saints); 2. *Limbo* of the Children (a natural paradise for unbaptized children with original sin alone); 3. Purgatory (for those dying in a state of grace but requiring further purification); and 4. Gehenna (fires of hell for the damned).

“A region on the border between hell and heaven where those who are not responsible for their fate await judgment day. These souls can neither be punished in purgatory nor received into heaven. They must simply wait” (Adapted from Webster’s Third New International Dictionary).

2.2 Methodology: Practice as Research (PAR)

Practice as Research (PAR) is a methodological approach that uses performance and practice as a source of producing new ways of thinking and questioning. It is a method that views philosophy in physical actions, creation, and discovery as a way to broaden the ways of thinking to formulate innovations in performance. This paper focuses on the observation and reflections on the creative process from a dancer’s standpoint of view. This method is employed in original investigations that seek to gain new knowledge from past experiences and outcomes. The originality claims are supported by creative artifacts like musical performances, books, scripts, digital media, games, films, poetry, translations, and other forms of creative practice. PAR was a useful starting point for creating a process that worked well for me. To further explain, I am using

Limbo as Practice as Research for my thesis paper since I recorded every rehearsal note from the choreographer and I wrote about my own discoveries as my body keeps pushing me to grow. I find it very helpful to pay attention to the nuances on which I should be focusing by journaling about my daily rehearsal experience. Every day throughout the rehearsal also enables me to express my struggles as they arise as I learn more about my body.

Furthermore, the choreographer of *Limbo* Al Garcia encouraged us to explore our artistic freedom in how we interpreted the performance as dancers. The choreographer was open to discussing how we felt as dancers, how we discovered our movement vocabulary, and how we structured our performance for *Limbo*. We then performed *Limbo* at various events. Many issues arose during these individual performances, but we were able to rapidly resolve them so that they did not occur during our final performance. Gathering data were collected through my observation, documentation, and video recording during the creative process and evaluated through a phenomenological approach. Phenomenology is the study of conscious experience from a subjective or first-person perspective. Phenomenology can be defined as the study of the processes of experience or consciousness at its most basic level. In addition, phenomenology obtains information about the event being studied by making observations of it as it happens and keeping my observations focused on human behavior, the phenomenon's utilization, and human interactions with the phenomena. More so, perception, thinking, memory, imagination, emotion, desire, and volition are all studied in phenomenology, as are bodily awareness, embodied action, and social interaction, including linguistic engagement.

Chapter 3: THE CREATIVE PROCESS OF *LIMBO*

This chapter records my reflections on the creative process of *Limbo*. I transformed these thoughts (e.g., stories, emotions, and views) into movements by embodying *Limbo* as the entirety of my existence during the performance. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Al Bernard Garcia chose this piece *Limbo* as one of his graduation choreography, and it took us over seven months collectively to complete it.

3.1 The Initial Stage

We made countless changes in the process of choreographing *Limbo*. During this period, we faced multiple uncertainties that challenged the ideas proposed by the choreographer as well as the capabilities of the dancers in terms of strength, flexibility, and ways of expression in executing the dance. The brainstorming process for the performance of *Limbo* started during the second week of May 2020. We started to explore the piece for 20th Century Music and Dance Composition under the supervision of Professor George Holloway and Professor Wen-Chung Lin. *Limbo* premiered in June 2020 at Nanhua University Dance Studio.

The *Limbo* performance is manifested differently for each individual involved in the process. Personally, it served as a springboard that allowed me to experiment with my creative approaches. The creative process for this performance involved more than just the one "Aha!" moment and I employed extensive forethought and preparation of ideas.

The initial stage for creating the choreography of *Limbo* started with us dancers exploring our physical restrictions and spatial awareness. The choreographer started by spending 10 minutes briefing us dancers on what we should be doing during the exploration process. We started by creating the shape of a square using masking tapes in the dance studio, which is an intimate space.

The square shapes represent the green mats that we would be incorporating in the performance later on. Through this exercise, Garcia wanted the dancers to get used to the delineation of our performance space and explore these limitations through the creation of images through the interactions between the three dancers. These movements were inspired from the experience of the composer Messiaen who spent time in prison during the war in Germany. We spent two to three hours in rehearsal three days every week just focusing on movement studies. The choreographer instructed us to memorize our movements while we improvised. After every interval, the choreographer instructed us to recreate the movements that resonated with us and piece them together until we had a 10-15 second movement sequence that we all agreed with. Then, we started the process all over again. We repeated this process using different prompts and manifestations until we had movement sequences that lasted 30 to 60 seconds that we felt satisfied with. Then, we tried to embody the dance. As requested by the choreographer, we imagined that we were surrounded by the audience, who were watching and observing how our three bodies moved together. Our bodies piled upon one another as we moved together as we pulled, breathed heavily, and moved effortlessly across the limited space.

The dance studio was fascinating as a performance venue because its intimate setting allowed the audience to see the small details in the movements of the dancers. The choreographer positioned the chairs against the four corners of the room so that we would be familiar with the spatial constraints of the room and imagine the sensation of being surrounded by the audience. It was also a test of our sensitivity towards other people watching us for the first time. We could now estimate how much effort we would expend in the performance by using the chairs as an imaginary audience. Furthermore, we spent time practicing spatial manipulation to produce expressions using the human body as a tangible way of manifesting ideas that are marked by unity and balance,

vitality, clarity, and variation. It also made me become acutely aware of my interactions with the objects in that specific space. I derived information through exteroceptive awareness, which utilized senses like my sight and hearing to understand space outside of my body, and interoceptive awareness, which used my physiological systems to comprehend my position and movement through space. The dancers explored different avenues for creativity each time we rehearsed the piece, which taught me to anticipate diverse possibilities. Using the body as the primary source of movement, we flowed from one move to another, each movement caused by the former and resulting in the next. A small movement would develop through time as I kept repeating the same process as I tried to become mindful of the interactions of our three bodies. I learned to appreciate the interesting movements of my body as it slowly grew and learned to affect my fellow dancers. Becoming aware of my body helped me develop techniques that resulted in mindful body action and helped me recognize movement structures and body reactions based on the performance in the present moment.

We continued modifying *Limbo* even after it premiered. *Limbo* has been performed in various outreach programs for schools such as Sieh-Chih Junior High School, Minxiong Junior High School of Taiwan, and Municipal Zhongbuguomin Junior High School.

3.2 Performing Philosophy

My approach to *Limbo* was deeply influenced by my Christian views. I was raised in a Roman Catholic family, and thus my thoughts are founded on that knowledge. As such, my interpretation of *Limbo* was that of a hypothetical theory based on the thought of Baptism. Baptism is usually a prerequisite for eternal life; it is said that if baptism were skipped, eternal bliss with God would be impossible. As Jesus said, “Amen, amen, I say to you, no one can enter the kingdom

of God without being born of water and Spirit” (John 3:5). Furthermore, the church teaches us to acknowledge humanity's limits in comprehending God's mystery and redemptive power.

My background knowledge served as an additional source of perspective and inspiration as I worked through the creative process of articulating and brainstorming ideas. I started with a sense of loneliness and isolation, but as I started to feel more in control, I was able to make modest changes that made a difference in my life. As I progressed through the images of *Limbo*, I began to grasp the mood in Domenico Beccafumi's painting "Jesus in *Limbo*." It made me think about how the contrast of light and dark in monochromatic paintings influences the entire image. I could also sense the soothing and soft environment as I considered *Limbo*. I learned to balance everything from my personal feelings, thoughts, and attachments to my co-dancers. As we progressed, the dancers gradually came close to realizing the choreographer's vision of *Limbo*.

This choreography reflected my identity and ambitions and broadened my knowledge as a dancer. It subjected me to a developmental process while allowing me to experience, express, and embody the dance performance. It also gave me the opportunity to explore my freedom as a dancer. I learned to smile through tears in my eyes, embody the pain of my grandmother's death, or feel unworthy and yet still be able to offer something. The process allowed me to get lost in my world from time to time. As a dancer, I valued the choreographer's generosity in considering my vision and flexibility in expressing my thoughts into movement. I am fascinated by the nonstop learning atmosphere inherent in the creative processes as it allowed me to channel my knowledge and ideas into the piece. When it comes to dancing, I am constantly pushing myself to expand my vocabulary.

I have also discovered that dance and verbal communication have a lot in common in the creative process. Dance steps, for example, can be viewed as words that can be connected into a sequence that functions much like a sentence does. The dance movements are analogous to the

tone of voice and the composition of these sequences are analogous to how thoughts are created. I utilized the creative process as a method to freely express myself, allowing me to communicate what I was thinking and feeling through movement rather than words.

The change was constant in the choreography and reflected the uncertainty and freedom of the performance. Al Bernard Garcia, our choreographer, reminded us to focus on forming good images instead of the precision of the movements. He acknowledged the importance of the present moment, not only in terms of the choreography itself but also dance in general. This echoed how Martin (1990) viewed the "finding of the self" as emphasized by early modernism. It entailed copying external shapes and accepting the "lived" experience behind the form. As a dancer, the existence of change in the piece allowed me to explore the different areas of the space. We performed *Limbo* many times, and the choreographer always reminded us to embrace the awkwardness in our bodies and our emotions and react to the present moment. My dance movements also evolved as I accumulated more experience on stage. The dance had a fixed structure, yet in every moment "change" was always present, specifically when it involved the green mats. As I mentioned in the previous subchapter, the dancers often neglected to follow the markings on the floor during the actual performances, whether intentionally or unintentionally. For instance, Wynvel lost his balance when manipulating his green mat into a mountain shape as he entered into his solo performance. This experience taught me to focus on the details to ensure a more effective manipulation of the prop.

3.3 The Solo Section

It was my first time performing wearing a dance belt, and I felt awkward because I was used to performing while fully clothed. Dance belts are commonly used by most male dancers in every performance to protect their private parts while performing. The dance belt was chosen for

use in the final performance because it highlighted the dancers' toned bodies and made it easy to see their movement techniques and the reflection of the theater lights.



Figure 7. shows the solo scene of the performance. The photo was taken during the final run-through at Nanhua University Dance Studio. Photo credit: Zhi-Yan Liao.

We started fully clothed while in rehearsal but eventually had to shed our clothes in the actual performance. I felt insecure because it is the first time I wore a dance belt in a public performance. Being an introvert, it takes me a little additional time to get ready, I crave personal space to reflect and refuel. I experienced insecurities like having low self-esteem. I usually prefer to listen more than I want to talk, therefore I use my words carefully and I only speak when I have something to say important. Through this, I am more inclined to pay attention to the body language and facial expressions of my fellow dancer. In times when I was struggling with these uncertainties, my family, classmates, and dance teachers have all shown me their unwavering support. Due to this, I have grown tougher and have been inspired to persevere through hardship.

Occasionally, even during our time of rehearsal, I do not feel confident. It's the first time I've ever had skin-to-skin contact with a woman. I had to fight over my nervousness and insecurities for several days while practicing the piece. Sometimes I close my eyes when touching

my classmate's body to prevent myself from becoming preoccupied with what I see and feel. It supports me in regaining my confidence so that it won't negatively impact my performance as a whole. I felt insecure but soon realized that I could use that insecurity as fuel to motivate me to do more, work harder, and perform better. I firmly believe that insecurity could be used as an agent of positive change as long as we do not allow it to overwhelm us. The dance studio became my personal space as I continued to practice my solo performance. I usually reviewed all the changes made by the choreographer at the end of each rehearsal session. I constantly pushed myself to expand my vocabulary while exploring different movements, an attitude I had adopted when learning a new dance to improve my comprehension and expression. This addition defined my uniqueness since I involved both my mind and my body in the creation process. However, there are times during the rehearsal when I'm unsure. I overthink movements that I believe will be challenging for me to carry out. One example is the fact that when it was my turn to perform alone, particularly with the props, my brain was divided. I started to worry about my surroundings and start to panic. Sometimes I wonder if I'm doing things correctly. Through these experiences, I learned that persistence and patience go hand in hand since it took me several days and time to convey my solo performance. My solo process introduced real personalities and emotions that possibly affect my performance. The authenticity of practicing my solo opens up the possibility of understanding myself to act in a normal situation.

My solo performance focused on allowing my body to acknowledge the space. I gradually let myself focus on my body parts and all the ways that my dance movements flowed instead of starting with a specific dance technique that could limit my imagination and physical expression. Instead, I combined activity with passivity to achieve an appropriate sense of connection. I became

aware of the development of my physical reactions and movements while performing this piece. I had the impression that I did well in my solo performance despite my mixed feelings.

3.4 The Props

The props gradually became an extension of my body in the development of the piece, and I sought a variety of options that produced dramatic eye-catching images. I worked on keeping the process personal while maintaining a focus on the desired outcome. This led to the realization that while my body has limitations in terms of movement, there are ways to manipulate my body within those boundaries. I then learned to move effortlessly with help from the form and momentum of the green mats. It did not take long to observe that when I tried to move quickly, I was thrown off balance. On the other hand, when I held tightly onto the green mats, I was unable to produce the desired aesthetic effect, which was an apt analogy for my daily routine. I encountered struggles and failures constantly yet I continued to seek to master these challenges and found my way through to discover my inner self.

I learned that foreseeing issues could soften the blow of their impact. The more I rehearsed and changed my perspective, the more I felt comfortable with the props. The green mats had two different sides, one smooth and the other rough, so it was easy to tell which side was which. The choreographer always reminded us to choose the perfect timing when incorporating the green mats into our routine. Technically, there were marks on the floor to guide the dancers with regards to placement, but we still had to account for last-minute changes, which I will further discuss in the next subchapter of this paper.



Figure 8. Shows scenes in the performance *Limbo* at Nanhua University Dance Studio. Manipulation of green mats. The photo was taken by Wen-Chung Lin.



Figure 9. Shows scenes in the first section of *Limbo* at the photo were taken during the final run-through of *Limbo* at Chiayi Performing Arts Center Experimental Theater. Photos credit: Zhi-Yan Liao.

The uncertainty of performance was constant in the choreography and reflected the uncertainty and freedom of the performance. Al Bernard Garcia, our choreographer, reminded us to focus on forming good images instead of the precision of the movements. He acknowledged the importance of the present moment, not only in terms of the choreography itself but also dance in general. This echoed how Martin (1990) viewed the "finding of the self" as emphasized by early modernism. It entailed copying external shapes and accepting the "lived" experience behind the form.

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Chapter 4: REFLECTIONS ON THE PERFORMANCE

Limbo was presented to the public on April 18, 2021, at Chiayi Performing Arts Center Experimental Theater in Minxiong, Taiwan. The final performance was a product of continuous trials and challenges. The entire choreography was created inside the dance studio for months. The choreographer created three main sections that would act as anchors for the rest of the work and development process. With the foundation of these three sections and the guidance of the choreographer, I was able to develop my skills in the emerging themes that fit into the performance.

After performing *Limbo*, I learn more about myself as a dancer and have access to a wide range of feelings and emotions. I believe that I have different patterns and directions that are influenced by my physical experiences and reactions. It assisted me in identifying a dance style that suited me and gave me a sense of comfort. It also brings me delight and even aids in my development.

My first section of the performance started with three bodies piled on top of one another. For my part, when the two other dancers Mary and Wynvel started to move, I began tuning in to their body language. As I mentioned earlier, acknowledging the existence of change every time I perform makes me more comfortable. We began by moving slowly starting with our hands, heads, and bodies while simultaneously giving and taking weight from one space to another, our movements similar to the motion of a newborn baby in the sense that, as our movements developed slowly, they kept growing and extending until they had reached their extremities. Our movements – such as the body restrictions, pulls and pushes, and circles – built upon the foundation we established in the choreography class we took in the past semester.

While our bodies interacted with one another, I learn that letting myself focus on my body parts and all the ways that my dance movements developed as gracefully as they could and willed

my body to allow the physical forces of gravity and momentum to guide my movements in response to the boundaries of the other bodies. Additionally, I need the stamina to challenge



Figure 10. Shows some of the scenes in the first section of *Limbo*. The three bodies piled up together moving cautiously as one, this process of improvisation contains the essence of artistic expression and creation. Photos credit: Zhi-Yan Liao (left); Wen-Chung Lin (middle and right).

variations, the strength to lift other dancers, and the flexibility to create aesthetically attractive motions. My body was able to move as one and in rhythm with itself. I feel confident using my movement phrases as we dancers move in the same direction. I was happy to find the dancing expressions I had been looking for in my past rehearsals. As I progress within my constraints, my body's circular motion becomes more consistent. My body's gravity offers me the ability to detect the motions of my fellow dancers, which makes my five senses more active and gives me a feeling of ownership. Observing my body improving for the better was very wonderful to me; it struck me in the shape of an enhanced feeling of receptivity on all levels—physical, mental, and emotional—which my life has given me the ability to respond to the fleeting nature of dance. This first section of the dance, in my opinion, is a gateway into one's own movement discoveries.

The second section of the performance highlighted every dancer's journey. Wynvel, Mary, and I represented people from different walks of life. This collaboration signifies a world that is full of inspiration, perseverance, and dedication and in which every individual carries his or her truth and identity as a human being. This segment was composed of a solo, duet, and group performance. As I mentioned in the previous chapter, I grew up with great faith in the Almighty

God sharing all my journey as I continuously sought my path. When I performed my solo in this section, I courageously shared my own story by applying my intention and energy to every detail of the movement phrase and timing. I also punctuated the performance with smooth transitions between body movements, which I believe showed my personality as a dancer. The ability to improvisation is one trait that really helps me in this section. When doing my improvisation, I step outside of my comfort zone. It helps me to discover who I am as a performer, solve problems during a performance, and think on the spot. Improvisation teaches me new things about my body's range of motion, which lead to new knowledge of dance techniques and other possibilities. This becomes easier and more fluid as I gain confidence in my abstract ideas, and my performance becomes true to myself and more authentic. I consider my body is open to the possibilities of moving through accepting the experience, expanding the body's capacity to learn and create. My self-discovery was achieved through improvisation. It means that improvisation assists me in discovering who I am as a dancer, what styles I prefer, and even what I want to do with dance in the future. This second section of the performance engaged my awareness in dance self-evaluation and understanding the feeling of the senses in the space while dealing with the limitations of choreographed movements. This shows the connection of the three bodies through accepting and receiving the ideas given by physical awareness applied to the performance of *Limbo*.



Figure 11. Shows the second scene of the section, separation of three bodies. These photos were taken during the final run-through of *Limbo* at Chiayi Performing Arts Center Experimental Theater. Photos credit: Zhi-Yan Liao.

The third and final section was the most crucial part of the performance. It involved the use of props as an extension of the body as was mentioned in the previous chapter. This segment was composed of solos, duets, and a group performance incorporating the green mats being moved in various shapes and directions. While performing this segment, I imagined myself exploring different angles of life, like soul searching to find a way to reincarnate into another species or human body. I tried to capture how every person saw himself or herself when facing everyday battles in life with every movement phrase and body gesture. It was a clear vision for me that the choreographer's ideas and inputs were to build us dancers a strong role and more meaningful connection in the movement phase of the dance. The choreographer always reassures specifically each dancer about the "Playing of Roles" in each of us by filling progression in each movement intention.



Figure 12. First exploration of the green mats, when one dancer travel outside the mats and dragging it diagonally to the upper right corner of the stage. These photos were taken during the final run-through of *Limbo* at Chiayi Performing Arts Center Experimental Theater. Photos credit: Zhi-Yan Liao.

Limbo was a fascinating performance since the movement composition is unpredictable. I enjoyed the scene in which Wynvel carried Mary and I while we formed a long horizontal shape using the green mats. Mary appears to be floating in the air while Wynvel and I are hidden behind her, cooperating to hoist her as high as we can. This demonstrates our skill as dancers as we move slowly while maintaining a steady momentum. I liked the image being presented. It makes me feel energized in every detail I provide and demonstrates my dancing ability. I enjoy the concept of the piece because it provides me with a wider variety of movement that is genuine or authentic by dancing from the perspective of my body, which appears and moves differently from others. As a dancer, I can relate to the idea of "known" and "unknown" because it sometimes makes me unexpected or unanticipated. It enables me to take into account both my body's inclinations to move in accordance with impulse patterns that have been created and made routine through practice and its preferences for particular types of movement choices from a movement vocabulary.

Meanwhile, the lighting for *Limbo* served to illuminate the details of our techniques, the tone of our bodies, and the manipulation of the props. The spotlight focused on me and motivated me to make the performance more authentic, and I savored each moment when our bodies remained faithful to the performance stage and the wonderful surrendering that occurred. Because the movements were visible, they were also fascinating to observe. I learned to work with the spatial constraints of the performance space and this sense of control allowed me to fill in the gaps in the movements and give even the tiniest gestures definition and meaning. Although there is a three-part structure of the choreography and overlapping music, the specific movements are always on point in every sequence of the performance innovating in relation to the connections of the body and the unpredictable actions of the other dancers.

Finally, the music completed the sensory experience of the dance performance. Two tunes were used in the performance: one slow and one upbeat. This tune had a steady speed. I noticed that the composition took its time showcasing the movements' formal qualities. The pieces were perfectly suited to the concept of the performance, and the quality of the vibrant harmony inspired me to express myself through a combination of movements, which is a clear expression of another form of knowledge that flowed from the beginning until the end of the performance. The studies we took in music theory were beneficial to us, especially since our dance signals involve changes in rhythm. I can control my body more easily since I am aware of when to pause at a particular interval. Because I am fully aware of these changes, it gives me more confidence on stage. In comparison to our previous performance in numerous activities, it got more tranquil this time. My senses are fully engaged and my body is fully adapted to the environment, which makes me more eager to execute my next movement phrases as I train my mind to expand my dance vocabulary.

CONCLUSION

Through analyzing the experience, my thoughts about *Limbo's* creative process broaden my knowledge and comprehension of the performance. The exploration of creativity allows me as a dancer to acknowledge new possibilities that arose during the rehearsals. It became the basis for my understanding of who I am as a person.

I gained knowledge from the creative process by learning about myself as a dancer and by exploring my imagination freely. *Limbo* was not just about coming up with a concept; it was also about putting ideas into action. I have discussed my reflections on *Limbo* during the creative process which ensured that I had sufficient time to overcome inconsistencies and technicalities. It was also about using my body to tell a story and creating good connections between the dancer and the choreographer. These are the ideas that I discovered and I am eager to learn more about as these encounters continue to grow. Through dancing, I learned that the creative process should be measured through the function of effectiveness, in processes and outcomes. I was able to elegantly manifest a wide range of emotional and physical actions that I hadn't discovered in my previous performances. After analyzing my performance experience, I know how effective it was to plan my movements, test my ideas, and possibly take risks. The resulting confluence of the choreographer's framework in choreographing the piece *Limbo* and my willingness to embody his ideas went beyond my expectations and his conventions of creation.

Through this, I gained a new perspective on presenting dance works based on my personal experience. The creative process helped me understand that there is an increased chance of breakthrough moments when the dancers are prepared for the specific task assigned by the choreographer. I would say, after having completed this project, the first and most crucial step in the process for a dancer is to be internally motivated and willing to overcome failures and make

sacrifices. I took inspiration from the recent global pandemic, namely COVID-19, that affected millions of people around the world. I imagined a scene with bodies piled on top of one another to depict the lack of facilities to accommodate patients affected by the virus. Through this, my perspective is widened by self-discovery to see the dance process as an integral component of knowing myself. It enables me to view things from a different vantage point, which led me to believe that I played a crucial part during the entire performance.

As a dance performance major, I kept myself open to potential opportunities that would hone my abilities and balance my inner and outer perspectives. I was aware of the challenges that needed to be conquered, but, at the same time, I believed that I should always go back to the core purpose of why I dance. The performance, from inception to completion, had been a life-changing experience, and my learning process had enhanced my knowledge, morale, and experiences. As I prepare for another year as a dance major, I carry with me the knowledge that shaped me as a dancer, namely that being true to myself is the key to seeing the positive aspect of any situation and also motivates me to keep going regardless of the results of the venture. I learned to lean into perseverance to realize my goals; it is with this spirit that I am completing my thesis in a few months. Through my continued effort to embody the spirit of the piece and to expertly execute the movements, I pushed myself closer to the choreographer's ideal vision of *Limbo*. I also learned to respect the importance of music, lighting, and props in the choreography. As a dancer, I consider these to be key elements in creating another dimension to experiencing the performance. It has been a long journey of collecting new knowledge and experiences as I continue to follow my dreams and seek to chronicle my experience as a young artist. I learned to push myself further than I thought I could to develop my skills and to reach the ideal of the choreographer. I applied my

analytic skills and lived experiences while stretching my creativity through improvisation and creating visual images, stage spaces, and dance techniques.

The creative process helped me develop my quick thinking, decision-making, and communication skills, and allowed me to become more confident as a performer, while improvisation taught me to be less afraid of making mistakes. My experience mirrored De Spain's (1997) statement, which indicated that “the dance emphasized the importance of improvisation at the moment of new action/interaction.” In addition, the visual images we utilized helped me to develop a conscious ability to employ my senses and generate or re-create a genuine or fictitious experience in my mind, which can alter movement. These images made my movements unique and at the same time unpredictable. These experiences broaden my perspectives on dance. The awareness sharpened my senses and awakened my sensitivity to listen and respond to what was going on in the present moment.

The two years of studying abroad in Taiwan have been the most challenging part for me as a young student artist. I took the first steps on this risky new journey in my life and made the hardest decision to be away from my family. However, I remain steadfast in grasping the chance to fulfill my dreams through dance, especially as the breadwinner of my family. Furthermore, I am more self-assured and capable of making wise decisions as I continue my studies. I was able to improve my decision-making abilities in addition to my dance abilities because it affected both my life as a dancer and as an individual. Additionally, I get to demonstrate how my dancing has advanced over the past two years. I spent months preparing for this performance, and now is the perfect time to impart all the lessons and knowledge I have acquired. I have integrated the concepts and principles of performing arts with learning dance because I believe that learning should be fun, creative, and interactive. I am aware that there are many areas in dance technique that I still need

to develop, but I am eager to learn more about my body and continue to push it to its absolute maximum throughout my everyday performance. There is a lot to learn, particularly on how to handle oneself when engaging in the creative process in dance, therefore I also want to take use of this opportunity to share my experience. I want to demonstrate to the many young aspiring kids who wish to be great dancers in the Philippines that there is a lot of variety of fresh dance methods that can be applied to create fresh modern dance genres. There is a potential to enhance another level of performance with the help of comprehensive body and mind awareness.

I envision myself joining other dance companies that will help me further hone my craft and develop my dance identity. I hope to someday build a dance studio that will help guide young children through their dream of becoming professional dancers. I also want to share what I have learned through my Master's program at Nanhua University with the next generation. I hope to become a good teacher and an inspiration to my future students someday. I am aiming to do it all with a heart full of love, passion, and dedication. Dance has greatly impacted my life, and I will forever be grateful for everything it has manifested. I will continue to nurture the creativity of dance with a humble mind that mindfully thinks, a heart that feels the sensitivity of dwelling, and a spirit that reaches the soul of the place.

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Appendix

Program Notes

A: Program Information

Limbo

Choreography by AL Garcia

Performance by Wynvel R. Anguren, Cyril C. Valeriano, and Mary Evangeline R. Recto.

Music by Oliver Messiaen, Kim Jae Duk, Meredith Monk, Wayne Hankin, and Toni Munoz.

LIMBO is an uncertain period of waiting for a decision or resolution. A temporary state or condition. A place is in-between and unknown. A place where time and space are unknown.

Inspired by Oliver Messiaen's work which resonates with a feeling of transcendence – beyond time and space, beyond life. This musical work was written while he was a prisoner of war in German captivity in Gornitz, Germany where he spent quite some time during the war. In this time of the pandemic, Messiaen's piece is still relevant. In this challenging time, I would like to use this music and create work as Messiaen did during the time of war. To give people hope and to release them from all the anxiety, hatred, and fear.

B: (Re)collections Publicity Poster



Figure 13. (Re)collections Publicity Poster

The (Re)configurations production consists of four choreographed pieces with different styles of creation. The dance pieces were entitled *Limbo*, *Link*, *Recollection*, and *Babaylan*, or

BBYLN. All the cast members were Filipinos from the Philippines. The production was made possible with the support of the Department of Ethnomusicology of Nanhua University and the Department of Performing Arts of Guang Ming College.

