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Revelations, in Creation and Choreography: Alvin Ailey's Application of Dance/Movement Therapy in Mending Cultural Trauma

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*Revelations, in Creation and Choreography: Alvin Ailey's Application of Dance/
Movement Therapy in Mending Cultural Trauma*

Submitted in partial completion of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Science in Dance/Movement Therapy at Sarah Lawrence College

May 2022

Abstract

Alvin Ailey's 1960's ballet suite, *Revelations*, utilizes elements of dance/movement therapy theory and practice to inspire and encourage empathetic connection and communal togetherness within the performing arts arena. Through depictions of mirroring interventions and the utilization of *blood memory* as body memory, Alvin Ailey created a movement narrative of the African American experience to communicate the emotional spectrum of human life. In witnessing both sorrow and joy through performance, audiences journey through emotional polarities to find shared empathy and unification toward mending collective pains from systemic oppressions. Expanding beyond barriers of racism and cultural difference, Alvin Ailey's *Revelations* communicates, choreographically and developmentally, the building of communal empathy and reconciliation through a story of shared cultural trauma and triumph.

Keywords: Revelations, Alvin Ailey, blood memory, dance/movement therapy, cultural trauma, mirroring, empathy, performing arts

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Before continuing it is advisable to view Alvin Ailey's Revelations at the following link:

Alvin Ailey's Revelations 33:43

Overture

As a graduate Dance Movement Therapy candidate, I had to actively practice self-regulation through breath while studying the history of this field. Without doing so, I would have not become aware of how to manage the growing tension in my shoulders, glutes, lower back, chest and iliopsoas muscles. My sternum became extremely heated and a blockage in my throat had developed weekly during classes. Within my comprehension of the field of dance/movement therapy, there were no reflections of my own self-image in any practitioners or theorists presented. In a movement-based field influenced by many white identifying cis-gendered women, I often felt invisible. It was through the marriage of my culture and current field of study that I discovered a sense of genuine belonging in my new embodied community of clinicians, practitioners, theorists, dancers, artists, educators, and movers. This sense of belonging is not mine, yours, nor anyone else's to claim solely as their own. This belonging values the indigenous practices and people who have utilized dance/movement therapy and communal healing practices prior to the foundations of modern Euro-centric psychology. This belonging is of the people, and so should dance/movement therapy be returned to the people.

There were no dance/movement therapists in my life when I needed healing most. During that resilient period, I did, however, train heavily as a pre professional modern and ballet dancer.

During this time, I was routinely taught and required to simultaneously use the body as an athletic instrument and channel for catharsis. I learned to access embodied artistic expressivity

and somatically condition my musculature for optimal use and wellness. My embodied educational background did not cross paths with the celebrated founding dance/movement therapists of the twentieth century. The integration of body-mind interconnectedness to support psychological implications was a foreign concept to my consciousness. Dance/movement therapy is a field of phenomenological study that incorporates bodily sensations, movement choices, and non-verbal expressivity into our awareness when reflecting on our lived experiences and relationships. The studio, marley floors, high mirrors, ballet barre, and moving bodies of others guided me towards my discovery of these foundations in the field. I first experienced therapeutic healing through dance while moving in memory of the man whom I was devastated to not hear mentioned at any time during my studies.

Curtain Up

“Dance is for everybody.” Alvin Ailey

I witnessed *Revelations* at sixteen years old and felt an immediate sense of liberation beginning to grow in my sternum. The 1960’s modern dance ballet activates, hums, rocks, sways, and lifts into movement unmarked memories stored in my young body. As I watch the dancers and listen to the music carry my consciousness, I recall memories of ancestors, rage, trauma and triumph, Africa, the Atlantic, all of God’s children, spiritual transcendence, and the healing housed within the bodies of culture that survived American enslavement. My body is, to name a few intersections, African (specific region and country of origin unknown)/African-American/Afro-diasporic/black (BLK)/Baltimorean (USA)/she, her, hers/woman/cis-gendered/heterosexual/ Baptist and Catholic church raised, but current non-religious affiliate/Master of Science in Dance/Movement therapy candidate/professional modern dancer and artist educator. I find reassurance in *Revelations* and feel immensely seen through the culturally and ancestrally significant works of modern dance choreographer Alvin Ailey (1931-1989). The brilliance of his work, and what continues to draw my heart to him again and again, is our similar historical context and culture and the equity and accessibility to reach all humanity beyond the falsified barriers of race, class, gender, sex, religion, and other oppressive hierarchies.

This possibility manifests through Mr. Ailey’s embodied comprehension of traditional West African communal dance practice as an effective healing modality that instills hope, supports change, and builds communal empathy. His experiential knowledge of these ancestral practices is modeled within his retold narrative of the African American experience through folk

music and symbolic movement remembered from his childhood. For a culture that has been stripped of its humanity, Alvin Ailey retrogrades assumptions, birthed in oppressive Euro-centric ideologies, that believe melanated people are less capable of experiencing sensations of joy, transcendence, empathy, love, passion, sorrow, intellect, perseverance, technical brilliance, mastery, healing, liberation and freedom. *Revelations* is a display of our complex and interchangeable human sensations for both the dancers to emote and process and for the audience to reflect and assess throughout the performance.

Ailey also integrates, within his cultural narrative, a utilization of dance/movement therapy theory and practice to deepen sensations of empathy, communal togetherness, and self-actualization for both his dancers and his audiences. In creation and choreography, Alvin Ailey turns performance halls into therapeutic safe spaces. The audience and dancers both become movers within Alvin Ailey's work, as we all engage together throughout the piece, feeling, shifting, and sensing the story being told. Through three distinctly symbolic movements, audience members developmentally witness dancers emote a passionate communal journey through the emotional spectrum of human life. Watching Alvin Ailey's work provides witnesses a clear canvas to use, so that we may as collective viewers connect with his movement and projected sensations, feel them dancing within ourselves and come to paint our own portraits of who we are.

Coming from a different cultural background than Alvin Ailey, in history or ideology, is of great value to the power of *Revelations*. Alvin Ailey's rendition of pain and prosperity transcends our variations and soothes the heart in a tender and universal place. Through the

beauty and brilliance of his embodied cultural knowledge, he shares with us an examination of the human spirit dancing to carry on. *Revelations* reminds us that our human journeys are never traveled alone and are always surrounded by the presence, support, and company of others. Surrounded by community, seated within the balcony of the Lyric Opera House in Baltimore, Maryland, I heard cries of “hmpf”, “yes”, deep relief, “ugh”, “wow”, “yay” and many other exclamations of audible joy while watching the thirty-five minute ballet with others. We stomped, clapped, sang, whistled, snapped, and danced together as the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre lowered the curtain to end the night, closing the show with *Revelations*. All blockages, barriers, gateways, paths, and doors of prejudice that prohibit empathy and connection among human beings dissipate as we share in the experience of this performance together.

For thirty-five minutes I was transported back home to a place where all I had was my body. Once the drums, voices, deities, ways of living, children’s songs, oral traditions, diets, mannerisms, rites of passage, language, clothing, tools, weapons, books, science, mathematics, rhythms, medicines, ecosystems, rituals, teachers, and spirits were stolen, all I had was a moving body left to remember it all. I am forever grateful for Alvin Ailey. He allowed his body and the bodies of others to project collective trauma, the eminence of change, and the embodied power of hope to all humanity for the past sixty-two years. I will never forget the day I saw *Revelations* in myself. I was changed. It was as if I was looking through a moving mirror, one that shows not only my body, but all bodies who felt their sternums grow while witnessing that day.

Through the guidance of shared musical stimuli and the vibratory sensations of an orchestral gospel choir, Alvin Ailey introduces the ballet to the audience in darkness. No body is seen, only voices heard slightly humming in harmony as the space gradually shifts and witnesses grow aware. Immediately the audience is immersed, and being prepared for the journey that is *Revelations*, by joining in listening together as the volume of choral voices and downstage curtain both simultaneously rise. In the spirit of historical dance/movement therapy theorist and practitioner Trudi Shoop, I ask the reader, “Won’t you join the dance?” (Wallock, 1983). A dance that came from cultural meaning making, *blood memories*, and that ole’ time religion. In preparation for this journey, I shall take a moment to embody the start of *Revelations*. We welcome the audience with feet planted, chest high. At this time, wherever you are, feel the sturdy earth beneath you, and the pace of your breathing. Allow your sternum to expand and contract.

The Ballet

“The first [section] was called ‘Pilgrim of Sorrow.’ I took all of the songs dealing with black people’s sorrow and put them in this section; at the time there were about five or six songs. It was about trying to get up out of the ground. The costumes and the set would be colored brown, an earth color, for coming out of the earth, for going into the earth.” Alvin Ailey

Pilgrim of Sorrow: I’ve Been ‘Buked

The lights begin to dim in the concert hall as voices are heard harmoniously humming. Melodically, operatic voices rise in volume as the house lights decrease, preparing for darkness. It grows fully dark, for a moment, as the voices continue to hum. With a unanimous rise, the voices and curtain lift, a peaking light breaks the darkness. The music comes to a soft pause once all nine dancers are fully seen positioned in a triangle shape, with the point closest to the audience. Dancers are all standing with feet separated, further than hip width apart. Their arms are fully extended, placed low, palms facing forward. Their heads and sternums are lifted upward past the balcony and out toward the audience, with feet firmly planted to ground them in a sturdy stance. The dancers move in and out of this original formation, breaking into bursts of varying solos and repeatedly exposing their palms to the audience. They transition slowly, rhythmically, independently and in unison along to the choir singing:

I’ve been ‘buked, and I’ve been scored, Yes

I’ve been ‘buked, and I’ve been scored, Children,

I’ve been ‘buked, and I’ve been scored

I've been talked about, 'sho's you're born

Their synchronized movements repeat along with the chorus. Hands are seen all together reaching upward, to the side, and circling in unison. Their legs are bending and stretching, allowing their torsos to match their arms, rising and falling again in unison. Their solos are close to the ground, with dancers growing in and out of the floor, deep bends, contractions, and repeatedly reaching outward. Having returned to their original triangle wedge formation the dancers finish with hands very close together, arms fully extended, reaching and looking upward above the head. Together they end in unique syncopated openings of the arms, returning back to the beginning placement of the hands, with heads and sternums lifted once more. The lights fade to dark.

Pilgrim of Sorrow: Didn't My Lord Deliver Daniel

A trio of dancers, two female presenting and one male presenting, are seen in a wide deep bend of the legs with arms, palms, and heads facing directly upward. Their heads are the first to move as they circle at the neck, clasp hands high above their heads, and quickly move their hands down lowering the head again. They move in and out of floorwork, contractions, slow bends to the ground, torso isolations, and wide arm expansions as they perform individualized solos and duets. They dance rhythmically along to the choir singing:

Didn't my Lord deliver Daniel,

Deliver Daniel, Deliver Daniel,

Didn't my Lord deliver Daniel,

Then why not every man?

Their movements grow from the ground to high leg extensions, turns and jumps, as the music crescendos louder throughout the theater. They finish with a quick spiral descent to the ground from a high standing position up on their toes. This sudden fall to the ground matches the musical score as the choir and dancers both come to an abrupt stop. Their shoulders are on the ground, faced away from the audience with the pelvis, head, and exposed hand reaching upward to freeze together and finish. The lights fade to dark.

Pilgrim of Sorrow: Fix Me Jesus

A female presenting dancer is seen standing with her feet together, arms down by her side, and head and sternum lifted fully upward. Behind, a male dancer gazes toward her with his arms down, seen slightly above her head by the audience. She slowly suspends back and to the side as his arms open outward. They mimic in unison, bending left and right to perform a hand gesture just above and below each other. The male dancer remains seen by the audience, but not by his partner, as he echoes her shapes out of sight. They continue this movement with additional falls to the side, leaving the female dancer to be caught and lifted by her partner repeatedly. Her gaze is softened and slightly lowered as she performs slow fully extended movements of the arms and legs, often taking her off balance and into the arms and hands of her partner. The dancers move in and out of an adagio pas de deux. They shift slowly through lifts, falls, suspensions, high leg and arm extensions, and rhythmic relationship to the choir singing:

Oh, Fix me

Oh, Fix me

Oh, Fix me Lord

Fix me Jesus,

Fix me

Their movements continue to share weight and balance with one another as the female dancer never makes eye contact with the male. The male dancer holds her pelvis, hands, arms, back, torso, and legs as she continues to rise and fall. They come to an end, preparing in a cradled lift, and the female dancer grabs her garment to stand on top of her partner's thigh. He is in a deep bend, making space with his leg and torso for her stand to hold. They finish in her upward facing suspended lift, continuing to reach herself backward as he holds her from falling. The lights fade to dark.

Take Me to the Water: Processional/Honor, Honor

“The second part was something that was very close to me – the baptismal, the purification rite.

Its colors would be white and pale blue. The middle section was to be ‘Wading in the Water.’

Songs such as ‘Honor, Honor’ had all of these extraordinary words. I was moved by what spirituals say as words, as metaphors. So I found these short songs for the middle section.”

Alvin Ailey

The timing of the music has increased and a pronounced rhythm is heard as voices and instruments build. Drums and voices are playing. Dancers wearing all white enter the stage

individually turning, running, advancing forward and back, and carrying props along with them. An isolation and rotation of the hips, torso, and back mimic the rhythmic timing of the choral humming and beating drum. With props and each other, the dancers continue turning, suspending, running, and spiraling in time with the drums. There are smiles on the dancers' faces as they run in preparation for the incoming duet.

The duet enters one after the other, turning in unison. They travel upstage, furthest from the audience, and meet a trio of dancers awaiting them. All five dancers, some standing, some kneeling, begin bending the torso forward with hands and head following. They repeat this motion with accompanied voices singing:

...I prayed all day,

I prayed all night...

... Come run along children, be baptized...

The dancers reach the arms and head upward, moving toward the audience as a group with chests forward and heads lifted, walking in rhythmic syncopation. The duet and a lead female dancer separate from the group and are left on stage.

Take Me to the Water: Wade in the Water

The duet is seen descending slowly to the floor with arms and hands facing the audience in front of them. The lead female dancer comes toward the audience in between the duet with a smile on her face. Her arms wave and ripple as she transitions steps while holding a large umbrella. The dancers behind her follow her direction as they begin coming downstage, towards

the audience in shared rhythmic steps. Switching places in low bent positions, the duet moves together completing reaches, arm extensions, ripples of the spine and wrists, turns, twists, curves and backbends in unison. Voices are heard singing:

Wade in the water,

Wade in the water, children

Wade in the water,

God's gonna trouble the water

The previous dancers return to join the duet, the lead female dancer entering first. One by one dancers continue to join as they all begin leaving the stage together. As the music repeats its main chorus, the dancers sway sideways to exit all together. The female dance of the duet is cradled within her partner's arms as she uniquely moves up tempo. A solo male dancer is left on stage as the last to exit. He takes the ending of the choral crescendo to jump, quickly extend his arms, raise his knees high, and articulate the back quickly. He leaves after moving by swaying away. The lights fade to dark.

Take Me to the Water: I Wanna Be Ready

A male soloist is seen on the floor slowly raising his gaze and torso up and down, growing in height with each repetition, to the sounds of voices singing:

I wanna be ready,

I wanna be ready,

I wanna be ready, Lord

Ready to put on my long white robe

He continues reaching out and in, up and down, growing larger and smaller. He completes a series of balances that continue to increase and decrease in size, allowing him to turn and extend. He suspends the rises and falls to the rhythmic timing of the voices heard singing. After constantly reaching with the arms and legs out, in, up, down, side, forward, and back, the male dancer ends standing, preparing to descend to the floor. He holds a backbend suspension to match the held note the singer emphasizes before falling to the ground as lights fade to dark.

Move, Members, Move: Sinner Man

“Then there would be the section surrounding the gospel church, the holy rollers and all the church happiness. Its colors would be earth tones, yellow and black. There were quite a few songs for the last section, ‘Move Members, Move.’ The whole ballet was a giant suite of spirituals. I poured in just about everything, every beautiful spiritual I had ever heard.” - Alvin

Ailey

Voices are heard singing loudly:

Oh Sinner Man, where you gonna run to?

Oh Sinner Man, where you gonna run to?

Oh Sinner Man, where you gonna run to?

On that day, run, run, run, run...

Individually, three male dancers quickly run onto the stage, one by one, stopping themselves abruptly. They begin slowly moving in unison, preparing to run again. Each male

dancer performs a solo as they switch on and off stage until joining, returning together in unison to finish. The first solo starts low to the ground. In deep leg bends, traveling contractions, and reaching movements along the floor, each performer dances a series of fast paced rhythmic steps ending in elongated suspensions, quick turns, energetic leaps, and high leg kicks. As one soloist exits, another enters, jumping and spinning onto the stage coming toward the audience quickly. Repeatedly, each dancer performs various expansive and outward extended movements, reaching with the hands and head upward and out toward the audience. They come back together, dancing in unison, dragging along the floor and pulling themselves up and down. The dancers open and close their chests, arms, and hands outward toward the audience in preparation to finish. They end quickly as the music speeds up, running away from the audience and finally turning around to open their chests forward, kneeling on the floor. The music ends quickly and the lights fade to dark.

Move, Members, Move: The Day is Past and Gone

The lighting and music has shifted once again, returning to a slower organ melody with warmer colored hues. A solo female dancer stands on stage holding props, waving her hand, slowly walking toward the audience. Another female dancer joins her, and they acknowledge one another. Followed by other female dancers, they all walk onto the stage, holding their common props nodding non-verbally, moving close together and coming to form group circles. They all surround the last female dancer to enter, who walks quickly in pace to the center of the stage. They wait in stillness momentarily before joining one another in shared quick hand waving and

torso swaying side to side. They separate and prepare to settle. Placed equally distanced from one another, filling the stage, they place down their stools and open their fans and arms wide.

Nodding their brimmed hats, they slowly descend to sit in unison with their backs turned to the audience. Voices are heard singing:

The time of day draws nigh

Oh, the time of death draws nigh

Move, Members, Move: You May Run On

You may run on for a long time

Run on for a long time

You may run on for a long time...

As voices continue to repeat this phrase, seated female dancers sway side to side, front and back, in unison with their backs facing the audience. Stretching their hands and legs outward and away from their seated positions, they turn around to face forward with smiles. Moving together they reach up, look down, spread out, and welcome the male dancers who run on stage to meet them. In rhythmic unison to the tempo playing, all male and female dancers perform a series of syncopated footwork, hand claps, and finger points directed towards each other and the audience. All dancers have a partner. Female and male dancers mime conversation with one another, looking and bouncing together uptempo with a lift in the sternum and shoulders. They

prepare to end, the female dancer seated once more on her stool, and the male dancer kneeling at her side. They turn to look at each other, and smile. The music comes to an end and all dancers nod to their partner.

Move, Members, Move: Rocka My Soul in the Bosom of Abraham

I may be weak, rock o'my soul, but thou art strong, rock o'my soul.

I'm leaning on, leaning on, I'm leaning on his mighty arm.

Oh, rock o'my

Rock o'my soul in the bosom of Abraham

Rock o'my soul in the bosom of Abraham

Rock o'my soul in the bosom of Abraham

Oh, rock o'my Soul.

My soul is fed, rock o'my soul, my soul is free, rock o'my soul, I'm going home, going home, I'm going home, to live with you.

Dancers watch one another as they move improvisationally and clap in a shared rhythm. The audience begins clapping, matching the dancers and musical rhythms also with hands and feet. All dancers, with full smiles, travel down toward the audience with shoulders and chests open, hands on their hips. Swaying together in unison they complete a series of turns, bounces, high reaches out and upward, backbends and torso isolations continuously in lines side by side. Preparing to end, the music increases in volume and speed. The dancers quicken together, smiling and spinning fast with their heads up and down. They look above with arms outwardly extended, spinning once more with heads tilted back. Before descending to the ground, the

dancers reach in and out, finishing to show the audience their open chests, high extended arms, and wide smiles. A high falsetto singer finishes a suspended note as the dancers hold their final kneeled position. With hands, eyes, chests, and sternums lifted and open towards the audience, the lights fade to dark and the music transitions to applause.

“I believe that the dance came from the people and that it should always be delivered back to the people.” Alvin Ailey

The Man

On December 4, 1988 Alvin Ailey Jr. smiled, waved, and leaned forward to rise out of his chair, as an audience cheered and applauded at his presence. He received The Kennedy Center Honor that evening for lifetime contribution to American culture through the performing arts, the nation's highest official distinction for creative artists (Wignot, 2021). With an astounding applause and the eloquent words of actress Cicely Tyson, Mr. Ailey was introduced:

Alvin Ailey has a passion for movement that reveals the meaning of things. His is a choreography of the heart, drawing a whole new public to modern dance. Alvin Ailey is Black, and he's universal. The very spirit that has made him a Pied Piper of modern dance, and that's his genius. (Wignot, 2021)

The genius of his work and the brilliance of his universality as a modern dancer and choreographer begin and end with the emotional narratives of his ballets. Born in rural country full of farmland and abundant heat, Alvin Ailey was raised by his mother during the Great Depression, a point in United States history in which ever present implications of national economic failure resulted in high rates of unemployment, malnourishment, poverty, homelessness, and prolonged financial hardship for American citizens (Ellis, 1995; Dunning, 1996; DeFrantz, 2004).

In the filmed documentary on his life and legacy by director Jamila Wignot (2021), Alvin Ailey's voice is heard describing visceral memories of his childhood, working fields with his mother, the color of southern sunsets, picking cotton, and images of moving bodies in the twilight of Texas nights. Fleeing the racial terrors of southern American life and a traumatizing

family experience, Alvin and his mother, Ms. Lula Cooper, became citizens of Los Angeles, California when he was twelve years old (DeFrantz, 2004). At fourteen, inside of Los Angeles concert theaters, Alvin Ailey was introduced to dance and the professional Russian dance company Ballet Russe De Monte Carlo (Dunning, 1996). He had fallen in love with the performing arts, but Mr. Ailey did not fall in love with his own image moving across proscenium stages. Neither his body nor his identity was reflected, or represented with dignity, in concert theaters until the works of Afro-Diasporic choreographer Katherine Dunham, Pearl Prime, and Asadata Dafora crossed his path (DeFrantz, 2004). Dunham, Prime, Dafora, and other countless artists of their time entertained, affirmed, enlightened, and validated representations of traditional West African and Afro-Diasporic cultural values through movement (DeFrantz, 2004; Anderson, 2006). During this segregated and racially charged time of United States history, Dunham's representation of Afro-Caribbean dance traditions to her audiences propelled American performance culture to integrate the lives and embodied movement expressions of melanated people into the mainstream arena (Anderson, 2006).

Traditional West African performance culture integrates the whole being, body and mind, music and movement, allowing for rhythm, total body expression, verbal and non-verbal communication to symbiotically assist individuals and groups in translating stories, emotions, and communal spiritual practices through embodied awareness (DeFrantz, 2004; Thompson, 2014; Equiano, 2009; Hanna, 1978). Based on his lived experiences and choreographed through embodied memory, Alvin Ailey's *Revelations* as an on stage reflection of traditional West African performance culture that translates the emotional complexities of the human experience

through the moving body for others to communally witness and attune (Kourlas, 2010; Cook, 1978; DeFrantz, 2004; Wignot, 2021; Morini, 2015). Judith Jamison, director emerita of Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater from 1989-2011, in an interview exclaims that *Revelations*:

...set a tone for what is human in all of us, no matter where you come from. We've done that piece all over the world, and everyone understands exactly what it's about — it's humanity, it's triumph, and what it is to be human (Morini, 2015).

Through his choreographic work and movement expressivity, Alvin Ailey orchestrates a symbolic narrative based on his own embodied experiences. He transcends the theory of performing arts and dance to include an awareness and integration of one's own historical embodied cultural traditions (DeFrantz, 2004). In modeling Dunham, and countless others who reclaimed African-American humanity through their artwork, Alvin Ailey's communal narrative was the spark that ignited *Revelations* into becoming an affirming, validating, seeing and being seen, fully immersed and embodied, personally transparent shared felt experience. By shifting his embodied knowledge of his heritage and unique experiences into movement, Alvin Ailey's *Revelations* displays ancestral healing modalities in which music and movement support the individual in establishing a sense of belonging and cultural identity through narration (DeFrantz, 2004; Thompson, 2014; Equiano, 2009). His specific integration of cultural history and movement makes him a brilliant choreographer and a universal messenger that our stories are housed within the body.

The Theory

Dance/movement therapy is rooted in scientific research that examines how the body, mind, and emotions are intertwined. Dance/movement therapists speak of the powers of this integration and of how individuals have transformed, using their bodies to move through pain and gain insight into their deepest levels of unconscious processing (Winters, 2008, p. 88). Within the dance/movement therapy framework, there is a highlighted emphasis on both the mover and their supportive witness as collaborative partners along the therapeutic journey. As one moves through life, another also watches and listens, both the mover and their witness, the witness and their mover, engage in this reciprocal dance together. Clinically, movers and witnesses practice communicating in safe, attentive, and accepting spaces while in the presence of a dance/movement therapist (Himmat, 2012). Clients, and dance/movement therapy practitioners, receive support from their bodies in healing their wounded pasts, misattunements, and unbearable experiences through the non-verbal interactions they share with themselves and others (Caldwell, 1996).

Differing from traditional Eurocentric models of talk psychotherapy, dance/movement therapy does not require the verbal regurgitation of retelling a past pain or traumatic event for understanding. Such repetitive cognitive and verbal processing can cause retraumatizing effects and rework the scars we are intending to heal through the therapeutic process with our clients (Jennings, 1997). Retriggering clients by requesting that they verbally retell their stories to assist in building understanding for the clinician is not the path toward building true empathy and

connection. According to Caldwell (1996), the dance/movement therapist holds a client's personal stories without judgment and allows another the opportunity to develop empathy for themselves, increasing their ability to feel and accept all aspects of their life.

Empathy is a visceral and cognitive understanding of another's emotions or motivations and allows a person to take another's viewpoint to understand the intentions behind their actions more fully; in other words, "feeling what they feel" (Berrol, 2006). Through movement action, dance/movement therapy nurtures the neurological processes of the brain that ignite empathetic connection and attunement (Winters, 2008). Research conducted on animal interaction (Winters, 2008) reveals mirror neurons in diverse regions of the brain may be the neurological beginnings of empathy in humans, and research on the mirror neuron system (MNS) suggests that the areas involved in perception and the creation of movement overlap. These brain areas are also involved in the comprehension of movement intention and emotion, which involves the neural stimulation of another person's emotional actions in order to infer their intentions and better understand them (Rizzolatti & Craighero, 2004).

Researchers of infant development (Stern, 2000; Tronick, 1998) have also studied the connection between non-verbal interaction and emotional perception through the observation of infants' and caregivers' synchronized facial expressions, gestures and movement patterns. The process of sensing familiar emotions in others is a foundational non-verbal language that functions in felt sensory perception when communicating (Winters, 2008; Tronick, 1998). For example, being able to register the emotional intentions behind a frown or a smile, require a

nonverbal processing that relies on both a recognized physical cue and emotional sensation. Within dance/movement therapy, empathetic relationships are fostered through the sense of community established when recognizing shared emotions in others (Chodorow, 1991; Levy, 2005; Pallaro, 1993; Schmais, 1998). Being able to empathize with yourself, and receive empathy from another, opens the possibility for growth and change in perspective. This empathizing process allows for the dance/movement therapist to nonjudgmentally and unbiasedly make clinical decisions on behalf of the current presentations of their client's needs. Communicating on a movement based level engages non-verbal perception and emotional connection when forming new therapeutic relationships within the therapeutic session.

Dance/movement therapists work with clients through movement to also support empathy and relationship building in groups. Clients interact with each other through shared action to form group cohesion and understanding. Mirroring is a dance/movement therapy intervention, which involves imitating, replicating, and echoing qualities of movement. This occurs when two people make similar body movements that are coordinated, synchronized, or slightly echoed in time (Berrol, 2006). Mirroring as an exercise is employed in dance/movement therapy to enhance empathy and understanding with others by connecting both non-verbal language and emotional perception through action (Adler, 2002; Berrol, 2006; Iacoboni, 2008; Winters, 2008).

Forming relationships with clients from a movement based framework that recognizes the physical implications of empathy building allows the dance movement therapist an opportunity to minimize the retriggering harm of cognitive overload when verbally expressing how we feel.

Within therapeutic relationships, empathy is crucial; thus, non-verbal interactions can serve as another outlet to further emotional understanding without words. The mover and their witness, the witness and their mover, do not go without being fully received and comprehended during a mirroring movement exchange, in which they both share a non-verbal language that is understood on a body level (Adler, 2002; Whitehouse, 1999). Further research on empathy also highlights the impact witnessing movement has on the brain, in which movements do not need to be completed by a viewer to still be recognized and felt (Berrol, 2006; Porges, 2009).

Witnessing and watching others' movement that is connected to an internal emotion, sensation, awareness, thought, or feeling, cultivates the ability for the brain to still infer intentions and empathize with the mover although they are not moving with them (Berrol, 2006; Adler, 2002). Sharing emotionally motivated movement actions with themselves and others supports the mover in gaining a deeper awareness of the psychological and somatic nuances of that emotion (Himmat, 2012). In performing for an audience, whether it is the public or other group members, the mover identifying with their own internal witness, cultivates an ability to “see” themselves as they are, express their pain, feel their emotions, and recover the self that was pushed out of their awareness (Himmat, 2012). Thus, witnesses of this mover will feel and empathize with the intentionality, particular emotional connections, and self-seeing process being reflected.

While seated in concert halls, audiences are witnesses and dancers are movers, having a conversation through the non-verbal language of their shared performance experience. They both

equally engage while moving, watching, recognizing, and reflecting one another, immersed in the process of empathy building (Winters, 2008).

The Practitioner

In reviewing literature available on the life and legacy of Alvin Ailey in relation to dance/movement therapy theory and practice, I am aware of cultural divisions that perpetuate a segregation between the field of dance/movement therapy and the historical African American experience (Chang, 2016). Founding theorists in dance/movement therapy describe the field as an integration of movement and dance to change the chemistry of the body and include the consciousness of the whole human being in creating empathy for oneself and others (Wallock, 1983). Highlighted within this holistic approach is an emphasis on body-mind integration. This integration is a merging of cognitive and rationalized perspectives with present embodied sensations and somatic experiences. Being aware of our body-mind connection helps us expand our creative and expressive capacity throughout our lives (Leventhal, 1984). We have opportunities to build stronger empathetic relationships with self and others through movement by engaging in activities that encourage body-mind awareness and connection through dance/movement therapy (Chace, 1975).

The revered theories previously mentioned reflect a philosophical perspective on movement that I first experienced through the work of Alvin Ailey. Within his 1960's ballet, *Revelations*, Alvin Ailey choreographed a shared spiritual experience for mover and witness, dancer and audience, to engage through an exhibition of African American history, culture, and healing traditions (DeFrantz, 2004; Cook, 1978; Korlous, 2010). He also integrates concepts of intergenerational racialized trauma (Menakem, 2017) and body memory (Kolter, et al., 2012)

into his choreographic process and embodied practice as a coined theory he called *blood memory* (DeFrantz, 2004). *Revelations* is cultural memory as body wisdom, an exhibition of Mr. Ailey's inspirational embodied practice that integrates fragments of his Texas childhood and the gospel folk music of the southern black Baptist church (DeFrantz, 2004). His choreographic choices integrate key dance/movement therapy models in which consistent examples of group and duet mirroring (McGurry & Rusos, 2011; Winters, 2008) reflect empathetic communal connection within a shared cultural experience. With an additional supportive integration of rhythmic attunement (Motenero & Wall, 2011; Wallock, 1983; Chace, 1975), Alvin Ailey mirrors in layers, visually and audibly, to the audience a reflection of unification and belonging through his cultural lens.

Embedded within the creation of *Revelations* are Mr. Ailey's *blood memories*. These are the memories of his life in Texas as a young boy, and an embodied intuition of the recollection of his family memories, the memories of his ancestors (DeFrantz, 2004). Alvin Ailey's blood memories fueled his choreographic choices and inspired the setting of movements, shapes, positions, colors, songs, props, qualities, and synchronized phrases of the ballet (DeFrantz, 2004). Mr. Ailey created *Revelations* to reflect the humanity of all dehumanized people who have pain to express and joy left to experience. His work is purely based on manifesting a reflection of human capacity to feel immensely through an ancestral and cultural nonverbal context. He uses body memory and unison choreography to reflect unification, oneness, empathy, and community, all accessible through a performing arts arena.

Theory in Choreography: Mirroring

The emotional repertoire and effort quality of an individual's movement is empathetically mirrored, followed, and/or echoed within dance/movement therapy in order to establish connections with others based on cognitive understanding, emotional compassion, and a capacity for empathetic reflection (Levy, 2005; Sandel, 1993). Mirroring is one specific intervention derived from founding dance/movement therapy theorist Marian Chace (1975) that is widely used by therapists to grow emotional resonance with their clients and ignite the neurological processes in the brain that enhance empathy and understanding (McGarry & Russo, 2011; Berrol, 2006).

Mr. Ailey has dancers beginning and ending each section of the ballet in unison phrases to establish and reestablish sensations of togetherness and community (DeFrantz, 2004). He begins the ballet with *I've Been Buked*, and has dancers positioned so that all can be seen together looking upward with palms facing front. As the music continues dancers move in unison from side to side, up and down, reaching out and up, synchronizing with each other's speed and quality of movement. Holding the same positions, dancers move through the first piece sharing similar shapes and pausing for stillness to show the audience their shared movement. The first piece ends with every dancer finding themselves with their arms down and head looking up, finishing in the same stance together. We see repeated within *Revelations* an A-B-C-D-A choreographic format in which groups of dancers begin and end each section all mirroring each other in the exact same position (DeFrantz, 2004).

Choreographed within *Wade in the Water* is a reprise of a choreographic motif shown by the dancers in *I've Been Buked*. In both sections, the dancers mirror each other's arms, which are often held outward in a curved position to the side with palms and heads faced down. Repeated consistently throughout the ballet are movements of clasped or opened hands held closely together, said by Mr. Ailey to have symbolically resembled the positions of hands shackled in bondage (DeFrantz, 2004). The dancers will hold their mirroring movements in stillness so that it can be fully seen, recognized, and taken in by the audience.

To end the piece, the full company of *Revelations* appear on stage in the final yellow section and perform a turning and reaching combination all in unison facing and moving in the same directions. The company members mirror each other in smiles and joyous expressions with arms and faces reaching upward to the balcony as everyone falls on their knees and finishes their reach at the same time, holding in stillness together.

Alvin Ailey suggests another layer of mirroring in that the dancers moving in unison throughout the ballet empathetically connect and non-verbally communicate a parallel reflection of the harmonious interplay of the accompanying choral voices also heard above. These voices heard by both audience and performers not only guide the experiential and emotional journey of *Revelations*, but also serve as a catalyst for Mr. Ailey's inspiration along the creative process. Music was heavily integrated within the core theme of his suite to mimic and support the cadence and rhythm of his choreographed movement quality (Kolous, 2010; DeFrantz, 2004; Morini, 2015). Finally, dancers are seen clapping together on stage, holding another opportunity

in mirroring for the audience to also be invited to join in as *Rocka My Soul in the Bosom of Abraham* closes the show with an element of audience participation. With reflections of group mirroring in choreography and a choreographed invitation to join the dance, Alvin Ailey's *Revelations* is saturated with moments of empathetic possibility through the use of mimicry as a means of connection and communal understanding.

Ekman's (1970) research suggests that all humans share common emotional feelings and empathize with those with whom they feel a strong identity. Within American culture is racism, amongst other dehumanizing binary structures, that limit human capacity for empathic connection with others (Menakem, 2017; Coates, 2015). Racial divides within the country limited empathic relationships to only existing in segregated groups based on the familiarity of skin color. By dehumanizing another we remove the emotional connection, thus potentially removing mirror neural activation, and no longer have the ability to perceive an individual as a whole and complete being/body. As a result, racial genocides and terrors instilled fear and grief for generations through bodily harm, colonized conditioning, and psychological ailments (Coates, 2015 ; Akbar, 1996 ; Menakem, 2017 ; DeGruy, 2005 ; DuBois, 1903).

Shared cultural and communal relationships were deeply valued and required for psychological maintenance and emotional healing from the traumatizing experiences of American racism. Having known these horrors first hand, establishing a strong cultural identity within performing arts was highly important to the growth of Alvin Ailey. The affirmation presented through Afro-diasporic dance culture on stages brought him the inspiration to become

a cultural icon who reflects the validation of human familiarity to forgotten audiences (Morini, 2015). Alvin Ailey saw something familiar about Katherine Dunham and Asadata Dafora within himself, thus returning him to a former forgotten place that his body recognized, rooted in the culture of his Texas living (DeFrantz, 2004). Dance/movement therapists understand empathy and its residual effects on human connection to often help themselves better understand their clients. This writer argues that Alvin Ailey understood empathy as his tool to help others better understand themselves and how deeply they can feel.

Theory in Creation: Blood Memories

Dancer and choreographer Rennie Harris shares during conversation in a documentary on Alvin Ailey:

I see the dancer as the physical historian. The dancer holds the information from the past, present and future... They have this information stored in their body... Mr. Ailey talked about *blood memories*, what his parents went through, what his parents' parents went through, what his folk went through. And that was a major key for me. Memory, that was the anchor. (Wignot, 2021)

Memory is not only an anchor of Mr. Ailey's work, this writer argues that it is a fundamental component in revealing his embodied awareness and a movement practice that honors cultural traditions and ancestry. In a video interview merging clips of Mr. Ailey's voice describing *Revelations*, the transcript reads:

Every Sunday we were at church. Praise God to the almighty. Our beautiful black songs from the church. The joy of these people of my aunts and uncles exploding in church. It's something that was always with me. I remember there was this procession of people all in white. They sang "Wade in the Water". I came up with a piece, an evening long saga of the black experience. It was called *Revelations*.... To reveal it, *Revelations* is the title of the Bible and it's a suite of spirituals in three sections. The first section is called *Pilgrims of Sorrow*. The second section was called *Take Me to the Water* which is based on a baptismal. A personal experience when I was a kid in Texas. One was baptized outside the church by a lake all dressed in white. Well that's a very intense memory that was theatricalized for *Wade in the Water*. And the last section is called *Move Members Move*, ladies on a Sunday morning. The fans and hats in a country church. All of this is a part of my blood memory. (Wignot, 2021)

Alvin Ailey's comprehension and use of his *blood memory* can be compartmentalized into three layers of somatic understanding. First, embedded within *blood memory* is body memory, the phenomenological stance in which the past can be presently experienced through body action and metaphoric stimulation (Fuchs, 2003; Kolter, et al., 2012; Eyerman, 2004). This explains Mr. Ailey's metaphoric use of clasped hands, movements of heavy weight and groundedness, reflections of religious ring-shouts (Thompson, 2004), Negro spirituals, and culturally symbolic props to represent a once sorrowful and troubled time in African American history (DeFrantz, 2004). Second, is Alvin Ailey's understanding of intergenerational racialized trauma as an African American cultural implication of body memory. Somatic healer Resmaa Menakem

(2017) describes intergenerational racialized trauma as the continued biological hereditary transfer of past traumatic sensations and ancestral lived experiences through the body's nervous system (Menakem, 2017).

In addition to the concept of intergenerational racialized trauma, there is extensive literature by African American psychologists, academics, and researchers on the psychological implications of such body memory. These implications are examined through Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome (DeGruy, 2005) and heavily reviewed in the writings of Frantz Fanon (2008), W.E.B DuBois (1903), and Dr. Na'im Akbar (1996) on the holistic transformation of the African American consciousness as a result of racial dehumanization (Menakem, 2017).

Third, and most importantly, is Mr. Ailey's integration of the blues, folk song, gospel music, and Negro spirituals in a fashion that honors a symbolic and symbiotic relationship between music and movement, musician and dancer, to assist in holding the shared space for bodies to transition together through shifts in breath, rhythm, and sensation (DeFrantz, 2004). As his own embodied practice and resource for movement inspiration, Alvin Ailey's *blood memories* pay homage to the cultural milieu of his ancestry and his embodied knowledge of the moving body as a physical historian of healing and harming events. His embodied memory of worship and joy, trauma and pain ignite the array of emotions felt through the non-verbal oration of the *Revelations* narrative. In an interview commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of *Revelations*, company Artistic Director at the time, Judith Jameson is quoted as saying:

It [*Revelations*] has to do with the burden of life and its heaviness. You've been weighed down by the world and aspiring to touch something you cannot touch, but you can only feel, and therefore the reaching to the sky with the hands spread wide reaching to something that you cannot touch but you know in your heart you're going to get there but you have to be cleansed first you have to be absolved. He understood that when someone shut down the aisle because they had that spirit going through them they weren't just doing a dance, they actually felt something you know and it was their great faith and their great belief we are joyous and that we see hope from despair. Always it is never-ending hope, to understand what that spirit was about and to remember it as a child, those impressions are indelible in you (Any Given Child, 2020)

Cultural stems were firmly rooted in the movement of Alvin Ailey's body. His *blood memories* are what called to him and ushered *Revelations* into creation. Dedicated to revealing the human capacity of his culture, Alvin Ailey has done for me what was done for him by Dunham and others. His integrated cultural symbolism and emphasis on unison phrases support me in feeling a sense of unity and togetherness as I watch the dancers and audience. Seeing moving bodies work together to complete intricate and emotionally charged actions inspires movement of me to want to do the same. As an audience member watching *Revelations*, I feel that I am fully recognized, my pains, my past, my joys, my music, my style, my customs, my rituals, my background, my culture is fully accepted and seen. Through witnessing the dancers' emotional and cultural non-verbal context, I can empathize with myself through seeing and feeling the memories of perseverance and hope stored in the history of my cultural trauma.

The Implications of Cultural Trauma and Art in Healing

Cultural trauma can be generally defined as a condition or syndrome that occurs when a collective has been subject to an unbearable event or experience that undermines their sense of group identity, values, meaning and purpose, or cultural worldviews (Halloran, 2004; Alexander et al., 2004). Literature on cultural trauma has included emphasis on Native American people (Atkinson, 2002; Evans-Campbell, 2008; Halloran, 2004), the Holocaust and genocide survivors (Danieli, 1998; Robben & Suarez-Orozco, 2000), and the effects of enslavement on African Americans or post-slavery trauma (Akbar, 1996; Menakem, 2017; DeGruy, 2005 ; DuBois, 1903).

Recent studies and discoveries increasingly emphasize that an effective model for mending cultural trauma includes working primarily within and through the body, not just through the rational brain, nor in isolation from others. Mending cultural trauma happens primarily through what our bodies experience and do collectively, not through what we think, realize, or can solely cognitively process (Menakem, 2017). A participation in dance, for both a witness and a mover, in its varied intuitive improvisational patterns, has served all human societies as a means of self-expression and communal connection on physical, social, spiritual and emotional levels (Hanna, 1978; Himmat, 2012; Berrol, 2006). The act of dance serves to soothe the implications of cultural trauma by allowing space for emotional release and communication through movement action (Hanna, 1978). Revelations is a representation of traditional West African performance culture that does not separate medicine and art, mover and witness, music and movement, nor self and other (DeFrantz, 2004; Thompson, 2004; Equiano,

2009). In 1789, speaking on dance culture and the communal climate of his home in West Africa, writer and activist Olaudah Equiano (2009) articulates:

“We are almost a nation of dancers, musicians, and poets. Thus every great event, such as a triumphant return from battle, or other cause of public rejoicing is celebrated in public dances, which are accompanied with songs and music suited to the occasion.” (p. 29)

Alvin Ailey’s embodied awareness of cultural trauma in the African-American context delivered a performance experiential on the perseverance and resilience embedded within his own body. Through the telling of his cultural trauma in dance form, Alvin Ailey exudes his own southern expressivity, and communicates the emotional spectrum of human life (DeFrantz, 2004; Morini, 2015; Wignot, 2021). Similar to the impact Dunham had on his sense of belonging through culturally affirming performances, Alvin Ailey’s reflection of moving bodies through both a cathartic and hopeful lens, aids collective witnesses in experiencing and validating the complexities of both Alvin’s emotions and their own. In present time the audience is guided through *Revelations* in a continuous call-and-response relationship with performers, in which mover and witness engage by continuously singing, moving, and swaying together. By igniting a series of mirrored movements by the end of *Rock My Soul in the Bosom of Abraham*, Alvin Ailey’s choreography has manifested into a mending experience in which he has engaged the self-expressivity and communal synchrony of everyone within the theater.

Like Alvin Ailey, many artistic healers within the African American community understood and experienced firsthand the impact cultural trauma has on one’s somatic, communal, and psychological wellbeing as a result of racialized American living. Within

American history specifically, extensive literature exists on the use of various expressive art forms and creative modalities used by African people to ignite collective healing and cultural liberation in response to oppression (Douglass, 1849; Du Bois, 1903; Morrison, 2007; Thompson, 2014; Johnson & Johnson, 2011; Coates, 2015; Baldwin, 1963; Harrell et al., 2003). While enslaved, African poet Phillis Wheatley (1773) stunned American culture by becoming a household name in the 19th century through her use of biblical prose and language to expose the convention of American slavery and race to slaveholding readers (Bennet, 1998). Wheatley (1773) took to the page with brilliant intellect and artistry to deliver in written word a presentation of her humanity and utter disdain for the torturous acts of other human beings. Wheatley sheds light in her poem *On Being Brought from Africa to America*:

'Twas mercy brought me from my Pagan land,
Taught my benighted soul to understand
That there's a God, that there's a Saviour too:
Once I redemption neither sought nor knew.
Some view our sable race with scornful eye,
"Their colour is a diabolic die."
Remember, Christians, Negros, black as Cain,
May be refin'd, and join th' angelic train (Wheatley, 1773).

With similar poetic delivery and prolific imagery nearly 200 years later, fiction novelist Toni Morrison (2007) in her 1983 novel *Beloved* depicts the somatic implications of American enslavement and racialization on the body, and reminds the collective how to heal from it:

In this here place, we flesh; flesh that weeps, laughs; flesh that dances on bare feet in grass. Love it. Love it hard. Yonder they do not love your flesh. They despise it. They don't love your eyes; they'd just as soon pick em out. No more do they love the skin on your back. Yonder they flay it. And O my people they do not love your hands. Those they only use, tie, bind, chop off and leave empty. Love your hands! Love them. Raise them up and kiss them. Touch others with them, pat them together, stroke them on your face 'cause they don't love that either. You got to love it, you! And no, they ain't in love with your mouth. Yonder, out there, they will see it broken and break it again. What you say out of it they will not heed. What you scream from it they do not hear. What you put into it to nourish your body they will snatch away and give you leavins instead. No, they don't love your mouth. You got to love it. This is flesh I'm talking about here. Flesh that needs to be loved. Feet that need to rest and to dance; backs that need support; shoulders that need arms, strong arms I'm telling you. And O my people, out yonder, hear me, they do not love your neck unworked and straight. So love your neck; put a hand on it, grace it, stroke it and hold it up. and all your inside parts that they'd just as soon slop for hogs, you got to love them. The dark, dark liver--love it, love it and the beat and beating heart, love that too. More than eyes or feet. More than lungs that have yet to draw free air. More than your life-holding womb and your life-giving private parts, hear me now, love your heart. For this is the prize (Morrison, 2007, p.102).

Native Baltimorean writer, Ta-Nehisi Coates (2015) speaks on his integrated embodied awareness and cognitive understanding of the same somatic implications Morrison paints:

But all our phrasing—race relations, racial chasm, racial justice, racial profiling, white privilege, even white supremacy—serves to obscure that racism is a visceral experience, that it dislodges brains, blocks airways, rips muscle, extracts organs, cracks bones, breaks teeth. You must never look away from this. You must always remember that the sociology, the history, the economics, the graphs, the charts, the regressions all land, with great violence, upon the body (Coates, 2015, p.10)

Alvin Ailey stands hand in hand with these artists and activists who continuously radically, poignantly, and through divine artistry, reclaim humanity and deeply comprehend the collective trauma stored within the body. With dance as his medium, Alvin Ailey was born a Texas child, raised in the hot heat and racially terrorized American south during a time of national crisis. He is a revolutionary and American cultural ambassador to the world, with a dedication to acknowledging trauma and healing to be both stored in the moving body. With *Revelations* he shared a dedication to reclaiming the narratives of continuously dehumanized people (DeFrantz, 2004 ; Wignot, 2021). With *Revelations* he opens both the body and mind, through music and movement, to assist others in feeling his story to empathize with their own.

Bows

Central to my theoretical discussion is a presentation intended to acknowledge the innate healing possibilities of experiencing Alvin Ailey's *Revelations*. Alvin Ailey's *Revelations* is an example of dance/movement therapy practice in performance. Through this work, human pain, perseverance, and joy are reflected to mirror a shared human condition of the infinite emotional spectrum. Purely derived from Mr. Ailey's comprehension of his intergenerational trauma, he used his own embodied knowledge and memory of synchronized movement/mirroring and sharing in rhythmic attunement as movement catalysts that inspire empathy, connection, and shared understanding with others. Dance/movement therapy theory and practice emphasizes the neuroscience of empathy as a mirror neuron and chemical process in the brain that is supported by unison phrases and the active witnessing of another's embodied responses. Alvin Ailey resourced the therapeutic connections stored in the culture, history, rhythms, and memories of his own body to communicate with others the healing potential of moving, seeing, and feeling together through the theater.

This thesis serves to highlight the embodied effect Mr. Ailey's legacy has on communities of culture in the witnessing of his work in mending shared traumas, supported by my personal experiences and theoretical dance/movement therapy lens. I hope to expand the definition of dance/movement therapy theorist and practitioner to include the name Alvin Ailey and others as a direct result of their invaluable contributions to somatic, embodied, psychodynamic, rehumanizing, equitable, and empathetic healing experiences for all. Alvin Ailey was a dance/movement therapy practitioner and the legacy of his ballet *Revelations* remains consistent with

the goals of the American Dance Therapy Association. His work, and the work of like-minded American artists of color, should be recognized to create space for a more equitable and holistic history of dance/movement therapy practice that is no longer segregated based on constructed familiarities. We are continuing to limit our progression towards developing a therapeutic dance and movement community that reflects the expansiveness of humanity and Americanism without honoring modern dancer and choreographer, Alvin Ailey.

In conclusion and as a parting dedication, I address the invisibility of theorists and practitioners of color in the history of dance/movement therapy. I name, mention, and honor a few like-minded artists such as Katherine Dunham, Pearl Primus, Asadata Dafora, Josephine Baker, Arthur Mitchell, Carmen De Lavallade, Geoffrey Holder, Nina Simone, Ulysses Dove, Donald McKayle, Jawole Willa Jo Zollar, Maya Angelou, James Baldwin, Tyde Courtney-Edwards, Zora Neale Hurston, Baba Chuck Davis, Mama Maria Broom, and Toni Morrison.

Curtain Down

I dedicate this presentation to all others who are expanding spectrums and deconstructing binaries within dance/movement therapy theory and practice. I dedicate this presentation to the creation and choreography of the world renowned and humanly inspiring ballet, *Revelations*. I thank Ms. Lula Elizabeth Cooper and Ailey Camp Baltimore. I thank Sarah Lawrence College for the journey, practice, and vocabulary. I thank Linda Denise Fisher-Harrell, Torens Johnson, Rachel Tecora Tucker, and Jacqueline Green Miller for the guidance and mentorship along this process. Finally, and most importantly, I thank none other than Mr. Alvin Ailey Jr., for his vulnerability, unwavering blackness, and invitation to join his dance. Ashe, Ashe, Ashe-O.

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