

Chapter 4: Marcus Schulkind

Introduction

Marcus Schulkind is a dancer, dance teacher, choreographer, and acupuncturist, currently living in Cambridge, Massachusetts, in the United States. He was born in Queens in New York City in 1948 and grew up there as the youngest of two children in a middle-class family with Ashkenazi Jewish ancestry.¹ Schulkind speaks his last name with American English pronunciation and describes himself as “Jaoist” (i.e. Jewish and Daoist). His discovery of Graham-lineage modern dance as a young man at Goddard College in 1965 changed his life trajectory—channeling his creative, physical, and emotional energy into his passion for dance. Beyond Goddard, Schulkind studied dance at Jacob’s Pillow, The Juilliard School, and in New York City at the dance studios of Martha Graham, Daniel Nagrin, May O’Donnell, Gertrude Schurr, and Norman Walker. He performed as a dancer in the Batsheva Dance Company of Israel and in New York in the companies of Pearl Lang, Lar Lubovitch, Kathy Posin, and Norman Walker. In the mid-seventies, The Marcus Schulkind Dance Company emerged as a “hot ticket” in New York.² In parallel, Schulkind developed his reputation as a teacher of ballet and Graham-influenced modern classes, often using his teaching income to support his choreographic projects.³

Moving to Boston in 1989, Schulkind found extensive employment as a teacher—at the Harvard Summer Dance Festival, Boston Conservatory, and the

1 His father’s family emigrated from Germany to Brooklyn circa 1895 and his mother’s family from Kyiv to Brooklyn around the same time.

2 Schulkind’s words, from our discussions.

3 Some memories of Schulkind’s influence as a teacher are found in Madonna’s recently published biography, for which Schulkind was interviewed. See Gabriel, *Madonna*, 58. Madonna took classes with Schulkind at the American Dance Festival and in New York. She reportedly asked him if studying modern dance would make her famous. Schulkind quipped that to the contrary, when most Americans hear the word “Graham” they think “Graham cracker,” not choreographer. Citations from my videoconference interview with Schulkind on March 31, 2024.

Boston Dance Project. In 1991, Schulkind cofounded Green Street Studios, a private dance studio in Cambridge, between the campuses of Harvard University and Massachusetts Institute of Technology. The studio—with high airy ceilings, skylights, and a sprung floor—served for nearly thirty years as a community dance center and refuge for Schulkind's choreographic projects and teaching. It was in this context that I met "Marcus," when I was nineteen and studying nearby at Harvard. I became Schulkind's student in ballet and modern dance, progressing to become an apprentice and then a dancer with his company.

Impacted by a debilitating knee injury early on in his dance career, Schulkind added healing work to his professional activities while living in Boston. He graduated from the New England School of Acupuncture in 1998 and subsequently built up his own private acupuncture practice. After closing his dance company officially in 2001, Schulkind continued to make solo dance pieces intermittently, including benefit concerts for Green Street Studios in which I took part as a performer. In 2013, Schulkind returned to the Boston Conservatory as a Professor of Dance, where he is still on the faculty today—teaching ballet, contemporary ballet, and dance pedagogy. Additionally, he teaches freelance classes on weekends at a private dance studio in Cambridge called The Dance Complex. We met there to begin this project of life review. As I approached the studio, I heard the music of *Swan Lake*, which Schulkind was listening to on the stereo as he prepared his Sunday classes: "Back to the Marley" and "Intermediate/Advanced Ballet."

Writing Schulkind's Body-Biography

Schulkind's life stories presented themselves to me as a dynamic collection of anecdotes and memories that developed extensively throughout our research process. His stories were performed—by which I mean selected, crafted, and animated for me as his audience—in a way that reflected my position as his former student and company member, as well as my status as a dance scholar curating perspectives on embodied dance history. Schulkind spoke about the pleasure of remembering the past—the value of having an active listener, with whom he could rethink his memories.⁴ He contrasted this process of empowerment with the lack of validation that he feels in his current position as an elder dance artist—no longer working actively as a choreographer and disconnected from the aesthetic standpoints of his dance students. Following knee-replacement surgery and arthritis, Schulkind stopped teaching modern dance about a decade ago, when he was in his late sixties. Our research together could therefore not engage

4 The possibility of achieving "psychic composure" in oral history interviews is reviewed by scholar Penny Summerfield. See Summerfield, "Oral History as an Autobiographical Practice," 2.

Schulkind's muscle memory as directly as I had with Kono; instead, we relied more on storytelling, my embodied prompts for dialogue, and curated questions.

Our initial conversations approached dance biography from the conventional perspective of a chronology of professional phases: focusing on Schulkind's dance education, early professional experience, choreographic work, teaching and healing work. Therein, many humorous stories erupted with well-practiced charm, while dark moments and discontinuities (such as Schulkind's move to Boston) were left unresolved and hanging. Like Antonín Dvořák's *Dumky Piano Trio*, which Schulkind has used for his choreographic work, Schulkind's storytelling colorfully shifted in mood and rhythm, presenting self-reflection in the form of pithy anecdotes.⁵ In hindsight, I see now that our editing process mimicked Schulkind's choreographic process, in which a sequence invented by Schulkind's body is reinterpreted and developed through dialogue between the performer and the choreographer. Relying on that rapport, Schulkind entrusted me to take a leading role in shaping his stories, through a dialogic process of research and revision, moving oral dialogue into written form.

The body-biography that follows was developed by interlacing various techniques of life review. At the heart are recordings of in-depth narrative interviews, focusing on Schulkind's career and bodily experiences as a dance artist.⁶ I also revisited Schulkind's dance classes live in Boston, and we explored his digitized personal archive of press clippings, using them as a stimulus for memory.⁷ To launch the editing process, I emailed Schulkind an arrangement of his prior stories, developed from light revision of our word-for-word transcripts. This draft set in motion an extensive process of revision: adding and subtracting narratives, working on the tone and message of the stories, and figuring out how to translate vocal and gestural emphasis, timing, and mood into scripted dialogue. The final manuscript manifests the give and take of collaboration, reviewing multiple drafts until we declared mutually: "It's a wrap." As with Kono, the writing formulates a substantial process of mutual reflection, demonstrating how the researcher becomes part of a protagonist's life-story creation, rather than standing outside it.

5 Specifically, Dvořák's *Piano Trio No. 4 in E minor, Op. 166*. Schulkind choreographed the solo *Let Bygones Be* (2002) to this music for dancer Lorraine Chapman.

6 Interviews held in Boston on March 18 and 21, 2023, were recorded in both audio and video. The audio recordings and transcripts of these conversations are available at the Swiss Archive of the Performing Arts. See: Schulkind, "Body-Biography Interview with Marcus Schulkind"; Waterhouse, "Metadata Body-Biography Interview Marcus Schulkind." Secondary interviews, reviewing the manuscript draft, took place via video conference on January 3, 2024, March 31, 2024, and July 18, 2024. These were recorded with audio and selectively transcribed.

7 I made audio recordings of the dance classes and protocolled them with fieldwork notes in a process of participant observation.

Throughout the interview process, Schulkind was conscientious and critical of his own storytelling performance: He desired to be perceived as speaking truthfully, without deliberate exaggeration, narcissism, or hubris. He thus invited my fact-checking and was delighted when I studied the New York Times records to search for further reviews and identify the biographies of his dance collaborators. There are some stories printed in this collection that Schulkind has not recounted often: accounts revealing his deepest troubles. His process of becoming a dancer was euphoric but also extremely difficult, requiring him to resist military service in the Vietnam war and confront bullying and adult authority. Additionally, a debilitating knee injury in his thirties put him out of the spotlight for a few years, requiring seven surgeries over the course of his life. A broken partnership and a car accident are also notable stories. Unlike my other interview partners, Schulkind's narratives sustained greater attention to describing difficulty, pain, and the troubles and injustices of life, while also interlacing these with humorous tales, shrugs, and smiles. This emotional range is also palpable in his collection of choreographic works—many of which are solos that, as he puts it, explore the sensual qualities of the “human condition.” These solos were my first modern dance repertoire as an aspiring young dancer.⁸ Learning a modern dance vocabulary and process of rehearsal with Schulkind, I changed from a ballet-influenced performer to one interested in the choreographic expression of modern dance—intimate, nonverbal storytelling through practiced and personal gestures.

As with Kono, my research with Schulkind manifested the “creation” and “exchange” of life stories highlighted by linguist Charlotte Linde: My role as a researcher was not to mine Schulkind for preexisting stories, but to work together with him to produce coherence.⁹ To this end, we aimed for a satisfying form that would bring together Schulkind's narratives for the reader to interpret—marking them as traces of embodied dialogues, not word-for-word transcripts. Together, Schulkind and I have created an episodic text. We begin with my reflection on his teaching, followed by an introduction to his present lifeworld, then crossfade into a curated selection of life stories, and end with Schulkind's review of the interview process. The footnotes create an accompanying second space referencing the print and digital sources we investigated, providing biographies of Schulkind's collaborators, and adding my description of his body language during our conversations.

8 I performed *Slanting Sun* as an apprentice in Schulkind's final company concert in 2001, *Let Bygones Be* for my MFA concert at The Ohio State University in 2004, and created two new solos with Schulkind during my breaks from The Forsythe Company: *Hippogriff* (2004) and *Allemande* (2006).

9 Linde, *Life Stories*, 3. See discussion in the opening of Chapter 1.

In the form presented here, Schulkind's body-biography exposes the tensions between his deep humanistic love and appreciation for modern dance and the underbelly of its economic reality as a financially precarious career in American society. Furthermore, Schulkind's heritage of the Martha Graham technique and repertoire adds to our understanding of how Graham's practices were institutionalized and developed by teachers in the second half of the twentieth century, including Schulkind's own alterations for the purpose of injury prevention and rehabilitation.¹⁰ His unique perspective, as a Jewish and heterosexual man, navigating the dance field through his physical, social, economic, and cultural capital, gives great insight into the ways that dancers move and mobilize their powers uniquely—using their bodies as tools for labor and expression.

Figure 1: Marcus Schulkind teaching ballet at Green Street Studios, circa 2016.



Photographer Peter Schweitzer.

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- 10 Schulkind's perspective exposes the tensions of dancers developing modern dance in New York City and Boston, paralleling the aesthetic developments described by Sally Banes as post-modern and postmodernist. Interestingly, in our conversations, Schulkind did not mention the artists that Banes focused on in her analysis of different waves of post-modern art making in New York City. Banes, *Terpsichore in Sneakers*.

Schulkind's Teaching

Schulkind is a spry, small, and effervescent septuagenarian, agile despite a slight limp in his left leg. On the day that I visit his classes, he is wearing grey sweatpants and a black fleece jacket.¹¹ The participants in this “Back to the Marley” class are mostly women over the age of sixty. I’m the youngest in the room. The ballet students come afterwards, a mix of students from the nearby Harvard and MIT campuses, freelance dancers living in the Boston metropolitan area, and working professionals, who practice ballet with Schulkind regularly on the weekends. Schulkind begins class with a short note about the change of seasons: Since it was the Spring equinox, his breathing exercises would change to reflect this. The large dance studio has high ceilings, beautiful dark wood-paneling, and a quiet piano in the corner. Even while wearing a COVID-19 mask, Schulkind projects his voice resonantly.

As we did twenty years ago, when I was a regular student with him, we began with an exercise of Daoist breathing. Schulkind provided our healing imagery. Spring, the time of our interviews, had wood as its healing element, with the color of green, and the taste of sour. Liver is the yin. Gallbladder is the yang. Though it has been almost twenty years since my last training with Schulkind, these routines are still accessible in my body; they still made me feel calm, capable, and peaceful. After this rebalancing breathing ritual, we then continued with arm gestures from dance. Seated on our mats on the floor, we followed Schulkind: scooping one arm backwards, lifted it up over our heads and then offering that hand expressively to the front of the room, growing up tall with our backs and lengthening our spines. In unison with the other dancers, supported by the musicality of Schulkind’s directions, we repeated this little phrase—altering right and left—symmetrically awakening the body. Then we scooped and opened our arms to the side of the room. Holding the arm extended sidewise, we changed the head: sharply (“spotting”) looking to the left, right, and left again. Scooping, gesturing, and seeing: my body started to sense the space. There was no audience for this—no complex movements or even music, but fundamentals of Schulkind’s dancing were being animated, incorporated, and kindled.

The beginning of Schulkind’s warmup drew together many aspects of his body and dance philosophy—his lifeworld. These facets are Daoist healing modalities, Graham technique and ballet without the “bullshit” (of painful contortions, gender ideology, and a teacher enforcing banal repetitions), and Schulkind’s unique sense

11 This description is developed from a “Back to the Marley” class that I took and recorded on March 19, 2023, at The Dance Complex in Cambridge, Massachusetts. I also studied recordings of Schulkind’s zoom-classes from June 14 and 20–21, 2000, during the COVID-19 pandemic. See, <https://vimeo.com/429747558>, <https://vimeo.com/431300326>, <https://vimeo.com/43164228>, last accessed September 27, 2025.

of humor.¹² The class interlaced these. We began to arch and curl—making rounded and extended motions of our backs. This terminology is influenced by Schulkind's study of GYROTONIC®.¹³ The contraction and release movements echoed his prior Graham training and are fundamental within his body as his first exploration in dance. After this, we prepared the limbs with fundamentals of ballet: articulating our line and turnout in the legs. We lie down and brought our legs together with the knees bent: our knees were pressed together, our heels were pressed together, waking up the deep pelvis muscles and the inner thighs in a way that Western dancers practice daily. Hissing to vibrate the muscles of the core and support the movement with our diaphragm, we flexed one foot and straightened one leg, before lifting it to bring the knees together. The load here will surprise any nondancer, who must build this leg-torso connection to coordinate the legs. We articulated the toes, the flex and demi-pointe, and then explored ballet positions and movements: attitude, développé, dégagé, battement. All of this was reoriented in gravity, abandoning the ballet vertical by lying down on the floor. Coached by Schulkind, I re-experienced the basics of ballet extension, without strain and accents, finding smooth articulations. We changed orientation to lie on our sides and even used the outer wall of the studio to model the floor in this horizontally flowing ballet—where turning out becomes a strength exercise, not one of contortion and pain. Props in the form of a foam roller and a balloon helped me to feel my body: squeezing the balloon gently to activate my pelvic floor, and rolling out some of the complex, interlacing, and often gripping muscles in the lower back and buttocks. Schulkind sometimes beat a small rhythm on the floor with his fingers to accompany our rhythmic repetitions of battements. At the end, following Schulkind's lead as a chorus, we sang three notes rising in scale. Then we rested and dispersed, the lesson complete.

Throughout this meditative, flowing, and inwardly focused movement series, Schulkind was teaching with boundless vocal energy and keeping everyone motivated. His well-projected voice was ever-present: encouraging, reminding, thanking, and cheering when people accomplished his directions. His voice brings me home, with its nasal New York accent. He addressed all his students by name and celebrated their developments. He told newbies to watch—to follow the unfamiliar sequences that they had yet to memorize—and he made precise both what they had accomplished on that day and what would be the next step in their development. I imagine that this positive atmosphere might be cloying if it were

12 Upon his request, Schulkind's expletives have been removed from this publication. Though he uses respectful language in dance class, in our trustful relationship he enjoys storytelling using his vibrant, New-York-City-style curse words.

13 For the purpose of readability, subsequent references to the method of GYROTONIC® in this chapter are made in lowercase without the registered trademark symbol.

not name-based and the intimate result of a community's work together—a kind and caring atmosphere built around judging and improving very specific physical skills. The material of dance is one's body, so corrections can feel very personal. Schulkind is sensitive to this, aiming to be constructive—assuaging insecurity, shame, frustration, and anger by affirming the process of learning at one's own pace. As the teacher, he coaches more than he demonstrates, affirming a positive mood of detailed work on individual bodies, shaping collective values. From my position in the middle of it all, he appeared to speak to everyone, maintaining a sense of fairness. On this Sunday, he energetically served a community, giving space for physical connection, peace, and self-discovery.

As this introduction is beginning to unpack, these preparations for the dancing body and reasons for attending a dance class are not only aesthetic: They are personal, psychological and social. Schulkind's classes position dance at the interface of private and public, spiritual and secular—a holistic and healthy counterpart to the outer (non-dance) world. Though he resents capitalism, Schulkind works in a dance economy where his lessons are purchased as commodities; in fact, his lessons have brought him more financial profit than producing his choreographic works of art. But beyond being a mode of employment, they contribute to his sense of living a meaningful life. For Schulkind, dance has for over fifty years been a daily practice of tuning in, developing deep muscular skills, and using this to intuitively connect to others, in a manner that is existential, and more than verbal. Dance has been a basis to connect to emotional energies and feelings that compensate for the anxiety and loneliness of modern living, exacerbated by the stress of capitalism. This class microcosm brings together Schulkind's world: of healing and balancing the body, of connecting to deep internal feelings in the torso, and of extending lines and energies through the body and communicating in space. All this, while reminding city-folk to stay rooted in nature and the seasons.

This body-biography project allowed me to rethink, from my perspective today as a dancer and dance scholar based in Europe, the world of dance that Schulkind introduced to me when I was in my early twenties. Not only did I wish to better understand the components of Schulkind's teaching practice, and their autobiographical significance to him, but I also wanted to learn what he had witnessed as a dance practitioner in the revolutionary 1960s and the American dance boom of the 1970s and 1980s. I hoped to better articulate, as I have in the passage above, what that practice was and what it did to me, by means of its sensual and emotional components.

Life Stories

Figure 2: Marcus Schulkind (left) and Liz Waterhouse (right) on March 18, 2023, at Schulkind's office in Brookline, Massachusetts.



Screenshot by E. Waterhouse.

Context: Schulkind's Office

Our initial interviews take place in Schulkind's acupuncture office in Brookline, Massachusetts—a part of the Boston metropolitan area where Schulkind's practice has been located for over twenty years.¹⁴ He wears fleece jackets, the same ones that he wears when teaching dance training, with casual khaki pants and sneakers. Before my flight to Boston, Schulkind reminds me over the phone that his building is at the corner of Hawes Street, pronouncing the street name with a strong New England accent on the “aw”—nasal and bright. The small room of his office was filled with the relevant materials and tools for his profession and padded with a well-worn carpet. I ask Schulkind to begin by saying where we are. He responds pithily: “We are in my acupuncture office in Brookline, Massachusetts, United States of America, planet earth.”

¹⁴ For the references to this data and metadata see: Schulkind, “Body-Biography Interview with Marcus Schulkind”; Waterhouse, “Metadata Body-Biography Interview Marcus Schulkind.”

Our conversation starts by inventorying the many photographs, paintings, magazine clippings, diplomas, and posters framed on the walls. A large anatomical poster titled *The Points and Meridians of Acupuncture* has a prominent position in the room. I ask him to describe these images on the walls. Schulkind explains. “I ask people that I treat, if they’re comfortable, to give me a picture for my wall. So, that’s all the dancers over here. On the other wall are some pictures of my sister’s art because she’s a watercolorist. The Buddha comes from the woman I used to share the office with. She was a masseuse, who sadly ended up with melanoma cancer and passed away. She devoted ten years of her life to figure out how to live with what she had, and not fall into disrepair or doom. She had been told by the Western medical people that she had six months to live. Eleven years later, she died. She spent ten years researching and exploring her mortality: how one looks at and deals with a death sentence, and how one prevails. Then, on this wall there are my degrees from the acupuncture world.”

Brightening his voice, “And this is a *Dance Magazine* from 1978, with a review of my dance company.” I read out loud:

(Mini Umbrella, October 22). Dance dialogues about human relationships dominate the dances here. The Beatles sing about lost love as Serena Ward sweeps the space with broad, clean gestures in the first two solos which make up Schulkind’s *Ladies Night Out*. Elisa Monte follows, setting a mysterious and sensual dance dialogue against Randy Newman’s lost-love song. Both women seem to be moving on the impulses of emotion, yet their solos are not emotional. They are dramatic, somehow pensive. Two couples (Zane Rankin, Dante T. Del Giudice, Ward, and Monte) dip and swirl through *Crêpe de Chine* (Schulkind’s new piece), building up undefined tensions as they group and regroup, forming lovely shapes connected with lines of lyricism.¹⁵

Schulkind continues: “In the 1970s, my company was based in New York City. As a new company, I got a lot of work where I was produced—like this. We did Dance Umbrella. We did the Shakespeare in the Park Summer Dance Festival. I was creating for my own group, and I did some work for Dennis Wayne, who had a ballet company that he just started. That piece seemed to be very well received as well. The Playhouse in the Park, which is in the Delacorte Theater in Central Park, happens at the end of August every year. To be picked was like one of those major things. So this reminds me of my fifteen minutes of New York fame, where I was getting attention, money, grants, and things.”

As a last bit of informal banter before we start his interview, I ask Schulkind whether his acupuncture images are Chinese or Japanese. He answers, “Chinese.

15 This magazine clipping did not list the author. See “Review: Michael Sullivan and Marcus Schulkind Dance Companies.”

The way you get your degree is your knowledge of traditional Chinese acupuncture. I happened to go to a school that had a very strong Japanese program as well. I chose to do that because I liked that work more than traditional Chinese medicine. According to the Chinese, there's about 386 points you can use on the body. They are still discovering new points. The Japanese have *very* different locations, depending on which master you study with, of where these things are located. Whereas this is chapter and verse."

During the interview, we sit at the desk he uses for greeting patients and doing paperwork: Schulkind on his doctor's swivel chair, and I in the patient's seat. Besides us is a table for treating patients, covered with hygienic paper. I position my camera at the opposite corner on a bookshelf, to capture more of Schulkind's bodily movements and facial expression. We both wear wireless microphones.

The atmosphere is friendly and energetic—for Schulkind is an experienced and gifted storyteller, and I am very happy to be reunited with him. During our conversation, Schulkind sometimes props his legs up casually on the treatment table. Overall, his appearance, vocal performance, and sense of humor remind me of other male Jewish artists and natives of New York: actors and comedians Woody Allen, Larry David, and Jerry Seinfeld. When the stories get going, Schulkind layers his non-verbal communication with choreographic expertise, changing the scale of his motions to make wide, expansive gestures. He also uses rhythm and rests to add groove and accents between his words. For rhetorical emphasis, he often points with one or both hands, vibrating his gestures on key phrases. He frequently shrugs, as if to say, "That's life!" This gesture appears to be one that he has made throughout his life; it is portrayed vividly in a photograph of him at a very high point, before his company's Boston premier in 1989 (see Figure 3). When Schulkind speaks about dance teaching, he uses his own body to mark movements like a teacher—economically with his arms to illustrate positions. In between, he performs a small repertoire of common conversational postures: rocking the chair right and left, interlacing his fingers or crossing his arms on his chest, rubbing the palms of his hands together, and playing unconsciously with his fingers and nails. While annotation of all these movements during the interview would ruin the flow of the text, in what follows I have illuminated key anecdotes by adding my own descriptions, which are placed in the footnotes so as not to disrupt the flow of Schulkind's storytelling.

Injury: "Is Acupuncture Making Me a Better Creature of this Earth?"

Liz Waterhouse: What brought you initially to acupuncture?

Marcus Schulkind: I believe it was 1979, I came down from a jump *horribly* in a dance class and tore my anterior cruciate ligament (he points down to his right knee).¹⁶ At that time, they didn't have a really great sense of surgery for that, because usually the people who injured themselves that way were football players, and a football player doesn't need flexibility, they needed to be solid. The surgeons would just put it back together very *tightly* and that would get the person, who was the football player, back to playing their sport.

Unfortunately, they did that to me, and they made it too tight. It took a year and a half before I could perform again. I was basically told it was a career-ending injury, and that if I wanted, I could try to come back. But they said, "There are very few people who have succeeded at coming back." So then, my journey towards self-exploration and self-help began. Ultimately, that brought me to Boston. After ten years here, I started seeing an acupuncturist for knee pain, and it was very helpful. He was a Japanese-style acupuncturist. What I noticed—that was the most interesting thing—was that not only was my knee better, but my emotional *tsuris*—which if you don't know Yiddish, my emotional crap—got better.

Liz Waterhouse: Tsuris?

Marcus Schulkind (smiles, makes a soft gesture pointing with both hands to his head, as if pointing to himself): Grief, craziness. Tsuris! I started talking to the acupuncturist and I asked, "Is acupuncture making me a better creature of this earth? Or is it I'm finally growing up," He said, "Well, if the whole purpose of acupuncture is to *balance* out your energies, one would assume it's going to balance out the emotional energy as well." Then little by little, I started asking him, "How long does it take to be in acupuncture? What is it like? How does it happen? Because this is kind of fascinating to me."

Happily, the oldest acupuncture school in America was in Watertown. Happily, at that point, because acupuncture was not a trendy thing to do like it is now—their program started in the evenings. So, from 4:00 to 10:00 p.m. you went to the acupuncture school, every day. Every other weekend you spent there. That worked out for my schedule because I could do my dance teaching and my company. So, I started that. (Stands up, leans in to read diploma, then sits back down.) I graduated in 1998. So, I probably started in '95. And happily, that school had the only kind of

16 This story is reported similarly in: Temin, "Marcus Schulkind Helps Keep the Dance Faith Alive."

Japanese program that was extensive. I got a chance to work with some really genius people, and that was the beginning of that.

I have to tell you—when I was nineteen, I went to a very famous psychic, because I was at a turning point. I had only been dancing a year or two. I wanted to know what to do. He was expensive. He was in the West Village in New York City. He read my palm, he asked my birth date, and then, he proceeded to talk for two hours about me, my family, and it was *dead on*. I went, “This is really spooky, because you don’t know me and there’s no way you could know this.” This was way before computers. So, he went, “Well. I think, if you came to me and you were fifteen, I know you have healing hands. I would have told you to go to medical school and not be an artist. But I suspect you’re not ready for that. So, you should go off and do art. That won’t be bad, but at some point, you’ll want to go back to healing. I know that’ll happen, because you have (emphasizing each word) natural healing abilities.” I don’t know, I thought—whatever. But he was right. I really didn’t want to deal with that at all until I was forty-seven or forty-eight, when I started acupuncture school.¹⁷

What he said really scared me. Later, I was old enough and had lived long enough, that having that gift wasn’t so scary that I wanted to pursue it. Because knowing you could heal people also meant your *responsibility* is overwhelming. Because if you’re not really good, or if you get in your own way, or if your motives aren’t clear, then you’re not helping them and you’re just being an egocentric person who has a gift they’re not using well. When I was first receiving acupuncture, I was still at a point in my life that I really wanted to be involved in dance, meaning to have my company—at that point, I wasn’t dancing too much. But I could gradually add acupuncture to what I was doing, which I still do to this day. So now, I teach nine classes a week at the Boston Conservatory, where I am a full professor, *albeit* part time. I teach two more classes publicly, on Sundays at The Dance Complex in Cambridge. So I teach eleven dance classes a week. Most of them are early in the morning, which is the best time for me. When I’m not there, I’m *here* doing acupuncture. So, I work six and a half days a week still. I’m seventy-five. That’s kind of my life.

Goddard College: “The Story of My Dance Existence”

Marcus Schulkind: I have to tell you that I had no friends in high school. High school was, you know, a nuclear wasteland. Middle school had been worse. I was

17 Schulkind appears to relish telling this anecdote about the psychic. He begins with vocal energy, speaking quickly. He rocks his stool left and right. He inflects many words with slow, vocal emphasis. I notice his hand gestures, because we are speaking about his healing hands. I have felt the intention of Schulkind’s hands, as an acupuncturist and a dance teacher, and they did feel wisely precise, soft yet clear, and healing.

very bullied, which was the reason my parents sent me early to a prep school. When I think back, the two most important things that made me the artist that I became were the bullying and then—much later—the car accident. I think those were the really the big issues for me. Also, I hated conventional education. It didn't work for me. Never did. When you study pedagogy and educational philosophy, you differentiate a) forms that are dominated by the *institution* deciding what you should study vs. b) forms that say you as a *person* in that education should have *some* right to decide what you want to study. At that time, most colleges followed the former, and I wanted the latter. So, I knew if I went to a college, where it was going to be the same old academic crap, I would drop out, have a nervous breakdown, or be dancing naked in the streets in some way.

So, I heard about a place called Goddard College, which has no marks, and tests, or grades. I flew up there, to Plainfield Vermont, because I wanted to see it. Goddard was the *ultimate* in progressive education—meaning not only did you decide what you were gonna do, but everybody argued about it every day. Their education was in an *incredibly* gorgeous flux, and there were *brilliant* people teaching in Goddard, because they didn't want to be in the city [New York City]. At Goddard, you could go and do your work, and it would be a cheap place to live and raise a family. So, I lucked out. The only thing you had to do at Goddard was work in three areas. I loved this place! There was nobody telling you that you had to do a science, and math, and this and that.

You had an advisor. I decided my first semester I would do creative writing. I really liked to do that, and they had really good people teaching. I decided to do vitreous enameling on metal because I liked the idea of crafts. They had, in the middle of the woods somewhere, a weird little workshop you had a key to 24/7 to go in and make very elaborate jewelry or ashtrays. I liked that! It was complicated because the person teaching it was incredibly advanced. I had to learn cloisonné and plique-à-jour, which is when you take enamel that is in a flux and fill it in to filigreed silver that you've made a design. I just went, "Jesus! This is super hard!"

I was trying to figure out what would be my third course. It was the beginning of the semester, and a woman named Brooke Dyer-Bennet walked past me in a leotard and tights. I'm seventeen. I follow her. She goes into a dance studio. I have no idea what is going on, but I look in and there are sixteen women in tight clothes and a guy teaching class. So, I wander in, and I sit down. I'm just kinda going, (breaking a smile) "What the fuck is this?" I watched for an hour and I'm kinda going, "This looks weird, but interesting! Whatever."¹⁸

18 Schulkind also shares this anecdote in an interview with Iris Fanger in 2009, published by the Boston Dance Alliance. I discovered it in Schulkind's press clippings. In it Schulkind recounts similarly: "I started dancing at Goddard, on my first day of college at age 17. A gorgeous woman walked by me in leotard in tights. I followed her into a room with 13 girls in tight

So, the guy comes up to me afterwards and he says, "Are you interested in this?" And I said, "I haven't done a *step* in my *life*, and I'm pretty awkward!" And he said, "Do you wanna try?" And something said, "I do!" And that's the story of my dance existence. Because I started dancing every day. Because Goddard had no rules, I danced every day. And I danced every day for as long as I wanted to. I would be in the studio rolling around on the floor, thinking I was being creative.

Liz Waterhouse: Who was your teacher at Goddard?

Marcus Schulkind: Mark Ryder. Mark Ryder had come out of the Martha Graham Dance Company. He did both ballet and modern. He had a dance company with a woman named Emily Frankel, Mark's first wife, called Dance Drama Duo [later renamed Frankel-Ryder Dance Drama Company]. They were very famous for their time. I don't know any of this, at this point. Mark *became* my artistic dad. His family, he had three small daughters and a wonderful wife, and I kind of was his artistic son. He taught and parented with real intellectual wisdom, and I hung out with him.¹⁹

I have to say, the whole idea of everything was terrifying to me, because it was still *incredibly* difficult to tell people that I did dance. Because they looked at me like, "You're either gay, or you're stupid and gay." It's the way it was at that time. For the first two months, I didn't even wear dance clothes. I wore a pair of jeans, that were like killing me and I couldn't lift my legs and sit. (LW stifles laughter; Schulkind cracks a smile.) I finally went and bought a pair of tights at a Sears [department store] in Montpelier, Vermont. Of course, they didn't have male or female tights, they had *tights*. I didn't even know what to wear under it, so I came in in underpants. Mark took me aside and said (feigns seriousness, hiding a smile), "We need to talk about dance belts." I went, "I have no idea what . . ." So, he said, (gestures lightly down to his crotch) "Yes, I can tell! (Laughs.) You have no idea." Then, after the first semester I kind of got that.

I loved it. It was the hardest thing I've ever had to do in my life. It was just so hard, and I wanted to be someone who could do double tours. I wanted to turn. I wanted—like all young men—the idea of being able to have control and do tricks

clothes. It started out as lust, but it was the hardest thing I ever did. After three months, I was totally taken by the physicality—and the beauty of it all." In our conversation, I was struck by the vocal earnestness, slightly higher in pitch, of his "I do" in this origin story of discovering dance. Fanger, "Interview with Marcus Schulkind."

- 19 Mark Ryder, born Sasha Liebich (1921–2006), was raised in New York and trained in the performing arts at The Neighborhood Playhouse School of Theatre. He was a dancer in the Martha Graham Group in the forties, interrupting his dance career to serve in the army in WWII. He later served on the faculty at Goddard College in the sixties and the University of Maryland in the seventies until his retirement. Kisselgoff, "Mark Ryder, 85, Former Dancer in Martha Graham's Company, Is Dead."

like that. So, at the end of my second semester, Mark said, "You like this?" I said, "Yeah, it's pretty good!" My parents, at this point, had totally freaked out because I was dancing. They couldn't believe it. My mother actually said that I picked dance to torture her, personally. They weren't bad people.

Liz Waterhouse: Were your parents artists?

Marcus Schulkind: Not at all. My father was a businessman; my mother, a housewife. So there was nothing much in my home life before I went to college that was truly artistic. My mother made my father take a course at Queens College, learning about opera. And she dragged me and my best friend Freddie—and his parents and my father—to see opera. By 9:30 p.m., I was ready to fall asleep, and often I did. So, there was some culture there. I liked to listen to classical music when I was in my high school years. But they didn't care, except that I played it sometimes at the same volume that one would if you were listening to the Rolling Stones or the Beatles. (Quick story: So one day it was summer. The window was open and my dad came in and he went, "I could hear that music down the street." And I said, "It was Mozart. They probably think that we're very trendy." And he just went, "Turn it down!")

So the only reason they were doing opera at all was, I think, my mother thought that it was an important connection only because the *hoi polloi* did not go to opera, whereas those who were, pretentiously high middle class did, those who knew got dressed up and went to opera.

Liz Waterhouse: So it was about class?

Marcus Schulkind: Yes, it was. It was class. It was about not wanting to be seeming like just middle-class Jewish strivers who never went to college—because neither of my parents went to college. My sister and I were the first generation of our family who attended a higher institution. (My sister was five years older than me growing up, so I didn't really have such a deep connection to her until much later on in our lives.) So, my parents said, "We promised to pay for your schooling, which we will, but anything you do out of college, you're paying for yourself." And you can imagine dance was not what they imagined when they thought of college.

So, Mark Ryder wrote a letter to Jacob's Pillow and explained my situation to them. I got a scholarship at Jacob's Pillow. I parked cars. I pulled the trash down to the dump. I took class every day with teachers I'd never had and with people who were good dancers. I had my first gay man try to *schtup* [have sex with] me, which actually was such a learning phase because I never understood how obnoxious I was to women until I had a guy come on to me. Changed my consciousness! I kind of

went, “Well, he was obnoxious. So, I guess I am too. I should figure something out.” Anyway, that’s where I met Norman Walker, who was one of my teachers there.

Liz Waterhouse: I also read, from your collection of papers, the *Dance Magazine* article about Goddard, and I read Mark Ryder offered “nude dance classes.” Did you do courses like that too?²⁰

Marcus Schulkind: I took it. Honestly only did it twice. We had newspapers up on all the windows. Happily, it was only two women and me. Everybody talked the talk there, but the reality of being naked in a room and trying to dance was not overwhelmingly going over big. And so, we did it twice. It really didn’t become a very full class, because if you’re jumping around naked, and you have big breasts, it hurts. And if you have balls and gonads that flap up and down, that hurts a lot too. So, we weren’t doing, needless to say, a lot of jumping.

Liz Waterhouse: There was also a class called, “the mutual fulfillment of fantasy”?²¹ Did you take that one as well?

Marcus Schulkind: Well, there were all kinds of things that were being done. I don’t remember that one. They had a guy who was teaching a course in general semantics, but it all just became a course that was really about focusing on your senses. So, one day we spent the day working on taste, and I remember we had to each take a Triscuit [cracker] and chew it, not swallow for like five minutes and then put it in your hand, feel it, put it back in your mouth. It was kind of weird. But what they were trying to get to was how no one was tasting things anymore: eating slowly, finding some pleasure with it, giving it a responsibility in a way that our culture really doesn’t care about giving it. So, Goddard was questioning not just the macro, but the micro systems as well. It was amazing.

Liz Waterhouse: Interesting. I wondered about those experiences, in comparison to your students today. Today is another moment of gender and sexual revolution.

Marcus Schulkind: There’s such a new thing now that I didn’t have growing up, which was there’s more than two genders, right? Holy smoke. We didn’t have that. You

20 “This past semester Mark announced he was prepared to teach ballet, modern dance, dance games, a nude dance class and a class dedicated to ‘the mutual fulfillment of fantasy.’ The greatest student demand was, interestingly enough, for classical ballet.” Anderson, “Goddard,” 38.

21 Anderson, 38.

either were one or the other, or you had a variation on one of those two themes, right?

Juilliard School

Marcus Schulkind: In my second year at Goddard, I started to get a little bit somewhere with my dancing. Mark came up to me, and he said, “You know, I don’t really have that much more that I can teach you. You need to audition for a conservatory.” I said, “I don’t even know what you’re talking about. What’s a conservatory?” He says, “It’s a place where it’s about dance. You’re going to go there. You will be the worst person there. You’re not going to know anything. Everyone around you will dance circles around you, and that’s going to help you because you’ll watch them.” I said, “Okay, where?” He said, “There’s a place called Juilliard, and you’re going to audition.” We sent a letter out. Juilliard responded, “Come down, you’re going to take a class and perform a solo.” Mark said, “You know that solo you did in the winter? You’re going to do that.” I went, “I could do that, that’s fine.”

So, I’m at the audition. We took a ballet class. Not so good for me, but it was a ballet class, and I hadn’t really spent a lot of time in a *really classic* “Don’t mess around! Turn out! Shut up!” ballet class. Then, I did my solo. You will never believe who was on my jury?

Liz Waterhouse: Tell me!

Marcus Schulkind: Okay. José Limón, Antony Tudor, three principal dancers from the Graham company, Martha Hill, and Lucas Hoving—Lucas Hoving was one of José’s people. I mean, thanks God at that time I didn’t know who they were! I would have choked so bad. (Both laugh.)

So two weeks later I get a letter in the mail that says, “You’re accepted. We’re giving you a scholarship starting in the fall.” Mark had written them that my parents had cut me off financially, which was true. I did another summer at Jacob’s Pillow. Norman Walker was still there. I’m getting pretty good at modern. Not so good still at ballet, except I had good feet, but like turnout and everything else was just not there (shrugs). And then I started at Juilliard. The problem was I went from my autonomous design of my education—at Goddard—back to the other educational model, which is the institution is going to tell you what to do, from eight in the morning till ten at night. You *have no room* to have your own agency. That was a very difficult transition for me. When I was at Goddard no one was telling me what to do and I was very happy designing my life. I was working my head off, but nobody was saying from eight to nine you do this, nine-thirty you *have to* show up to do this, etc. So, that was that was tough the first semester (shakes his head).

But the background on all this was Vietnam. I *never* wanted to kill another human being, and that was a primal thing to me, but I did not have a *religious* background. In order for you not to be in the army and become a conscientious objector—which meant you became a corpsman, a Red Cross person—you had to have a religious background. This is before the Seeger case [Daniel Andrew Seeger, Supreme Court case 1965]. One of Seeger’s children sued the US government and said, “I’m an atheist, but my religious feeling of not wanting to kill people is as powerful as if I was a Quaker, or as if I was an Amish person.” That won. But then, to prove that, you had to have an incredible political backing. So anyway, my college time was . . . The way not to get into the war was to stay in college.

The pressure was I *needed* not to get kicked out of college, because that would be the army. I have to say: Taking class with Antony Tudor was the most wonderful thing, and he liked me. José Limón’s health was failing. But the people teaching Limón [technique] for him were really interesting. The ballet teachers didn’t like me. They thought I was a renegade, and I didn’t show enough desire to turn out, and to do line the way they wanted. I started, after my first semester, to get some work outside of Juilliard, which I liked. Because who wouldn’t want to get paid to learn your skill, right? But we also had *horrible* things to do there. Labanotation was academia’s look at trying to make dance into music. Here’s this strange staff. Here’s this strange score. If we train you how to read this score, you can replicate this dance. Of course, my hand went up and went, “But how will I replicate the intentionality of the dance?” They said, “Someone will tell you about that.” (Smiles smugly.) I just thought it was crazy.

So, I still had my “Goddard thing.” My, “I’m gonna do what I want” attitude. So, my second semester at Juilliard I stopped going to the classes I didn’t like. But *they* don’t like you to do that. At first, they give you warnings. I decided I’m not going to deal with Labanotation. It was driving me crazy. It felt like a waste of my time. Instead, I would go up to the music library and just listen to music, because they had versions of everything—it was fabulous—and I really liked classical music. In fact, at Juilliard you have to take four years of music, including solfège, which is singing on key. Also, you better know your music coming and going, because it’s a music school. Duh, right?

In my last semester there what I decided to do was this: Any time I cut a class I made it a discovery day. I said to myself, “You’re in New York City. Juilliard keeps telling me this is the best place to get classes. Do it!” I take the subway; I go to Martha Graham to take a class. I take a subway; I’m at Merce Cunningham’s studio. I took class with Charles Weidman, in the tiniest little studio on the corner of 9th Avenue and 38th Street. I tried to trace all the people that I could, because this was part of my background; this is part of my life.

Daniel Nagrin—who became one of my mentors—he had come up to teach at Goddard a few times, so I took classes with him.²² He was in the East Village near CBGB's. He had an apartment with a secret moving bookcase that led to his studio. At my age, it was so beyond cool! A lot of interesting dancers took class with him. I was the youngest person there. Everybody else is somebody, and I'm like going, "Who's that person?" It was *very* improvisational, and crazy. I could do none of those things. So, it was really interesting to me.

But—as you can imagine—the administration at Juilliard did *not* find that vital to my education. The head of Juilliard, Martha Hill, and I had fights. Today, with distance, I can see it differently: I was rebellious and probably aggravating as hell to someone in charge. Institutions and I did not mix. But then she was the projection of all my troubles. I said, "You have to also understand that *maybe* this isn't my *path*. Because, I have to tell you, that since I've been here, your consciousness is to tell me that if I graduate here, I'm lucky to be able to say, "I'm a Juilliard dancer." And I don't really want to be a product of *you*. I want to be a product of *me*. You want me to be something that you can get more people to come here with. I don't want to be part of your means of production. I don't want to get this into capitalism. I want to get into—*What is art?*"²³

So, after I finished my first year at Juilliard I took a break. They said, "We'll allow you to come back, but you're on probation for next semester. If you mess up anything, you're out." I went, (whispers) "I have a big job now. I'm not coming back."

22 Daniel Nagrin (1918–2009), is described in his obituary by Jennifer Dunning "as widely credited as an inspiration to male dancers and older performers." Nagrin worked fluidly across styles of modern dance, jazz dance, experimental improvisation, as well as sound and video art. He also danced for many decades, and was outspoken against norms of aging, publishing *How to Dance Forever: Surviving Against the Odds*. Dunning, "Daniel Nagrin Dies at 91."

23 For this story, Schulkind places me in the role of his interlocuter, Martha Hill, the former director of Juilliard, to situate me in the field of their conflicts. His story closely associates guilt and rebellion, in the ambiguity of being a young artist searching for independent self-expression. Schulkind's gestures emphasize distinguishing and differentiating himself from the big dance institution. First, he gestures casually and lightly outside himself to his interlocuter, with one upturned right hand, then to himself with both hands. He then changes effort to perform irony—using a more smooth and formal opening of the right hand, while retracting in his chair backwards. He holds this pose to announce with a deeper, mocking voice: "I'm a Juilliard dancer." Instead, he emphasizes his own rhythm and discernment. He makes a vibratory pointing gesture with one hand, vibrating after the word "you." Then doubling this gesture with two hands to affirm the importance of personal discovery and freedom, he points to himself at the solar plexus with both hands—"me"—vibrating both hands for emphasis. Then he concludes the vignette by releasing both hands and changing positions in his chair. The story returns organically to further justify and perform why, for Schulkind, a path of defiant artistic exploration trumps a rigid Juilliard education.

I actually worked that whole year. Started working with Pearl Lang, which was my connection to the Graham world. Norman Walker had his company. Worked with two holocaust survivors, Felix Fibich and Judith [Berg] Fibich. These were people who did Jewish folk dances for the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union at town hall, in New York, for their big meetings. They hired amazing dancers to do their work. One day, I saw Felix's tattoo (points to his inner left wrist). I went up to one of the dancers and I said, "Did you know about that?" And he said, "Yeah, no. He's a survivor. He and his wife made it out of Auschwitz." I went (holds both hands up by his shoulders, palms forward, as in shock). So, I had a really interesting year. I was working in a wine store when I wasn't doing that. It was it was the kind of education I really liked, but it didn't follow their idea of education.

Juilliard had by this time reported to my draft board that I was no longer in school. They had to—*by law*—tell them if somebody dropped out. But it felt like a personal affront. I discovered, through some of the anti-war activity I was doing, that you could go to an ex-Navy psychiatrist and tell them why you didn't want to be in the war. They would write a narrative for you that would get you a 4-F [registrant not acceptable for military service]. But I was in Manhattan. Everybody had that note, meaning no one wanted to go. Really, honestly, no one felt that going to a country in Southeast Asia and killing people you didn't know was upholding the American dream.

I decided, also because my parents were putting ungodly pressure on me, that I would go back to Goddard. I had to take my physical and my draft in New Hampshire, because there was not even a center in Vermont. It was awful, the way they lined you up in your underwear and evaluated you. I finally got to the end of it, and presented my note, my 4-F form, and he said, "Yeah, no. We're not going to take you." The note said, in essence, that in a war situation I would have a nervous breakdown and be unreliable as a killer. It was from a Navy ex-psychiatrist, so that seemed to be more than enough for them. It was a life-changing moment, but I couldn't celebrate, right at that moment. I remember going back in the bus to Goddard, and meeting Mark [Ryder], and driving for a while in the car with him, before I could start to feel relief. (Schulkind, looks at the camera directly, smiles, whispers) "Yay!" I did it very quietly. But when I got back to Goddard, I was so happy that was over.

Batsheva: "A Modern Repertory Dance Company"

Marcus Schulkind: After I finished Goddard, one day I was walking in New York City in August to go take class somewhere. I saw Norman Walker across the street. I hadn't seen him in a long time, and I went up to him and said, "How are you doing?" He said, "What are you up to now?" I said, "I just finished school." He said, "Are you up for an adventure?" I said, "Oh, duh!" He said, "I'm the artistic director of Batsheva

[Dance Company]. I need a man [a male dancer]. Could you leave quickly?" I said, "My bag is packed, I'm ready."

This is way before Ohad Naharin came to Batsheva. The company was started by Martha Graham, and aside from Martha's own company, and London Contemporary Dance Theatre, Batsheva was the only other company that did Graham's work. So I've been trained for this. I'm ready to do it. Norman had brought in *amazing* people. A program that we did was: *Diversion of Angels* (1948) by Martha Graham; *Moves* (1959) a piece in silence, by Jerry [Jerome] Robbins; *The Mythical Hunters* (1968) by Glen Tetley. There were also pieces from Israeli choreographers that were always about war, because that's all they knew. All told, I got the chance to do something that didn't exist in America, which is to say, a *modern repertory dance* company. Because in America, you danced either with Martha Graham, or you danced with Pearl Lang, either you danced with José Limón, or you danced with Paul Taylor, but you didn't dance any of them all together. Except in Batsheva!

Unfortunately, somewhere after the third month of my being there, Norman got horribly sick—he survived—thankfully it was fine. The high point of my time with them was a four-week American tour. I got to do all the repertory I wanted to do. It was sponsored by the United Jewish Appeal. Every Jew had to come out and support the Israeli dance company. It was all big towns with big Jewish populations. We did a week at City Center in New York. I've never been on a bigger stage like that in my life! But then Norman announces that he's sick and not going back. I didn't want to stay and be in a place where we weren't going to do the amazing kind of work that I started out doing. So, I left. Maybe I was there six months (shrugs). I wasn't there for a long time.

So, I came back to New York. A couple of months later, Graham gets a big grant from the federal government, because Martha is still kinda "drying out" and getting her stuff together. I'm not quite sure if she really had an alcohol problem, but she was having problems and was at an institution in Arizona where her sister Geordie lived.²⁴ Meanwhile, the company got a huge grant. The grant was to take people who had never danced in the Graham Company and reform the company. So, they had an audition. I show up. The audition is movement from *Diversion of Angels* (1948). I know this dance coming and going. I don't tell them that. I just did it. And they go, "You're hired!" So, I got that job and worked with them for about three months. Martha is not back, yet. This is all taught by the people who are the keepers of the flame, which is to say Bert [Bertram] Ross and Mary Hinkson. We did some interesting things.²⁵

24 On Graham's own account of her alcohol problems, see Phillips, "Martha Graham's Gilded Cage," 72–73.

25 In a scanned article saved by Schulkind, featuring him posed in a photo by Martha Swope, dance critic Marcia Siegel provides valuable context for Schulkind's remarks. The article focuses on the new group that Schulkind is part of—316 East—which is named after the

For example, we did a piece called *Seraphic Dialogue* (1955). We're six men and six women. The prop was this little (gestures in the air, showing an oblong shape between his two hands) weird-shaped thing: not a ball, but a sculpture Isamu Noguchi made. Each of the men got the prop, came off our set, and did a whole dance with that prop. What Mark Ryer told me was that Martha was looking at how every man plays with an idea. So, it was very clever, very interesting. We did only studio showings because the company wasn't reformed yet, but she invited all these people, and it was a big deal to come to her studio in 63rd Street. (By the way, Bethsabée de Rothschild bought that studio for Martha, because Martha then started the company in Israel. Bethsabée was one of the Rothschild people who settled in Israel, but had more money because of their family than God itself, because they were bankers from the Middle Ages on, right?)

Around that time, I started to see Elisa Monte.²⁶ We had been together already when I was living in New York and studying at Juilliard but had broken up when I went to Israel. (I got married afterwards to Dana Mann, but the marriage was annulled after about two years.) Elisa was dancing with Lar Lubovitch. She said, "I'm gonna tell Lar about you and you should come and audition for him." So, I got that. We did a little tour with Lar. Then, Lar broke up the company somewhere in the middle of Europe. Lar was kind of an interesting combination of a ballet flow, with a lot of Limón and contraction under it. That wasn't such a hard step because I was spending a lot of time doing ballet with Maggie Black at that point.

address of Martha Graham's studio. With Graham in retirement, the group began rehearsing in February 1972 under the direction of former dancers Mary Hinkson and Bertram Ross. Siegel questions whether modern dance's "heroic sensibility" and "odd, earthbound shapes and complex rhythms" still have an audience, and whether the dancers can preserve the lineage alone, without Graham taking part. Siegel observes changes in the new generation: "Where the movement should be hard and percussive it looks round and lyrical. Instead of giving you the feeling they've been punched in the stomach, they look as if they've just caught a nice squishy beach ball. This blander, nicer Graham technique looks more like balletic imitations and adaptations of Graham that have become internationally popular in recent years." Lastly, she describes socio-economic changes in the modern dance field: "It is not just that the early moderns went out of style. The way they organized and ran their companies couldn't survive the businesslike and competitive climate of dance in the 70s." These observations give important background for interpreting Schulkind's stories. See Siegel, "An Art Form Poised on Threshold of Rootlessness?"

- 26 Elisa Monte, born in Brooklyn, directed her company Elise Monte Dance from 1981 to 2016. She trained initially in ballet and danced as a child for Agnes de Mille in *Carousel*; as an adult she performed in the Lar Lubovitch Dance Company, the Martha Graham Dance Company, Pilobolus, as well as with Schulkind. Her career as a choreographer was launched by the premiere of *Treading* in 1979. For many years her ensemble was co-directed by dancer David Brown, Monte's husband, under the name "Monte/Brown Dance." Burke, "Review"; Dunning, "DANCE"; Dunning, "Elisa Monte."

When we came back, I said to Elisa, “You know, I need to start making my own work. My work is basically just this shit.” It really was time to make my own statement. So, we did. And that explains this (gestures to the *Dance Magazine* on the wall), because I had done *Ladies Night Out* (1974), and *Job* (1976/1977), and a couple of other things.²⁷ People were liking what I was doing. I did three summers at the American Dance Festival [ADF] teaching. One of the people who was really helping me at that time was Martha Myers [director of ADF]. She thought I was a valuable teacher and had me teaching there as a guest artist. I am very grateful for that. I did a big piece there on the students that I think was really good: *Of Taliesin* (1978). Then, I turned it into a company piece, and I brought two students from ADF to join the company. I loved that piece. *Taliesin* was to the second [Sergei] Prokofiev *Violin Concerto* [Op. 63]—the whole piece. We did it in the New York Delacorte [Theater], Shakespeare in the Park. That was when I had the big company. It had eleven dancers in it.

Liz Waterhouse: Was your early work like what I danced with you later? Was the movement vocabulary similar?

Marcus Schulkind: A lot of it had to do with what I was teaching people, because I was *always* teaching. I started my second year at Goddard (smiles). The only place where I didn’t teach was in Israel.

What I taught back then was more Graham-ish. More, more literal Graham. My last year at Goddard, when I went back to finish, I taught every day, seven days a week. I had twenty-five people, *every day*. They couldn’t believe it because Goddard was such a hippie place. The fact that I could draw that many people, every single day.

Liz Waterhouse: So, you were a teacher early?

Marcus Schulkind: Yeah. I think that was something I could *do*. Another (wiggles fingers on both hands in front of him) instinctive kind of thing, you know?

27 *Job* is reviewed in Schulkind’s collection of press clippings in 1977, though articles in the 90s report that the piece was made in 1976. Cf. Temin, “Dance Review. Schulkind Creates Beautiful, Brief Bits of Truth.” In 1977, Kisselgoff’s review states: “Mr. Schulkind himself showed off a startling degree of virtuosity by giving a literal twist to many standard modern-dance falls to the ground in another solo “Job.” The tone was set by Randy Newman’s talking lyrics of a dialogue between God and mankind. As *Job*, Schulkind was beset with travail—mainly falls to the side of the body when he was expected to go down slowly backward. These whiplash movements carried their own excitement.” Kisselgoff, “2 Dance Concerts with Common View.”

So then, I started making work. Yeah, it was scary. It was hard. but I could use some of the connections I had. For example, Ethel Winter and Stuart Hodes were on the New York State Council [on the Arts] as people who would decide on grants. I had put grants in, and I had them come to showings. They did that because they knew who I was. It made a huge difference because I could get some money from the New York State Council, and from the National Endowment, which even though it was minor, that made a huge difference to me. It was a couple of thousand bucks, then. Was nothing stupid.

American Theater Lab: "If They Didn't Think You Were a Comer, You Didn't Get in."

Liz Waterhouse: The first writing I found about you in *The New York Times* is by Don McDonagh, describing a shared concert you did in January 1975 at the American Theatre Laboratory.²⁸

Marcus Schullkind: Do you know what the American Theatre Lab was? Okay, so let me let me hip you about this—in terms of dance history in New York City. After Jerry [Jerome] Robbins made a lot of money from his big three shows, which was *Fiddler [on the Roof]*, *West Side [Story]*, and *Gypsy*. This is before George Balanchine. He was a little bored. So, he bought a building on 19th Street in New York City, between 7th and 8th Avenues, the bottom of which was a tire store, the top of which he turned into a 150-seat black box theater and two rehearsal studios. I loved it because as you walked up the stairs, you'd smell the new tires.²⁹

First, Jerry did this amazing project with all of these out-of-work actors who could dance. He put together a group of people, paid them 150 bucks a week. They did a ballet class, a modern class, improvisation with him, Japanese tea ceremonies and martial arts. He created these ten, wunderkind actor-dancers. One of the things that was coincidental to this, and the reason I know about it, was that Elise's sister Barbara [Monte] was an actress, and she was in the program. Eventually Jerry started doing other projects, stopped that, but he hired someone to run his place, named Sue Anne Shirley. It became a rehearsal space for people, but he had performances there. To be allowed to perform there, you went through Sue Anne Shirley and the board. If they didn't like you, you didn't get in. If they didn't think you were a comer, you

28 McDonagh, "Dances by Bowyer Are Small Dramas with Core of Truth."

29 With the assistance of the National Endowment for the Humanities in 1966, Robbins established the American Theatre Lab "to explore experimental music-theater techniques, from dance to Noh drama, with a small handpicked company in a workshop setting for a period of two years." See Hunter and Jerome Robbins Project Staff, "Guide to the Jerome Robbins Papers, 1930–2001."

didn't get in. (Smiles.) We did *shows* there. When it says American Theatre Lab, those shows were under the aegis of, indirectly, Jerry Robbins.

Liz Waterhouse: So that was a real funnel into the scene, as an emerging artist?

Marcus Schulkind: It was *very* under-spoken about (wiggles fingers). Every fourteen-year-old choreographer and a brother were trying to do it.

A year after that, a man named David White was running a thing called Dance Theater Workshop [DTW] in New York.³⁰ He took over American Theatre Lab and that's where the Dance Theater Workshop did all of their shows for a billion years. David White liked me, so we did some shows there as well.

So, one day we did a show for DTW, I went into David's office, and I said, "Okay, feedback!" He said, "Here's what I need to tell you. It's important." He said, "I know you're a good teacher and you want to *develop* dancers, but you had dancers on stage who weren't as strong: *big fuckin mistake*. You cannot afford to do that. They won't give you grants until you show people who have that kind of caliber of talent." I said, "But what? They wouldn't accept somebody who's going to be that?" He went, "No." So. (Brings hands back together to affirm the closure of the story.)³¹

Liz Waterhouse: Did you agree with him?

Marcus Schulkind: I listened to him because he was on *every* funding thing in New York: National Endowment, New York State Council, etc. I went, "I don't like this, but I will listen to you because I want to survive. I want my little piece of the pie—not a big one, because I'm competing with Merce [Cunningham], Martha [Graham], Paul Taylor, and everybody else in town. But I want my little piece of the pie, because it also makes me *feel* that I am seen as somebody to pay attention to, rather than just another person making dance in New York City." So, I really listened to that.

I had two *amazingly* difficult-to-hear conversations in my career. One was with David White; (softens voice) one was with Pearl Lang, pretty early on in my career.³²

30 Dance Theater Workshop was a performance space in New York City founded in 1965 for the rehearsal and presentation of new dance work. In 1975, under direction of David White, it moved to American Theatre Lab. Craine and Mackrell, "Dance Theater Workshop."

31 Sitting with his legs propped up on the patient's table in his office, Schulkind gives energy to this important anecdote. He leads with a smile, before changing into a serious tone, playing David White and turning me into his interlocutor. Schulkind scrunches his eyebrows together and looks directly at me, trying to put me in his shoes. He uses his left hand to draw attention, pointing with an impact on "this is important" and using the rhetoric of a weighted index finger, emphasizing each word: "big fuckin mistake."

32 Pearl Lang (1921–2009) was a dancer with the Martha Graham Company and choreographer, directing her own company in New York City from 1952. She also taught internationally and

Pearl took me aside, one day. She said, “You know what’s wrong with your dancing?” And I said, “No, Pearl, but I bet you’re going to tell me.” (LW laughs.) That’s just the way the conversation started up. She said, “I am, and I want you to really listen to me.” She went, “You’re too small to lift big women.” “What does that mean?” I said, “Yeah, what does that mean?” She goes, “You have to learn and make yourself be a *virtuosic* principal or soloist. Otherwise, no one will hire you because you’re too small.”³³

So, that changed the way I took class after that, because I went, “Pearl’s in the business. If anyone knows what’s important. You know, I can hear you!” This was way before I started doing my own work. This was like, “Who doesn’t want to work?” (Softer voice) “Okay, I hear you. I’m going to . . . I’m going to make that happen.” So, that was another of the more interesting—here’s a kick in the balls. Take it or leave it. But it’s probably not a bad perspective for you to know. Which now takes me to the conversation about my audition for Paul Taylor!

I *always* wanted to dance for Paul Taylor!³⁴ I thought his musicality and his *brilliance* and *athleticism*, and *virtuosity* were amazing. So, I had come back from Batsheva [Dance Company], and this was before the Graham-thing formed. He had an audition for men. I went down to his studio, four hundred men. He got rid of them fast. You did two pliés, you got rid of twenty-five people. It was like that. And then, I got down to the last three. There were two big guys and me, and they said to us, “We will call you by tomorrow and let you know who’s got it.” Now, this is before cell phones. I am now like Pavlov’s dog, sitting in front of my phone. I’m sitting there

directed modern dance at Jacob’s Pillow. In her obituary, Jack Anderson writes: “As both dancer and choreographer, Ms. Lang demonstrated an intense lyricism and a taut dramatic sense.” Anderson, “Pearl Lang, Dancer and Choreographer, Dies at 87”; see also Chapman, “Lang, Pearl.”

- 33 Still sitting with both legs propped up on the patient’s table in his office, Schulkind looks at me obliquely. He continues to put me in his shoes, as he recreates this difficult-to-hear conversation with Pearl Lang, treating me as his interlocutor. He energizes the story with drama by knitting his eyebrows together to start. He breaks a smile through the serious dramatization, as I laugh with his setup of a punch lunch. Clearly this is not going to end well. He drops his left finger for rhythmic emphasis on Lang’s advice. But the final judgment from Lang is voiced with a diminuendo and a growing smile. His gesture of pointing resolves before he concludes Lang’s testimony. Schulkind ends smiling vulnerably, resting his cheek on his left hand. A criticism heard.
- 34 Paul Taylor (1930–2018) was known as an exceptionally “versatile performer,” dancing in the works of Martha Graham, George Balanchine, Merce Cunningham, Charles Weidman, and Doris Humphrey. As a collaborator of Robert Rauschenberg’s and a teacher at Black Mountain college, his experiments in the 1950s shocked critics for their non-dance elements. Later, framing his work within the traditions of modern dance, The Paul Taylor Dance Company maintained an eclectic body of repertoire and was known for its diverse, individual dancers. Kane, “Taylor, Paul”; Macaulay, “Paul Taylor Dies at 88.”

from seven in the morning, and I am like *schvitzing* [sweating] bricks, I am like dying. I am waiting for the phone. Anybody calls me, I said, “Don’t call me today!” It got to be about three o’clock and I hadn’t heard. So, I said, “Okay, you lose nothing, call him.”

I call him, and the phone gets picked up. It’s Paul Taylor’s manager. I said, “Hi, my name is Marcus Schulkind, I was at the audition. I was one of the three last people. You guys said you would talk to us, and you haven’t. I know, I’m probably not supposed to do this, but what’s going on?” So, he puts down the phone and I hear him scamper off. Then he comes back, picks up the phone, and he says, “Mr. Taylor *wants* you to know that he thinks that you are a gorgeous, beautiful dancer, but you’re too small for his company.” And I said, “Okay, wait a minute! I just want . . . Would you go and tell Mr. Taylor that I project *huge* on stage?” He puts down the phone and he scampers away, comes back, picks up the phone again and says, “Mr. Taylor *even* understands that, but you’re still too small. (Schulkind changes from playing the character of the manager, to *his* speaking voice) So, but thank you, you’re a beautiful dancer. He meant that sincerely. That’s why you got one of the three left. But he can’t really use you.”

So, you’re one of the last three! Your expectations are like *something*, right? It’s not like you got caught after the first plié. (Exhales with a sigh, while dropping his arms with emphatic release.)

Liz Waterhouse: What an honor though! I don’t know if you could have felt that, at that time?

Marcus Schulkind: No, not at that time. But on some level, I could at least say (imitates the deep voice of actor Marlon Brando) “I’m a *contender*, if my *fucking* genetics was six inches bigger, I would have been a *champ*” Okay, whatever. So, it was like *On the Waterfront* “Stella! Paul!” (Both laugh cathartically.)³⁵

35 We can learn from this anecdote how bodily appearance—physical attributes of gender performance, such as height—are important to the perception of Western concert dance, strongly impacting dance careers. Schulkind has set up the suspense for this story, which is gaining momentum, as his third anecdote in a row. Smiling, he begins by making an exuberant gesture, like swinging a heavy baseball bat. Throughout his narrative, he alternates moods. Accompanying the serious conversation between Schulkind and Paul Taylor, mediated by an assistant and the phone, there are many comic interludes. Schulkind mimics holding the phone, acts out the sounds of the assistant walking by drumming on his legs, and changes his voice to mimic that of the assistant. Both of us often burst out laughing at the ridiculousness of such a serious conversation taking place in such a mediated, bizarre way. When he voices the final testimony of Paul Taylor, he delivers it dryly. When he pleads that he can dance *huge*, he smiles wryly, showing his desire, confidence, and social determination. Schulkind finishes the conversation by hanging up the imaginary phone. He returns to his speaking voice, in its deeper tones, to deliver his last reflection.

Six months later, Paul Taylor has another audition. I called up the manager before and I said, “Hi, my name is Marcus Schulkind, and I was one of the last people at your last audition. I *don’t* want to go through this again, to be told I’m tiny. Would you *ask* Mr. Taylor if I should even come to the audition or not? Because emotionally, it will tear me apart. I’ll *wind* myself up, and you’ll keep me or *not*. But either way . . .” So he scampers away, comes back, and he says, “Mr. Taylor *really* thanks you, but you really shouldn’t come.” And I went “Okay, you know, I can dig that. Because at *least* I didn’t have to wind myself up and turn myself into whatever I need to turn myself into, to come to an audition and make that work. So, thank him. And thank you because I’ll *never* come to an audition for you guys again. I got it. I appreciate that because it’s better to understand that. You know?” I’m sure even if you had put in the audition notice “Men five foot ten and bigger,” shrimps would still come because they want to try—because that’s the nature of the beast. (Looks away, contemplating.)

But I *really wanted* to work for that man. I never got the chance. Years later, when I was looking at how hard they killed themselves—Paul Taylor’s company works almost eleven months out of the year. They are a touring company. When they’re not touring, he’s doing new pieces. It was a *difficult* company in terms of your knee joints and other things to survive. When I thought about that, I rationalized why I didn’t get picked. God wanted me to dance another two years! So, that was that story.

So rather than our first conversation, which was my building up a “Marcus myth” a little bit, these are stories that are much more real, honest, and heartfelt, because they were instrumental in how I would consider looking at my career. Because this is, again, before I was creating anything. This is when I was trying to dance with anybody I could, but especially people who turned me on.

Next Generation: “You Taking the Time to Be You”

Marcus Schulkind: My dance career is so circular. In my last year at the American Dance Festival [ADF], Daniel Nagrin said to me, “I want to do a new solo for you.” He was having a big concert, because he had just recovered from knee surgery. Daniel invited all of the people who had danced with him to come in and do his solos. Then, he would close with a new solo for himself that was called *Getting Well* (1978). It started with him on a gurney, and then he would get up, and dance around. Daniel was amazing!

We rehearsed in New York. Neither of us had a lot of time, but we made time. This solo was the hardest thing anybody ever gave me. A recording of that’s in the [New York] Library of Performing Arts. It’s archived under Daniel. I’m not sure who can get to see it, but that’s there. That was part of the circularity of my career in dance, because Daniel was one of my first teachers and I got to do a new solo from him ten years later, which was *so* gratifying. It was called *Time Writes Notes on Us* (1978). It was *so* hard. It was horrible to do. The more I could do, the more he made it

harder (laughs). It was to a *discordant* piece of Aaron Copland piano music, an awful piece of music that had nothing to latch onto, emotionally. (Opens hands and smiles mischievously) I think he picked that because he *knew* I would find a way to latch onto it, physically, emotionally, some other way.

So, another circular story, also about ADF. I told you about my experiences at Juilliard, where I stopped going to all those classes and they failed me. Now fast forward ten years. This is my last year at ADF [1979]. At ADF, they always had a couple of panels of the faculty. The kids would all come in and then the faculty would tell them stories of their lives and careers. The first year, I remember sitting in the audience listening to somebody talk, thinking this guy was so full of himself. *But* the next year they asked me to be on the panel. I'm on stage, and it was my turn to start talking. I said, "You know what I want to tell you? This career is incredibly circular and weird. I'm going to tell you why. Back in the day when I was at Juilliard, three of the people who were on stage with me *failed* me miserably because I stopped going to their classes, because I doubted the value of their classes. (Pause) Guess what? I'm *here with them now!*"

The other guys on the panel looked at me, like they could kill. It was so perfect! I said, "What I want you to understand is you need to follow your own path. You need to not buy in to the corporate logic. You need to understand it's about *you*, fulfilling *you*. That if there's nothing else about art, that's what it's about! You might be poor, you might be unknown, but you have found an authenticity about who you are and what you want to do with it. That's art. It doesn't matter who fails you, as you can tell. I'm here. I'm their peer. They must be pissed as hell at me. Not only that: I choreograph! They must be pissed as hell at me, because they were trying to teach me choreography when I was so not ready to even think about choreography! Which is why I stopped going, because I could barely put a phrase together. I could barely walk across the stage. I could barely improvise. So, I just want you to know. That's such an important lesson for you to hear, that this isn't all glory, and it isn't all kissy kissy, and it isn't all politics. It's always the underpinning. It may have those things, you may need to do those things, but it's really about you, taking the time to be you."³⁶

36 This anecdote is performed expressively. Schulkind begins by creating a serious mood, his hands are folded together. As he begins his testimony about the panel, he creates attention by opening his hands and lowering them slowly, as if he is placing them onto a piano to play the first note of a piece of music. He continues, setting up the situation and story, and then makes a dramatic pause before resolving into his punch line. I exclaim in laughter, as he opens his arms at the elbows and smiles mischievously, raising his volume—delivering his candid advice for the students—that also demonstrates his status gained among his peers at the panel. He continues with sincerity, lowering his volume and tone: bringing his thumb and index finger together precisely. Then gesturing his right hand downwards with rhythmic emphasis—"It's about you."—he gestures downwards with his palm. Then, on the

After that, nobody in the faculty would talk to me except Daniel [Nagrin] and Doug Elkins (leans back in his chair to laugh). I think they couldn't accept my provocation. Here's this place where you "have to" do your classes. They don't want anybody to upset the structure. But I came from Goddard, I came from a place where it was in terms of educational *existentialism*. You decided exactly what you were going to do. No one told you what to do. Granted maybe not everybody wants to do that. Maybe they need to have a little cubby hole of activities every day, so they feel that they're fulfilling things, and get graded. I didn't! It *pissed* me off, and it made me feel less worthy than anybody else. Yet, I was spoiled, or angry, or ridiculous enough to do my own thing (smiles gently). So, you know—there you go. It all kind of works out in the wash, somehow.

Those are my stories more about real life. In our first interview, I was painting a picture of my career, that didn't show all the things that were difficult—you know hurtful. I mean, when they failed me, it was amazingly painful to me. But what could I expect? If you challenge them, they're going to fail you. (Laughs.) That's not the game! They don't set you aside and go, "Let's have an educational, philosophical conversation with you." They're not going to look at you, as you being as worthy as they are. Because you haven't done the same amount of work as they did.

Liz Waterhouse: I think in general, dancers' stories that are made public, they're very glamorized.

Marcus Schulkind (agreeing): No, no, no. And the *decline* isn't really talked about because it's so painful and difficult. But the interesting thing, and this would be, when I think of my career, (softens vocal volume) *I always taught*. I taught from the second year of starting dance. I taught seven days a week. And I think *one* of my gifts was being *able* to teach people things (offers his right hand forward).

Liz Waterhouse: Your contact as a healer and your contact as a teacher.

Marcus Schulkind: So, one of the great things about you having been here these last few days, is you're *reminding* me of that. Much more so than how it is now for me,

words "fulfilling you," he turns his hand over invitingly. He stretches his fingers and gestures downwards towards the desk for emphasis: "That's what it's about." Then he opens his palms invitingly, beckoning me into the play of: "That's art." Later, when he returns to contemplating his education at Goddard, he crescendos in his voice and gestures, looking like a conductor flinging his arms more extensively around him with weighted impact—strong, slow, free, and indirect. This contrasts with the prolonged gestures accompanying his description of "other" educations: the tiny, minute repetitive slicing of his hands one on top of the other—bound, quick, small, and spatially direct. This mastery of performance shows confidence and clarity: a defiant self-presentation.

when the path is *this* way (points with his index finger, making a straight diagonal line down) rather than the path is *that* way (draws a line in the air rising vertically). Because, when you're going, you know—thirties, forties—you're hot. Things still are okay: collagen [connective tissue] doesn't rip. Collagen gets nervous but is fine. But I have to also say that fine line between humility and humiliation occurs with major injuries. (Looks away, reflecting.)

Kathy Grant and Maggie Black

Marcus Schulkind: Once I got really hurt, I became a *real* teacher. That knee accident, to me, was the humiliation that allowed me to get into my humility about everything. I was a good teacher before then. I was a talented teacher. But I didn't have true empathy. After that, "Woke, smoke! I'm walking in your shoes!" I understand when you can't do things in a certain way, with a certain skill set. That was my greatest education. That's also when I found the teachers who then enabled me to go on. Kathy Grant being one of them. Maggie Black being one of them. They were both in New York. The injury was the key that opened the door.

Kathy Grant was the last of the three living people who had actually worked with Joe [Joseph] Pilates.³⁷ Kathy specialized in dance because she had been a dancer. Kathy also was one of the few people who could use Pilates to *fix* dancers or *fix* people, rather than teaching the rote way. Kathy was wonderful human being, who, as a Black woman, had lived through a life of intolerance and segregation. So, she had a love/hate for all of us being White. I had to prove myself worthy to her on so many levels. First, as a man. Second, as a *White* man. Third, as a *Jewish White* man. Fourth, as a Jewish White man who wanted to dance and wanted her help. For some reason, Kathy liked me, and I was grateful. Maybe because I had a sense of humor—I don't know. But Kathy let me in. Kathy let me *really* figure things out. When I went back to performing, my first performance (points to right knee) after I got hurt was at Harvard Dance Center [1987].³⁸ I did *Job*, and right after it was over, the first person I called was Kathy. I told her I performed, and we both cried. Because she knew about that road that I had taken to get there.

37 Kathleen Stanford-Grant (1921–2010) had an extensive career as a dancer, dancing with and for Bill Robinson ("Bojangles"), Cab Calloway, Pearl Bailey, Carmen De Lavallade, Geoffrey Holder, Arthur Mitchell, and Donald McKayle, among others. After a knee surgery she was referred to studying with Joseph Pilates, becoming a master teacher. See the websites <https://diversityinpilates.com/kathy-stanford-grant> and, <https://www.kathygrantpilates.com>, both last accessed September 24, 2025.

38 Dreyfus, "Faculty Show Eclectic, Energetic."

Maggie Black was also enormously helpful to me.³⁹ Somehow, Maggie let me into her world. She rehearsed me once or twice. I mean, she was into *crème de la crème*—Kevin McKenzie when he was a principal at American Ballet Theatre, Martine van Hamel, Gelsey Kirkland, when Gelsey started to become a fallen human being with [George] Balanchine, *because* she went to Maggie. She was there, too. So somehow, I got into this. Maggie let me in. And watching her teach her class in her formal, anatomical, structuralist style was a revelation to my mind. She would teach you how to physically enable your body to accomplish technical things.

Opposites Attract

Marcus Schulkind: I also learned a lot from Elisa Monte.⁴⁰ Elisa was my polar opposite. Elisa was streetwise. She had gone through it, knew it, understood how to deal. She understood all the little angles. *And* she had talent, which attracted me to her enormously. Elisa at that point was dancing with Martha, doing principal roles: Helen McGehee's in particular. She could wail through Helen's work—unbelievably powerful. She had the lead in *Clytemnestra* (1958), one of the biggies that Martha did. So, Martha seriously loved Elisa.

Liz Waterhouse: Did you ever have issues about authorship working with Elisa Monte? She also became a choreographer. Did that ever cause tensions?

Marcus Schulkind: Yes of course. Okay, so let's talk about some other things that happened with me and Elisa. Like I said, Elisa was really a good energetic match for me on a thousand levels: relationship level, also as a performer, she was beyond brilliant. I could just fold things into her, choreographically, and it was like going to be super brilliant.

I was the one who encouraged, "You should go to Graham." So she went to dance for Graham. Graham loved her. I knew that they would temperamentally click. But I also saw her talent was more than being an interpreter. One day, I was watching public TV, and they did a program on Pilobolus Dance Company. It was the first time Pilobolus got major recognition; they had taken the two women in [Alison Becker Chase and Martha Clarke]. That changed Pilobolus from a bunch of crazy scientific jocks, into theater. On TV they showed this piece called *Untitled*, where they're on men's shoulders and they come up in dresses. It was *fabulous*. I said to Elisa, "You should work with them." So, Elisa met Moses Pendleton and went up to their place

39 Maggie Black (1930–2015) toured internationally as a ballet dancer before teaching at the Metropolitan Ballet school, The Juilliard School, as well as private studios in New York City. Zeller, "Teaching through Time."

40 For a biography of Monte, see footnote 26.

in Connecticut and started working with them *also*. I kind of realized that for her development, that would be the next step. After she'd worked with them for a while, she started choreographing. That was really bad in the sense that we had a little competitiveness going on (rubs hands together), and that was not good. Especially because she had such good connections and was such a great dancer, she kind of jumped ahead of me. Alvin Ailey took her and did one of her pieces [*Treading*, 1979]. That made a lot of her career happen because of that.⁴¹

So, our relationship, I think, fell apart for two reasons. One, she was doing so much better than me (laughs joyfully and extendedly, changes position, stands up and then sits back down again). Our last concert *together* was at Marymount Manhattan Theatre. I did two works, and she did three works, and we shared dancers, but it was no longer harmonious—shall we say. The other reason, beyond our artistic relationship, was family planning and kids. Elisa really wanted to have a family. So, of course, I thought about the matter seriously, but I knew, I'm not emotionally or economically ready to be a father. After that was clear: We were done. Then it was a question of, since we had built this loft together, but she had put the money down for the loft on Great Jones Street, I could rehearse and teach there for two years. That was my "divorce severance." We weren't legally married. But I think we were together more than eight years. So, I think common law said, "You're married." So that was that.

Vehicular Trauma

Liz Waterhouse: Is the end of your relationship with Elisa also why you left New York?

Marcus Schulkind: Well, there were a few reasons. I left New York also because something else happened, that has nothing to do with my dance career per se. I was teaching at SUNY Purchase in the evenings in their evening dance program. There's no public transportation to speak of to get there, so I rented a car. Diving down on the New York Thruway [highway] one night, I'm in the left-hand lane and suddenly a *body* falls in front of my car, and I hit it. It's a man in a crouched position. So, of course, I stop the car. I put on blinkers. Police come. It's kind of damp out. My car is not totaled, but I didn't want to drive anymore that night. I'm sitting in the cop car, and I'm crying. Because there was no way, from the sound of what happened to that body and to my car, that person was alive. The person was dead. The cops took me

41 Anderson presents a different account of Monte's biography here. See Anderson, "Alvin Ailey to Open with Elise Monte Premier." For the performance of the Marcus Schulkind Dance Company on January 24, 1979, at the theater at St. Clement's, Monte is credited as co-Artistic Director and for costume design. Cohen, "On Ambition, Part I."

back to the local police station. I was still crying. The cop said to me, “You’re not at fault here. We even have a witness. I know you’re traumatized.” I said, “Okay, I don’t know how to get home. He said, I’m going to call you a cab. This is the Bronx. You should not walk alone.”

Liz Waterhouse: So, you were not at fault?

Marcus Schulkind: The cops told me that night, “We’ve investigated this whole thing. You’re not at fault. Do you know what happened?” I said, “Not really.” He said, “On the other side of the Thruway, this man had an accident. He had gotten out of the car. He was directing traffic around his *own* accident, on the other side of the highway, when another car clipped *him*, and sent him flying over the barrier. He landed in front of your car. You were in the wrong place at the wrong time.” And I said, “It doesn’t make me feel any better.”

This is how messed up this was. So the cop said to me, because I was so upset, “He was dead by the time he got to your side of the road. He was dead. He could not have survived what had happened to him on the other side of the road. So, you really shouldn’t feel that you have actually killed this person. The person was pretty much gone.” That was really, I guess, a situation where the cops were as comforting as they could be.

But that was the most astonishing and difficult thing to happen. To realize that *suddenly* this “thing” falls in front of you. Literally within five feet of you, and you make contact with it. And that thing happens to be another human being. So it was from that night on the trauma set in, because I had never killed anybody before—which goes back also to my protest and abstention from Vietnam.

Liz Waterhouse: Hmm

Marcus Schulkind: So it was a traumatic thing, because it also was, I guess, serendipitous. It was so random. It was so ridiculous. They never found . . . So, you know it was horrifying—just horrifying. But then after a few years it kind of disappeared, and then it became real as suddenly I’m going to trial.

Liz Waterhouse: What trial?

Marcus Schulkind: A civic trial. A civil case is very different than a criminal law case. If the police report had said that I was guilty of vehicular murder, then that’s a *legal* case. Then, they would have put me in jail or gone after me for manslaughter. Since there was *no legal case*, this was *civil* case. That’s why it took so long to get to court. This family is suing you for the intent, whether conscious or not, of killing this man. It’s a different thing when it’s *civil* versus *criminal*. There was no *criminal* case, which

you would think would kill off the civil, but no. Because it's *civil*, the judge had more power.

The lawsuit was for an astronomical figure. First, I called up the rental car company and I said, "Well, I had insurance through you." They said, "You only have insurance for us for up to 500,000 dollars. We'll provide you with a lawyer for just the first 500,000 dollars. We suggest you get your own lawyer." Basically, nothing happens for years. It takes ten years to go through its cycle. Then we go to court, and I testify. It's in the Bronx, which is where this happened. I had never really seen the family other than to express my deepest condolences right at the beginning. They're staring at me, with hatred and also greed. (Shrugs.) They're poor. In the same situation, I would try to get as much out of the insurance too. But they're suing me, at this point, for a million and a half—which meant, if I *lost*, I could be responsible for a million dollars, even though I didn't have it. My lawyer said to me, "You're going to declare bankruptcy, now, because we need you to be bankrupt before this happens."

I go through the whole court case. Because five years had gone by, the person who was the witness, who saw the man hit on the other side of the highway, can no longer be found. So, it's basically my word and the police report, against the family's. I said to our lawyer, "But there's no way. One doesn't *walk* on the New York Thruway. Pedestrians are not allowed on the highway—especially in the left lane. So, how did this person suddenly fall in front of my car? Like, are we missing some logic?" he said, "The jury is very sympathetic to the family." I said, "But there's no *facts* here." He said, "That doesn't matter." We get to the final moment of this whole thing and the civil jury says "Guilty, million and a half!" The judge has more power though, because this is a civil case. The judge comes back, and he said, "I'm changing the award. The award is going to be 500,000 dollars to be paid by the insurance company. This person [Schulkind] obviously was in the wrong place at the wrong time. I'm not going to *penalize* this person for this situation."

So, thankfully I was not bankrupted. But honestly, it was so traumatic to me. I just felt like people reading this should know that this person was hit on the other side of the road and fell into my lane. It wasn't like I was drunk driving down the road. So that was the most astonishing and difficult thing to happen. I had to rent another car the next week to go teach at Purchase. I drove back on the same route, to make myself understand there were no ghosts, and I was okay. But never—I'll never forget that sound.⁴²

42 In the first rendition of this story, Schulkind pauses for many seconds, as if deliberating or remembering, and inhales deeply before recounting this difficult event. In this writing I have blended two accounts, from March 21, 2023, and July 18, 2024; the first version was much more fragmented, as one would expect from a story of trauma seldom told. The second version morally justified that Schulkind was not at fault, while also explaining the choreography of how the man had been killed more clearly.

Liz Waterhouse (Overlapping): Mm-hmm. I'm so sorry!

Marcus Schulkind (Overlapping): No, it's okay! Probably made me understand how to do *Job*.

Then, the other thing that happened—you asked me why I left New York—was: I hurt myself, you know, horribly. Tore my ligament in my knee. The *repair*—which at the time wasn't frequent—except for football players, and that's an *easier* repair because you just make it tight as hell. So, this too—this pushed me away. Because at this point, I hadn't gotten back to dancing yet.

Once I get to the point where I (drops hand to injured right knee) could actually dance a little bit, I decided maybe I shouldn't be in New York anymore, and maybe I should try to teach in academia and see if I could stand that. A friend told me that they needed a modern dance teacher in Ohio. That's when I went to Denison and Ohio Wesleyan University. Unfortunately, Denison is a party, fraternity place. Kids there were not interested in the arts. The other place was fabulous. The kids were brilliant, and interesting, and I really enjoyed working with them.

But I was living in Denison in their young faculty dorms and driving back and forth to the two colleges. What I discovered is that people in academia are crazy. They actually think they're changing the art world with what they're exploring and researching, and they actually think they're important. At meetings, I would just go (shakes head). Then, they get caught up with, "Do you wanna stay here? Do you have to be tenured? You're gonna have to write a book." I just went, "No, I don't think that's what's gonna happen."

At the same time all this was happening, every summer, for nine summers in a row, Iris Fanger ran a thing called the Harvard Summer Dance Festival. I am so grateful to her, because that teaching helped me to continue after my injury. So, I would come to Cambridge for six weeks (opens palms, raises voice positively in pitch, smiles). I taught for nine summers. One summer, the last one, I met Gerri Houlihan, who had danced with Lar Lubovitch. She was starting the Boston Dance Project, and I said to her, "Gee Gerri, would you be interested if I came here and taught for you?" She said, "Let's try a winter workshop." I came in, and did a winter workshop, and it went over well. So, I moved to (voice raises up in pitch) Boston. I taught at Gerri's. Suddenly, I got a ton of work in this town—so (shrugs), I stayed.

It is a very interesting thing: I *knew* I wasn't done with dance. I *could* have stopped then, when I went out to Ohio. But I wasn't done with it. I needed to get back, I needed then to see. Once I got back, then I went, "Hm! Got things to say! Still got things to say, so I'm not done with this yet."

Liz Waterhouse: What a mix of factors that shaped your life story: There's your personal relationship with Elisa and questions of competition vs. family planning. There's your body, the injury. Just chance, this accident. The American legal

system and its procedures and verdicts. Then also, the dance network of different institutions for teaching. That's a real complicated mix of factors shaping a life story.

Marcus Schulkind: It was kinda thorny.

Liz Waterhouse: Just one last question, financially how did you get through this? How did you get by when you were injured? Is that also why you went to Ohio, to have a fulltime gig?

Marcus Schulkind: After the knee injury, I fortunately had disability insurance from MetLife, that I started when I was a teacher as SUNY Purchase, in their evening program. Thankfully it hadn't cost me much, but after I hurt my knee, I actually got a check from them every month. So that got me my rent and my basic food. That's how I survived then.

Another source of income for me in the early eighties was that I got a gig called "Affiliate Artist." Affiliate Artists [Appointment Residencies] was an organization in New York City, and they took three or four dancers, musicians, actors, and artists, and connected them to a corporate sponsor to work in what were called "underserved artistic communities." The first time I auditioned, I didn't get it—the guy didn't like me—but at one point they needed to replace someone, so I got invited to down to the Southern Illinois Art Consortium.

It was a great gig. What you did was called "informal performances." It was basically a forty-five-minute informal performance riff, where you talked and did a couple of dances and then you talked, and then you answered questions, and you then pitched how you were being sponsored by, for example, the Columbus Arts Council, or Battelle Foundation. I filled in for six weeks in Southern Illinois and then did another two years: first in Columbus, Ohio, with Batelle Foundation and then the third year in Patterson, New Jersey—I forget my sponsor in New Jersey. Basically you went in there for two-week periods, four times over the course of a year. The gig paid \$15,000 clear, all expenses paid, which was amazing cash. They flew you; they fed you; they put you up. It was a big high, a clap on the back, because to get this was a major thing. So that helped fund my company when I was in New York City. All this money that I got there, I would throw into the company, and any of the other gigs I got, including my teaching; all of the money I got went into the dance company, because I always paid people.

Figure 3: Marcus Schulkind at the Boston Conservatory on September 6, 1989, days before his company debut in Boston.

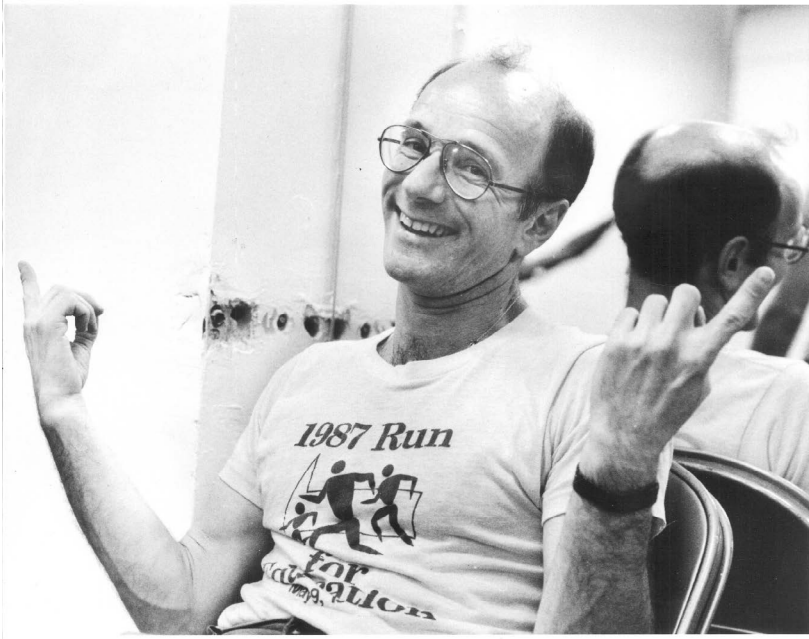


Photo by Ted Archer.

Choreographic Work in Boston

Liz Waterhouse: How did you start making your choreographic work in Boston?

Marcus Schulkind: My first big project here was when I was still teaching at the conservatory for Ruth Sandholm, she was my dean for ten years. I am very grateful to her. Ruth gave me the rights—I was the first choreographer who did this—to perform my work at the Boston Conservatory Theater. I mean, a show featuring my own dancers, not the Boston Conservatory kids. I decided that we would actually be a company. We did six weeks of paid rehearsal at the Boston Conservatory. We worked Monday through Friday for six weeks. I remember one dancer, Jimmy [Jim Viera], coming up to me and going, “That’s the best thing in the world!” Because we were doing a two-hour class, and then we work for four hours, and then you paid us. What more could I possibly want?”

There was no summer program at the conservatory, so I was there all August. Plus, then we went right in after Labor Day to do the show. We sold the place out. We

did Thursday, Friday, Saturday nights. It was a 250-seat theater. It worked out great. I learned from that to do my company concerts *before* anybody else in September. We worked all summer and then did the first concert of the year. Because we had *no* competition, I got every reviewer in town. It just had to be after Labor Day in September. So that's what I did, and it worked out brilliantly.

Liz Waterhouse: How many years did you do that?

Marcus Schulkind: Only once. Because after I did it, they didn't let anybody else ever do that again. Not because of *me*, but because they started summer programs, and the theater people didn't want to let it go.

I was also teaching publicly at The Joy of Movement, which was a health club run by Kenneth Estridge. His Central Square location in Cambridge was his dance health club. It's now called The Dance Complex. The *same* building I'm teaching in now, I was in thirty years ago. It's kind of strange when I think about it. Ken Estridge burned out badly. His building was seized by the federal government and the state government for tax. We walked in one day to teach, I was the morning person, and the building was padlocked with a sign that said, "This property is taken over by the state for back taxes." No one had told us! So, I was sitting out there with twenty people, and we weren't getting in.

Liz Waterhouse: So this was when you started Green Street Studios?

Marcus Schulkind: Yeah. Five of us got together. We were: Ruth Birnberg, Ruth was a modern dance choreographer in town; Cheri Opperman, who had danced with Susan Rose; Paula Josa-Jones; Paula's lover Pam White; and me. We opened a studio together. What started out really good and amicably, fell apart over time. Paula Josa-Jones was very wealthy. They lived in Concord and after about five years, they bought a house on Martha's Vineyard and built a studio there. Money wasn't an issue. Cheri was the next to go because she wanted to have kids. I don't think she really liked the aggravation of running a studio. It was a lot of work. Then, Ruth and I ran it for a while. Ruth left because she needed to go. She went back to school and got an MBA [Master of Business Administration]. Then, she ran the Boston Dance Alliance, which she did really well. It was an organization to unify us—all of the disparate forms of dance in town—into something cohesive. Lasted almost twenty years, until gentrification pushed us out.⁴³

43 Green Street Studios was founded in 1991 at 185 Green Street in Central Square in Cambridge, Massachusetts. The studio's mission was "to provide affordable rehearsal space to artists and innovative programming, including classes, performances, and artist residencies, to the community." It closed in 2019, when rent increases, caused by gentrification in the area,

In the 2000s, The Marcus Schulkind Dance Company was picked five times as one of the ten best dance events in Boston for that year. I was competing with Boston Ballet, all the biggies. I was picked five times, so I thought I must be doing something right. But I have to tell you, even though I got good reviews and even though I got picked, I got *nothing* for this. I got no *grants* from this town, ever. I got grants in New York, from the NEA [National Endowment for the Arts] and from the New York State Council, and there I'm competing with the greatest of the great. Come up here to Boston, and I got nothing from anybody. I got a thousand dollars in grants, in twenty-three years.

That's partly why I kept on doing solos. In the beginnings of my dance career, I never got paid. One didn't get paid for rehearsals. If you got paid for a concert you were in—I mean for the show—you were lucky! I said to myself, “As a person who choreographs, I will *never* do that to people. I will *always* pay them really well for a show, if I can't do anything else. Whenever I can get a lot of money together, I will.” Like that concert I told you about that we did at the Boston Conservatory [1989]: I lost thirty thousand bucks just for paying people for six weeks. I was paying them five hundred a week and there were six of them (mimes handing out cash). I'm going “Hmm! I better use that credit card to pay for that for that week.” It was like the economics of dance kicked me in the head.

So, one of the other things that I understood was that if you do a concert and you've got six soloists, it's much cheaper than if you've got twelve people. You cut your costs. Plus, *I'm interested in doing solos!* Solos are personal and individual. You don't have to do the same thing as the *schmuck* [fool] behind you on the same counts. What a great idea! I've done the group thing: “Okay, put the line down. Everybody get the timing right.” Whatever. I also really enjoyed making solos, but only with these really special people who were brilliant themselves. All of those people that I had in the company made me want to work.⁴⁴

All my early pieces were about the human condition. My solo *Job* (1976/1977) is a perfect example.⁴⁵ By the way, *Job* was a bet with Danny Nagrin, my first year at the American Dance Festival. Danny says in front of a class—and I was listening—he said, “You *cannot* do a solo to a song with words.” I went, “Bullshit, Danny!” So, I did *Job!* To the music of Randy Newmann [“God's Song (That's Why I love Mankind)"]. He came up to me afterwards and he went, “Okay!” Which was, I think, why we ended up doing a piece later on together.

were no longer affordable for the artists. Dwyer, “Green Street Studios Says It Will Close This Month.”

44 In 2005 Schulkind reports on this choice: “Limiting it to 10 minutes is so interesting. . . it's like a short story. You get a sense of character, time, place and few moments of an idea that I hope will be truthful and interesting and resonate with life.” Daniels, “Few Moments of Dancing.”

45 See footnote 27.

The piece *Ladies Night Out* (1974), which was kind of in the same period: They're dances about loneliness, the human condition. That's their focus. They're *short*. None of those pieces were more than three and a half minutes. As a result, I think people didn't take them seriously, because they were like either short stories or one-liner jokes. In fact, Don McDonagh in *The New York Times* said I was the master of one-line jokes as choreography.⁴⁶ (Laughs.) I wanted to go and kick him in the balls! But, whatever.

Later, the solos that I did in Boston were much deeper evocations in their musicality. I wasn't picking *angry* songs. It became more abstracted about what I wanted to say. Both, about the human condition, but also about music—about how, as a solo artist, we phrase things and stylize them. But ultimately, the things that made the pieces happen were the people I chose to do them with. Every single person I chose, to me, was amazingly special, was amazingly unique, was amazingly in another world—truly in another world. They were those kinds of dancers—they lived in another reality. I think that's why people—like, one of the reviews I got was—it was a concert of twelve solos and after the concert was over, you wanted to go off and just delight in what just happened, for the last hour and twenty minutes.⁴⁷

Liz Waterhouse: I remember as your student also being very inspired by the dancers you chose for your company. The word that comes to mind is “individual.” These people were physically different, emotionally different. Their technique was different. They were men and women. They were White, Black, and Asian. They were all so stunning and different—just different. They shared a movement vocabulary, but like a prism, each person spoke through this language very poetically and personally through your choreography.

Watching these dancers was a very important training ground for me in my transition from student to aspiring young professional. When we got to the phrase at the end of your modern class, I watched each dancer's ways of interpreting the material. I also watched the other people taking your modern classes—the elder women for example, over the age of sixty—they were also so fascinating to watch perform your material. I observed people take different musical and dynamic permission, personalizing gestures and also clarifying things that you wanted.

Marcus Schulkind: The people doing my work never looked like each other and they never even had nearly the same sensibility. What they had was a gift of lyricism,

46 McDonagh, “Fragments’ at St. Clement’s.”

47 Writing of a concert in 2004, critic Marcia B. Siegel writes: “The evening was satisfying in a way that eludes discussion. Once you note that the room was full of terrific dancers, luscious movement, thoughtful choreography, and real music, you just want to go away by yourself and savor it all.” Siegel, “Ones and All.”

elegance, grace, and then their own shit. That made them, to me, as a person, “Okay, you’re my paint, as you offer me a palette of paint that makes me happy. Because you give me a lot of choices. And I can give you something, and I can see how you take that choice, and make it that color for you.”

Liz Waterhouse: As you said in class the other day, you’re watching the performer experience a deep narrative while they move. It’s a non-verbal narrative, and it touches you.⁴⁸

Marcus Schulkind (nodding): Right! And I have no idea what your narrative is, but it doesn’t matter. But the *quality* of it being a personal narrative is all I need to have from you. Because then, I can either make up my own story, or I’ll just kind of watch. Since I’m trying to make academia buy dance as a language, then you would be less literate if you don’t put some extra time in while you’re working on your training, to be more fluent in your language. Because that’s the metaphor that I’m trying to get people to buy into, with this stuff.

Maybe no one really wants to fund solos, because it’s more like a one-line joke.⁴⁹ I’m not saying that I agree with them, but I’m saying they want a new work with eight people, at least fifteen minutes long, that’s what they want to fund. Even at the conservatory today, the politics being what it is, some of the kids came up to me and said, “Why don’t we do your work?” I said, “They don’t like my work here. It’s that simple. When they do a piece for you guys, they want half of your cohort to be on stage altogether, so everybody gets a chance to do it. If I did a solo, it just would be with one, maybe two casts—so three people.” I said, “I don’t think that that would be a *bad* thing.”

Liz Waterhouse (interrupts): In terms of my progression, that one-on-one depth was what I needed.

48 Writing about a concert in which I danced in 2004, Marcia Siegel describes: “Schulkind’s movement style comes across as a modern descendant of modern dance. His work seems to fuse the lyrical humanism of the Doris Humphrey–José Limón branch of the family with the fevered expressionism of the Martha Grahams. And there’s more than a little ballet added to the blend. Looking at the miniatures on this program, you’re exquisitely conscious of the dancers’ physicality, not just their muscles or their shapes but the way the movement is making them feel. Or perhaps the way their feeling makes the movement.” Siegel, “Ones and All.”

49 In 1979, a review by Don McDonagh criticizes Schulkind as “a man infatuated with the kinetic equivalent of the one-liner.” In 1987, a review by Andrew Dreyfus of Schulkind’s comedic solo *Do Be Do Be Do Be*, describes it as containing “a single joke that lasts too long.” McDonagh, “Fragments’ at St. Clement’s”; Dreyfus, “Faculty Show Eclectic, Energetic.”

Marcus Schulkind: That's what we love! The best part is seeing some young person who's *really* talented, and then working one-on-one with them, watching the solo become something.

"I Was the Bad Grasshopper Who Didn't Put Away for Winter"

Liz Waterhouse: I know it's by choice that you work so much still at the age of seventy-five, but also the American social security and health care system doesn't allow you to slow down, correct?

Marcus Schulkind (mockingly): Well, it also has to do with the fact that—if we go back to Aesop's fables—I was the bad grasshopper who didn't put away for winter. All of my expendable money that I made went into my dance company. When I think of the amount of money that I've put into it, that really would have been a retirement.⁵⁰ (Mockingly) If you invested it carefully like Aesop told you to, it would have been a retirement. (Shrugs.)

Liz Waterhouse: Also the gentrification here is staggering. Now I barely recognized Central Square, and I lived here twenty years ago. Did you rent or own Greet Street Studios?

Marcus Schulkind: We rented the building. We never owned it because in this real-estate market, there would have been no way that five of us artists had enough money to *buy* a building. It was a *prime* property in Central Square, in Cambridge—right between the campuses of Harvard and MIT. That's just the way it is here, you know? The arts will never be subsidized *well*, let alone subsidized at *all*, from the US government. I think if you really need to have your own theater, need to have your own studio, because that's where you'll be feeling creative, safe, capable of not hurting yourself to do the work you want to do, because it's built *well*. In this culture, you're going to put every cent you have into it. Because unless you are fortunate enough to be wealthy to start with, then you just put your own money that way.

Here's the deal. Anywhere there is a big population and not a lot of real estate, it becomes vertical. Not just to knock out California but in these places—New York, Boston, Philadelphia, Washington: It's the vertical. Anytime you're in vertical, every little *bit* of property costs a fortune, because there's no real estate. There's no horizontal. So, when there's no horizontal, the dollar sign goes, "Bing!"

50 Schulkind estimates: "I paid more than 340,000 dollars in rent over the twenty years we had the place. If I gave 1,000 dollars a month, that'd be 12,000 a year—times twenty, we're already up there. Does that make sense? Then, I donated it at least another 80,000 or 90,000 dollars to keep the place going." Citation from our interview on March 18, 2023.

Because you're now competing with not only academic institutions, but commercial institutions. You're competing with the guy who wants to run a bodega, which makes a hell of a lot more money than you do. You're competing with the for-profit yoga thing, or whatever is the latest rich people thing they need to go to feel good about themselves. It always comes back to the *economics*.⁵¹

Of all the art forms, dance is going to cost the most because it needs more space to practice in. I could be in a room this size and play an oboe and be happy. I could not be in a room this size and dance because there's no room. No one really understands, except people who try to do studios, that dance is about real estate. If you think it's not about real estate, you're living a fantasy life, or you're very wealthy. Because you need enough money to get that piece of real estate, so you can do your art.

When I came to Boston initially, I worked with Gerri Houlihan, who had a studio called The Boston Dance Project, above a place on Mass Avenue, near the Boston Conservatory. That was owned by the store downstairs, which is called Little Stevie's Pizzeria. Two stories up with Gerri Houlihan's studio, across in the building next door to it was Susan Rose's little studio. This was in the go-go years of mid 1980s in Boston: There was money, you could find a little place, Stevie's Pizzeria was happy to have you upstairs. You could make a place to do your work, and to have rehearsals, and things like that. You can't do that now because every little bit of real estate here is being fought for, by everybody.

Liz Waterhouse: Interesting. In places that I've lived in Europe, there's been some industrial spaces that have been renovated and used for the arts. [Schauspielhaus Zürich] Schiffbau, that was a ship building center in Zurich. In Frankfurt, I danced in the Bockenheimer Depot, which was a former train station.

Marcus Schulkind: These are the best things in the world! Because basically, as small industry has left, because it goes to places like China, you have empty spaces that used to be industrial. In New York City that explains the neighborhoods

51 Schulkind's narrative begins with a rhetorical opening, used often by American President Joe Biden: "Here's the deal." He borrows common hand gestures of male American politicians to develop his story—small pointing gestures in front of his torso, moved rhythmically for emphasis. Yet unlike in political speech, Schulkind also shapes personal gestures and uses his craft as a choreographer to poetically illustrate his arguments about real estate and dance. He raises his index finger smoothly above his head to depict the meaning of "vertical," holding the large gesture as he speaks—a stillness that is beautiful and poignant. This is contrasted with spreading his arms at full length, to illustrate the space of "horizontal." Then he makes a last gesture, drawing a small dollar sign high in the air above his head and ending it with an emphatic slash. It is in this rhythmic progression of three gestures that I recognize Schulkind as both an American male conversation partner and a choreographer, with wit for how to use movement meaningfully yet also unconventionally—and with personal flair.

of NoHo [North of Houston Street], and SoHo [South of Houston Street], and Tribeca [Triangle Below Canal Street], because those were *old* manufacturing buildings—loft buildings that people left. The artists snuck in!

When I lived in New York with Elisa Monte, we had a loft in NoHo. At that point, we were illegal, because you couldn't live in these buildings; you were not allowed to, by code. What you would do to keep from being kicked out by Inspectional Services is, you would lock the building at night from the inside. On the outside, you put on three letters: "A.I.R." What that meant was, if there was a fire, you're letting the fire people know, "Artist in Residence: break the door down and get me out!" This is the way it used to be in illegal spaces. You would walk down the street and that's what you would see on every doorway because people wanted to make sure they would live through it.

Dialogue on Schulkind's Teaching

Liz Waterhouse: I would like to know more about where the material from your teaching comes from.

Marcus Schulkind: I think in the beginning of my teaching, I *slavishly* imitated my teachers. When I first started, I did basically a May O'Donnell Graham class. May O'Donnell was the pioneer woman figure, like in *Appalachian Spring*. She was the opposite of Martha Graham: She was tall. Brilliant teacher. An old-world Graham: she didn't change a thing to the new world. A lot of bouncing, a lot of hitting drums, lot of bound movements.

Then I came to New York—started working with Norman Walker, which was more of a Graham-plus-ballet kind of idea. My original teacher Mark Ryder: We did a barre, then we did a Graham floor section, then we did whatever material we were working on. So those are always going to be my preoccupations. And, since our techniques come from what our body does *well* and feels *good* doing—because I had good feet and good lines, I kind of liked the ballet. Because I was an emotional *refugee*, doing Graham was perfect because it *grounded* me and it was all every emotion of tension you could possibly have, and then released. But nonetheless, I liked all of that. So, that was the underpinning of what was the beginnings of me.

My modern classes were, I think, two hours. What I didn't do with my Graham work was anything that was jeopardous to your knees, which for men, or for people who don't have hyper flexibility, is difficult to survive.

Liz Waterhouse: Do you mean these seated exercises, the fourths (demonstrates)?

Marcus Schulkind: That's it. All those things that you do in Graham. Those go into the *floor*, and falls, and things like that. They become—regardless of your personal strength—a stressor to your knees unless you have a Martha body . . .

Liz Waterhouse (interrupts): How would you describe the Martha body?

Marcus Schulkind: Hyper-flexible, small, (pause) *intensely* crotch.

Liz Waterhouse: Got it!

Marcus Schulkind: So then, we did things that got you to understand *spirals*, things that got you to understand *contraction*, things that got you *grounded*. Then we would get up and do a ballet barre. It would be a barre that was not obsessed about the perfection of 360-degree turnout. It would be a barre that was about taking movement into the vocabulary of ballet, without having to buy into all of the philosophical and mannered “isms” that deal with ballet. Basically, we're still now following the form of what a ballet class is.

After we got off the barre, we would do material that would be adagio-like; it certainly would use the floor, and it certainly would be multi-dimensional. Then, we'd do maybe a little jumping to warm up the feet, and then we would go across the floor. So, it kind of follows the metaphor of what a ballet class might be like, without any of it. Again, across the floor would be things of interest: off-center jumps, finding ways to connect to them, contraction jumps, finding ways to connect into whatever I was interested in exploring. Then, the class really becomes how *you* (pauses, gestures circularly with his index fingers, making a circle into the body down and away) *inhabit* the forms that you're working with. It's kind of like a pan—meaning all—form, because you have to know all of these underpinnings to have the clarity to become authentic in how you're dealing with the movement—if that makes any sense.

Liz Waterhouse: Let me show you what I remember. This was the first sequence (demonstrates).

Marcus Schulkind: That's all Graham, done lyrically. That's the start to get your body spiraling. That's a start to get your core engaged (on the word “core,” Schulkind gestures, touching from below the navel and tracing up the front of the spine to the sternum).

Liz Waterhouse: Your psoai [deep core muscles, connecting lower back and leg].

Marcus Schulkind: Totally!

Liz Waterhouse: Then, the second exercise. Is this more floor-barre?⁵²

Marcus Schulkind (affirms, nodding): Hmm. Pulsing is just: Where's my hip flexors? How do I rotate from the depth of the ball and socket [hip joint]? How do I start to connect into that.

Liz Waterhouse: Traction! Also, the release. I remember learning: How do I release the excess tension that I, as a ballet-trained dancer, have in the shoulders or in the standing leg. Okay. And then, the next exercise would come into spinal work from Graham?

Marcus Schulkind: Yeah. Those are variations of either *the* Graham or, May O'Donnell, or Norman. So, they're *authentic*, but they're not chapter-and-verse Martha. (Smiles.) They would kick you out, in the Graham world, for you modifying it at *all*.

Liz Waterhouse: Things like the breathings, the spirals, the long leans, and the pleadings. Then there is the standing section. I've seen this sequence of yours, in a Merce Cunningham class.

Marcus Schulkind: It's Cunningham. When we get up, we're going to play with: *How* do I curl my back? How do I roll my back? How do I move through the lateral energies to a spiral. So, I'm combining Cunningham and Martha, which probably Merce did anyway.

Liz Waterhouse: Let's talk about your ballet class too. For me, things that are distinct are: You do a *lot* of grands pliés. Can you tell me why?

Marcus Schulkind (shrugs): I do. To my body, it felt good. So, that was enough. Also, Maggie Black did a lot of grands pliés. I think that's where that came from. Maybe that was also part of the Cecchetti/Tudor kind of thing, where you did a lot of grands pliés, just to be stretching out and opening up.

Liz Waterhouse: Another aspect is slowness—slow tempi. I'm Balanchine trained, which emphasizes speed and anticipation. William Forsythe's movement is also fast.

52 Floor-barre® is a technique by Zena Rommett (1920–2010). Rommett emigrated to New York from Italy as a child, becoming a ballet dancer and opening her own studio in 1968. Schulkind recalls her teaching class for the Lar Lubavitch company. Anderson, "Zena Rommett, Ballet Dancer Who Developed Floor-Barre, Dies at 90."

So, for me, I enjoy when I get to your class that there is the slow tendus, or the slow grands pliés in second position at the end of the barre.

Marcus Schulkind (thumbs up): Oh, yeah! That hasn't changed! I think that's such an important part. The first exercise (marks tendus in fifth) is a little quicker. Then suddenly, no arms, I want you to work on your demi plié and how your foot (gestures with his hands smoothly) slides into positions in the lines. Then, let's add arms. Then, let's make it a dégagé. Then, since pas de cheval is a microcosm of a développé, let's get that going. We'll do that at the barre. We'll put that into our bodies and then we'll start moving along a little faster.

Liz Waterhouse: Also, I feel your classes are more choreographic—there are elaborate sequences, almost variations and solos in the center, with beautiful, original qualities. But in your class the slow adagio, the turning, the small jumps, and the big jumps—they're little microcosms. They're little choreographies, for me.

Marcus Schulkind: Right. Me too! I mean, I plan. For *me*, what happens and why I have a piece of paper. First, I can't remember if I don't sketch it out on a piece of paper (laughs). What happens is I rent the studio at The Dance Complex on Sundays before class. I plan my class for that day. If you looked at my piece of paper (draws the paper in the air, making a rectangle with his index fingers), you wouldn't see anything about what we're gonna do at the barre. What you would see is four columns: turns, small, big, adagio. Then, once I've warmed up and figured out what I'm doing, at this point, my brain retrogrades by itself to what we need to do at the barre that connects to what we're gonna do on those four big columns.

Liz Waterhouse: Right. Do you start then making the turn?

Marcus Schulkind: Turn goes first. Always, the easiest thing for me to do. Every time I plan a class, both turn and small jumps come easy—piece of cake!

In my classes at the Boston Conservatory, I'm making my students *connect* things. The other day, I made them turn into a front attitude—then plié keep turning into passé—then plié keep turning into back attitude—then plié, come back in. Because I said to them, “We need to be able not just to do three or four outside turns, or inside turns, but we need to figure out more complex skills.” Because no choreographer is going to give you the standard thing: chassé, pas de bourrée, fourth, pirouette. No one's gonna do that, trust me. So, and I try *always* in the turning phrase to have something where you have to travel—like a waltz phrase, because you need to move this stuff. That's the difference between me and a ballet class (hint of a smile). We're not making pictures that are static. You can go to anybody else and get that much better than me. Not interested.

So then, after the turns, we do petit allegro, which I like because I can throw in things people don't do.

Liz Waterhouse: Your petit allegro is complex! It's hard to remember. You have to think!

Marcus Schulkind: Very! Very! And my students know it. Actually, everybody that comes in understands that what I'm doing with them is going to be rigorous. Yeah, you have to think. I'm putting things together most ballet people *wouldn't* put together, because I don't have the same rules. (Shrugs with hands open) Because I got no rules! Got no rules! I got no rules. "Well, no, let's do a brisé there! Why not!"

So, I'll do that on Sunday. When I go to the conservatory on Monday, I have my piece of paper and I start varying the material. Tuesday, I vary it more. So, the conservatory schedule is: I have Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, Friday, an hour-and-a-half class; I prefer two hours, but that is not an option. Wednesday is my elective day: I have a two-hour ballet class, it's called contemporary ballet. Basically, it's what we do at The Dance Complex. Wednesday, I warm up again, we do a different set of exercises. That then, gives me the material that I'm going to do for Thursday and Friday.

There really is in my mind the need to make sure that my students know how to do everything at the conservatory: in terms of having vocabulary. Some weeks on Sunday I'll say, "Outside turns, today, in every position! (Small smile.) Then, we'll do that for maybe two weeks. Then, it's all inside turns. "Let's work inside!" It's not that I only do those things, because we'll still go through all the forms, but there is a sense that I need to make sure that they know how to do the vocabulary. There are vertical axis jumps, and you have to show me you know them. You have to show me you know them downstage and upstage. You have to show me you know them forward and backward. Like what we were doing on Sunday, (marks with hands) *trois assemblé* back. The week before I had done that at the conservatory.

Liz Waterhouse (laughs and claps hands): I didn't have that skill!

Marcus Schulkind: Nobody does! You have to practice it! It's nothing that's taught. The week before that I said to them, "Instead of doing this on two counts, I want you to do it on one count. So, you have to pick up your rhythm." They were so pissed at me!

So *then*, I said to them, "That's half of the vocabulary of petit allegro. Now we gotta do *moving* petit allegro. You have to show me the A's: *assemblés*. The B's: You have to show me *balloté*, *ballonné*, *brisé*. You have to show me the C's: You have to show me *chassé*. I go (with a grand sweeping gesture, opens arms in full extension to the side): "Here's your vocabulary! If you don't know this vocabulary, how can you

say you want to be in the advanced class? That's part of the *syllabus*. I'm giving you the syllabus." They said, "You're the only person who teaches like that here. You're the only person who comes in and has prepared class." I said, "They pay me for that. They're not paying me to come in and make something up on the spot and improvise a balletic class. I don't want to do that. I won't remember it. We'll waste time. I want you to get this." (Shrugs.) Some like me; some hate me. It's all good.

Liz Waterhouse: I think your way of developing virtuosity, it's about movement awareness, kinesthetic skills. This *petit allegro* teaches a lot about: Where are the limits of your toes? (Schulkind confirms with a "thumbs up" gesture.) Find that floor. How do you safely use your knees?

Marcus Schulkind: How do you navigate at a speed, because that's *petit allegro*, rather than how do you navigate at a slower form, which is *grand allegro*? It's about navigation. So, I mean, that's how I plan the work that I do.

A lot of the material in the floor barre comes from ideas I get in physical therapy [PT], ideas I get from other places, like Gyrotonic sometimes. I've had big conversations with PTs about arabesque and hyper-flexibility. That's why I'm talking so much now about the lumbar [spine] for arabesque rather than the sacrum. Because we need to get the *big* vertebrae, which are your support vertebrae, *not* hyper flexible. Because your back's going to die in a certain amount of time if that's the way you use it. So now, we have to find a way to go slightly higher up the spine. Yes, it's gonna involve the sacrum, it can't not, but you don't want to leave lumbar out of it.

Liz Waterhouse: I remember what I learned from you as a young student was watching you coach people. Arabesque was a balanced movement. There was a breath, a movement forward with the arm and the head . . .

Marcus Schulkind: . . . that equaled the movement that was going backward. At each point in your life, some dance styles resonate to you to be truthful, and some dance styles don't resonate at all. Our goal and job as people teaching has to be to help you figure out what resonates, why it resonates, and how best to deepen that resonance, that texture.

In Closing: Reflection

Liz Waterhouse: Now, after reviewing our interviews, is there anything else that you would like to add in post-production to our text?

Marcus Schulkind: Yes, there are a couple of things. When I really think of looking backwards at this whole thing, which is my career, which you're writing about, I want

to make sure that I mentioned and honored all the people who had some kind of belief in my ability as a teacher: Iris Fanger, Martha Myers, Elaine Finsilver, and Ruth Sandholm, and also to my teachers: Mark Ryder, Kathy Grant, Maggie Black, and Norman Walker.⁵³

What I wanted to emphasize was how these people really offered me a livelihood as a teacher throughout my career, and were incredibly important that way, because it was ultimately the teaching that enabled me to make a living and survive, and more importantly invest in my art. Which, of course, you know, because that's all there, but I wanted to emphasize it more. When I lived in New York, I was less known as a teacher, more so as a choreographer. In Boston I was more well-known as a teacher. I did do well in New York for a while. You know, like anybody who can be the young fifteen-minute attraction, until the next fifteen-minute attraction comes along.

The second aspect is about storytelling. I'm thinking of a musical by Stephen Sondheim, *Pacific Overtures* (1979), specifically the song called "Someone in a Tree." It's a brilliant work. This song is about two witnesses to the meeting of Commodore Perry and the Japanese shogun. One was a Japanese kid in a tree, who was singing this song, and another witness was a Japanese kid who is under the floor of the house. The kid in the tree is singing, "I was there, I was young, I was there, I was in a tree. I heard 'tap, tap, tap' I saw 'la la la.'" Where I'm going with this oblique reference is, it's a song about how the people, who were not really, fully sensorily *there*—in person—as witnesses, made this story up about what was really happening in the past.

So, jumping off that metaphor: while I was reading the first draft of this conversation, what I came away with was: I was doing the same thing as the kid in the tree! What I did with my stories, was I made *me* the central orbit and everything else around me the planets. Fabulous stories! I am really good at doing stories that I made up. Most showed my being the central character—meaning thinking I was the sun as opposed to the earth—and describing everything revolving around me. The reality in most of the stories I was telling you had nothing to do with me being the centralized figure at all. For example, from Martha Hill's point of view, I was

53 Schulkind elaborates: "So, Iris Fanger: Teaching at the Harvard Summer Dance program enabled me—after my injuries—to continue to stay in this profession. It was majorly important to me. Martha Myers helped me by getting me to the American Dance Festival. She thought I was a valuable teacher and had me teaching there as a guest artist. Elaine Finsilver ran the YWHA in Westchester, where I taught once a week for years. I taught adults who were dancers before they got married and continued to pursue dancing in a very serious kind of way as they aged. Then Daniel Nagrin and Mark Ryer—I know I spoke about both of them. Ruth Sandholm ran the Boston Conservatory for the first ten years when I was working there. She was my dean and was super important to me. And again, Kathy Grant, Maggie Black, and Norman Walker. The people who taught me how best to do my craft." Transcribed from our videoconference conversation editing the manuscript on July 18, 2024.

just a little annoying flea that she could really not stand much of, nor particularly spend a lot of time on. There was a real clear hatred between the two of us. It was a philosophical hatred. So, I made it seem like I was the supreme rebel—which I was, that wasn't a question—but what I kind of felt like I did was to create a narrative, with my presence being the central character, of course. In a way I magnified my importance in terms of dance history. So, you know, that was part of what I was doing.

You met me at my prime. You did my final dance concert with my company. You worked with me when my information for someone like you was a perfect meeting point. It was you recognizing, through my imaging you—as a mirror—that there was room for you in this culture and in this work. That you didn't necessarily have to buy into science, which was your other love on many levels. Basically, you were one of the students around me who were interested in figuring out how another form of dance could interest them, and also support them—going from, “I'm a bunhead” to “Wow, there's another world to live as an artist.” You were able to intellectually and emotionally take and springboard off whatever I had to teach you, into whatever you needed it to be, to get you to the next place. That really is ultimately what a teacher does. Being a mirror that shows you the intimate soul you really have, that you can't really appreciate, because you don't know about it yet, because it's too hard to face, or for whatever the reason is. So, what I wanted to come back to was this: I'm not sure that I need to build this much of a myth about me. When I think back about my stories on Juilliard, for example, it sounds as if they're grooming me to be a major figure in dance, which I think they really do feel about all the people they accept at Juilliard—instead of basically talented people that they could mold into whatever they wanted to.

I also wanted to come back to—because I'm teaching pedagogy—the concept of essentialism versus progressivism in education. Because my whole existence once I left high school was my need to be in a *progressivist environment*, which is why I ended up at Goddard. Goddard was on one hand for me the world: because of the teachers I had. On the other hand, it was such a pain in the ass, because everybody was so complicated. We would argue about self-government for hours at the haybarn (which was the big cafeteria). It was that kind of progressivism where no one could rightly tell you what to do. We were feeling it out every single day, educationally and in every other way. In my educational trajectory, I went from that progressivism to essentialism. I went from designing my education (in this case, I just spent all my time dancing and learning about what was interesting to me) to essentialism, which was Juilliard. I went from self-guided and teacher-guided to fascism, because that's what Juilliard was. So basically, everything I told you was true, but it was more about my coming up—as a young man—against that big word, which is institutionalism, and where I must succeed.

This week I was taking Gyrotonic, and I said to my trainer, Lisa Pari, “You know, maybe it’s really time for me to stop doing this?” And she said, “Well, yeah, but don’t stop. Don’t give up on it quite yet.” And I went, “Okay.” I’m still exploring ultimately the ways that I want to explore. And educating people in the way that I think is appropriate. But what it really was about was my early education possessed institutions that were not only venal, but really didn’t educate. Their whole purpose was—especially my high school—was to get you into a college. If you perhaps learned a couple of things along the way, fine. Education was to satisfy the needs of a middle-class Jewish community to give their children a college education—to be able to compare with their colleagues and their cronies their kids—not to even understand whether that college was giving someone an education to further their life, their form, their ethics, or anything else. So that’s the bigger picture. That’s what I think of when I really think of the beginnings of my dance. It’s much more about bumping up against the various educational philosophies of the time, and that which gave me the room to explore and be learning in a different fashion—to be successful *to me*—versus that which was more institutional success, that I couldn’t muster. Having come from a place that allowed me to question everything that I was doing, to then be suddenly to be caught up in the world of academia and be looking at Labanotation at Juilliard!

So, when I finished reading your first draft, I realized it’s your mirror back to me, after my mirror back at you—when you were working with me as a dancer twenty years ago. This text is your mirror back to me. It’s like we’re finishing a cycle here. Thank you.

In order to be honest and real, I wanted to give you a more complete view of my life that isn’t the theatricalized view that I gave you in our first interview. Because if push comes to shove—this is very real—and it doesn’t matter who this book is for, whether it’s for dance scholars or other dancers, like your little intro that you sent me talked about. It doesn’t matter to me. It matters more that I give you the real mirror, rather than the image of myself that I wanted to project, which still was real. It just was an exaggeration, which I’m very good at doing. Well, if you haven’t noticed. So, as we rewrite together, I would like to have less of my need for bravado and adoration and show more the substantive things that I’ve done with people like you.