

Ms. Marylee, Thank You

I had a conversation with my dance teacher in which I told her about how I felt; I expressed that it seemed like she was picking on me during ballet class. While she tried to explain that this attention was only due to the fact that she wanted me to get better and saw my potential, most of me felt like it was an excuse for her exceptionally condescending 'constructive criticism.' I felt isolated because of this, and it did not help that I was the only African American student in my class. I assumed I was overthinking about my sensitivities, and plus, she said that she would never want me to feel that way. However, I remember showing up to the next class and hearing her thin metal stick pound against the floor sending shudders throughout the entirety of my body. "Rotate your hips, Siauna!" Mrs. Marylee shrieked. On my way to the car from class, I made the decision to withdraw from what eventually became my life long passion. I would sit at home for the next few years of my life pointing my toes when walking down the stairs, or leaping over puddles of water, but still could never find the strength to put on my tights and go at the barre again. As of today, I have immersed myself in several dance opportunities only because I eventually reaccepted this passion and almost innate nature for me to just move. It didn't matter where I was... if there was a song playing or not, chances were that I was down for a dance. Realizing this passion has made me have a humble respect for dance - it has helped me to reclaim my power. It has given me insight and control. It has been the right thing to say each and every time. Part of me feels like I did not say what I really wanted to say to Mrs. Marylee. Due to my anxiety and poor social skills at the time, I think my communication about how I was really feeling was subpar; had I shown her a dance, would she understand?

Dance as a language is unforeign territory for many, but rarely used in everyday life, as the ambiguity of art's interpretation becomes mismatched with social constructs. When concepts of society do not fit in black or white, they fit in wrong before fitting in grey. This exploration of the grey area brings along its own dialect - a world driven by opinions, interpretations, and the acceptance of various

positions. The struggle that comes along with this 'grey dialect' is that it can be considered unclear. Oftentimes, there is no singular answer. The multifaceted usage of grey dialect can be "obscure" or "misleading." However, in the world of the abstract, open ended questions give way for an inclusive response; it allows for multiple perspectives to be observed and considered. For example, showing a dance to Mrs. Marylee could have caused her to interpret my feelings in several ways. Verbal forms of communication, while usually more direct, exclude other perspectives of insight. They exclude raw, visual emotion and expression. Contrastingly, communicating through movement allows for multiple analyses. With the assistance of little words, maybe this would have caused her to evaluate the situation at hand in not just one way or the other. My hope is that this dialect opens doors for taboo conversation.

The beauty of grey dialect is that the once perceived "wrong" transforms itself into a space for interpretation. The margin of error is as big as it is small. It is true however, that nonverbal communication can interrupt the communicator's intent. After watching a dance piece with an unclear message, conversation forms. Some may understand the concept of the piece as clear as day while others may be uncertain or have other ideas to contribute. It is up to the creator to disclose the intent of the piece, but the surrounding conversation should no longer deem itself as incorrect. In fact, the principle of grey dialect suggests that the surrounding ideas contribute to an even larger conversation, incorporating the minds and understandings of many.

In dance, the movement becomes the language. Once again, moving through space can signify almost anything. A mover can demonstrate peace as dictated by overarched, slow movement while anxiety can be expressed by fast, chaotic or erratic jerks. Consistency can be demonstrated through repetition. Confusion or disturbance can be portrayed through contortion. During my sophomore year of high school, I watched a dance piece performed by young members of my school dance community. This piece dealt with the brutal police shooting of seventeen year old African American male Laquan McDonald. The ironic part was that the dancers were so young at the time; yet, they successfully carried a

burden of hate, bigotry, and racism with sagacious understanding in order to make a sound statement.

Most candidly, each movement felt overwhelmingly powerful. This dance left no margin for error as there was no mistake about the intent of the piece. The whole audience reacted as such. Many let out a large round of applause, while others, like myself, sat in silence to digest. I began to hurt because my community was hurting. I had felt what was intended. However, my pain was immediately displaced with optimism for this sort of discussion regarding police brutality, and the need for empathy amongst the black community. These are the sorts of reactions that further contribute to this grey dialect - in the same respect that the creator has the right to disclose a creation's intent, grey dialect suggests that it is up to the receiver of such creations to process non verbal communication as they please.

It would be of similar ignorance to dismiss or overlook other art forms that consist of grey dialect; therefore, more broadly, different art forms deserve to be recognized. Paintings, zines, pottery, photography, digitized art, poetry (which is typically verbal but not in standard form), meditation ... the list goes on as to how many forms of non-verbal communication exist in our atmosphere. Millions of individuals practice these crafts on a daily basis, but have yet to acknowledge the dialogue that exists as a result, which is the byproduct of its practice. This discussion is never lost, but it hides public discussion because of its abstraction. In more of the visual arts, I imagine the dialect relating to the disposition of its subjects. Traits of a piece of artwork, such as color, fragmented shape, or shading technique are now the new language. Now, a sunset can represent peace, distorted lines can represent anxiety, congruent figures can represent consistency, and hard shading can demonstrate disturbance. The stark parallels between movement and traits of artwork become undeniably apparent, as each characteristic (just like each move) has the ability to evoke a variety of emotions in which no two understandings necessarily have to be the same, as advocated by the beauty of grey dialect. It is safe to say that all forms of non verbal communication deserve a voice in this language.

Dissimilarly, individuals who find verbal communication to be the best form of dialogue may potentially contend that non verbal communication is ineffective because it is less concrete; it is less assertive and even more indirect. A person who prioritizes non verbal communication does not want to take full advantage of the power of words and does not command their space. This line of thinking is logical, and non verbal communication does consist of these limitations, but in hindsight, there are words that cannot always describe. Phrases will not always bring justice. Feelings cannot be easily written in English form. For many, someone saying that they had a bad day is harder to empathize with than seeing someone cry. Verbally, there are too little options, and non verbally, there can be too many. I would rather have the privilege to show someone my thoughts and risk obscurity than to say nothing at all.

Conversations like this would not be possible, had it not been for the once considered miniscule conversation which led me to question my authentic voice. To Mrs. Marylee, you showed me the frequent errors that lie in the sole dependence on words to portray intellect. On top of that, you gave me a strong foundation for dance - an appreciation for the craft itself. You made me fall in love with movement. You trained me well and I am sure that at heart you wanted the best for me. I am forever grateful for my experiences with you as a little girl. Because of you, I learned to truly speak from within; for that, I will always say thank you.