

*DIVING IN BACKWARDS:*  
CREATIVE DIFFERENCE AS PERFORMANCE  
Five Questions at the Heart of the Divide

MARCIA FERGUSON (WITH LOURDES BLANSFIELD)



Lourdes Blansfield and Marcia Ferguson. Image Credit: Anna Corrigan

### **Context**

Over the course of a year, Lourdes Blansfield (an improviser and movement teacher) and I (an actor and theatre teacher) created a performance piece together for the 2009 Philadelphia Fringe Festival. We are now interested in interrogating and exploring the drama behind the drama, which was the process of creating the piece. In this essay, we pose five questions to ourselves. We did not consult one another about the content of our answers. This yields, not a dialogue, but rather a comparative analysis, one that gets at essential differences between our distinct artistic worlds, and documents how bridges between them were fruitfully built and richly erased.

The piece, *Diving in Backwards*, was the first such collaboration for both of us. We performed it five times at Studio 34 in Philadelphia in September of 2009. The performance alternated between rehearsed and memorized text (mostly my contribution), and spontaneous, improvised movement (mostly hers). *Diving in*

*Backwards* was about the encounter between two women from vastly different backgrounds on intersecting (and indeterminate) journeys. In my case, the character was a version of my maternal grandmother (Gog), a petite yet strong woman who was a consummate storyteller and whom I loved unconditionally. Lourdes created a woman (Mama Nena) out of a composite of images, memories, her imagination, and family stories. Gog was a sensible Michigan farm girl of potato-famine Irish descent, firmly planted on the earth, but also a great believer in ghosts and hauntings. The cigar-chewing, frightened, competent, domineering, fascinating Mama Nena also believed in ghosts, and in fact may have been one herself. (The fact that we left that point unclear, to ourselves and to the audience, is an example of the kind of indeterminacy that felt profoundly new to me.) In that we drew from both actual memories and experiences and fictional constructs, the piece was a mixture of the intensely autobiographical and the highly imagined. The piece became a meditation on women two generations previous to ours.

Philadelphia artist and puppet-maker Angie Arahood also participated, as actor, designer, and puppeteer, joining the project two months before the performance, at a point when its basic parameters had been decided. She contributed live, improvised shadow sand-paintings that provided a mobile abstract background for Lourdes' movement solos. (Angie was inspired by the work of Ukrainian sand animator Kseniya Simonova, a riveting sample of whose work can be viewed here: <http://www.kseniyasimonova.com/>.) Angie's sand art was projected onto a drop comprising the upstage wall, while Lourdes' solos took place on all areas of the stage before it. The effect was of moving and intersecting live art forms that delved into, and resonated with, one another. Angie also acted the parts of an immigration officer to nowhere, a snotty matron, and a random street person, performing a small suitcase show of puppetry in a scene that she wrote.

Lourdes and I worked solidly for thirteen months, each of us regularly travelling for two hours (she from Westport, Ct., I from Philadelphia) to meet and rehearse in New York. This document will focus on the period before Angie joined us, when Lourdes and I gave ourselves the daunting imperative to create a performance, from scratch, with someone who was basically a stranger.

Lourdes and I really did not know one another when we began this process. We had met in July of 2008, as co-participants at a three-day workshop with Meredith Monk's company in New York City. I admired Lourdes' work so much that I invited her, months later, and on impulse, to create a piece with me, with a performance at the Fringe Festival serving as our goal and finish-line. It was brave, if not foolhardy, but also thrilling for both of us to commit to a large-scale, ongoing mutual collaboration on instinct. We hope that this written reflection will document the long, ecstatic, sometimes grueling and often challenging process of this collaboration.

We represent two connected, but very different, performance traditions: "straight" theatre, and movement improvisation. As we began our work, the large impact these different orientations would have on our process became apparent. We soon realized that while we share many of the same passions, we have different vocabularies, both physical and verbal, with which to express them. As a teacher and director in the Theatre Arts Program at the University of Pennsylvania, I work primarily with texts, using movement and improvisation pedagogically, as training and rehearsal tools in my work with undergraduates – but not as ends in themselves. As an actor, while I have always preferred working on avant-garde plays to naturalistic ones, I am nonetheless rooted in a tradition of *rehearsing* things (characters, moments, emotions, words), refining them over and over, until the right balance, tone, or emotional value is discovered, uncovered, achieved. Lourdes, on the contrary, lives in the moment as an artist; the very beauty and immediacy of the *un-rehearsed* moment, that flows from a fluid and focused engagement with an image or an emotion, is the goal of her work. It is a beginning and an end at once. These differences, which may be said to inhabit the divide between "regular" theatre and virtually everything else, from happenings to perform-

ance art to flash mobs, are largely temporal: they can be described as differences in attitudes towards time, demarcating the upcoming “then” (performance that occurs subsequent to a rehearsal process) from the “now” (performance created and performed in the same moment). This is not to say, of course, that improvisers do not work or rehearse. Indeed, Lourdes’ approach at times prolonged the rehearsal period longer than I would ordinarily continue it.

We both soon realized that it is easier to collaborate with someone from your own artistic culture; without the need for translation, for demonstration, for teaching, or for learning, communication is easeful, and the interruptions and jolts of newness do not interrupt an artistic flow. We did not allow this to deter us. On the contrary, we welcomed the difficulties we faced, each eager to learn from the other, each willing to be an acolyte, a novice, in the realm of the other’s expertise. Being a diva under such circumstances is simply not an option. Indeed, collaborating across differences such as ours is downright humbling, and scary: it demands seismic leaps of communication, puts one in an uneasy, unknown place, and invites the disruptions of the new into comforts of the familiar, where it threatens, at its worst, immobility. Yet the discoveries we made about ourselves and each other, both artistic and personal, made the process not only a fruitful one, but also created a story in their own right, worthy of a grand performance of difference. That is the purpose here, to illuminate what went into this collaboration, from both perspectives, in the hope that this will further encourage artists from varying traditions and disciplines – ourselves included – to participate fully in each other’s process, do the hard work, park ego at the door, and to reap the benefits of working through, and celebrating, artistic difference.

## The Questions

### 1. *What is the relationship for you between performance and story?*

**Marcia:** Here’s what I knew going into the process of creating *Diving in Backwards*: that the body-mind of an actor absorbs a story through his or her own intelligence, life experience, attitudes, and feelings. The higher the level of the performance skills, the better the absorption, and the more authentic the actor’s connection with character. This is a simple enough concept, but for an actor, doing it truthfully and whole-heartedly is not as easy as it sounds.

This is what I learned from Lourdes: that the way the body behaves when it absorbs story is, or should be, part of the story itself. This idea was new to me. The body became a focus of the work in a way I was always hungry for, but was unsure of. Previous to my work with Meredith Monk, I had always seen story primarily as character. In Meredith’s workshops, I learned to think, feel and move in terms of images; basically a non-narrative approach. Working with Lourdes stretched that part of my understanding. I learned to think of story first as image and movement, secondly as character. I learned to feel and respond, physically and emotionally, first, and think next. Of course, I couldn’t always pull this off. I had monologues that required memorization, and I did lots of talking. But during those scripted moments, I could feel the snap and pull of the contrast between the different approaches: I was pulled towards a new kind of spontaneity within the well-rehearsed moment.

**Lourdes:** In multi-disciplinary theater-making, storytelling is mercurial; it manifests itself on many levels and in unconventional ways. A narrative can be a sensory experience, a visual experience or an amalgam of image, sound, and physical sensation. Story in the world of dance-theater can be a series of moving images that projects mood, feeling, or associations and reflects its own unique state or experience. The

theatrical realm in which I work stems from the world of movement and leans into body-based improvisational theater and physical acting with image-driven narratives at its core. I don't begin off the page with a script. I don't start with character or plot. I begin with images and work within the abstract. The stories that emerge are a mélange of elements that draw on body, movement, music, sound, and narrative to give voice to a theme, question, or artistic idea. They manifest themselves as textural landscapes often rooted in myth, archetypal images, memory, and poetic language.

My process of uncovering story begins in the body – deep within the walls of the unconscious. Personal stories are stored in our memory and in our physical bodies – in our muscle, blood, and marrow. Through the process of movement and vocal improvisation this internal landscape is accessed and tapped into – images appear often as amorphous fragments, sensory in nature, and plot-less. Images wrestle with one another, form relationships, and eventually are pieced together to paint a larger collage piece – revealing a loosely defined narrative with its own through-line – a story with a beginning, middle, and end – but not necessarily in linear order. Other times the images do not settle into any recognizable narrative and, instead, narrative works its way into the images, creating a visual storyboard.

Story begins the moment a performer enters a relationship with an imaginary character, another actor, an object, or the audience. Story exists in the mere embodiment of character; a performer's physical presence in time and space reveals intention and meaning. Story is in our body language, our gestures, our pauses, and in our spoken words. Some of the most compelling moments on stage happen in stillness and silence – or in subtle physical movements as in the shift in one's gaze.

Image is at the heart of my performance work. Performance is the means or platform to communicate: a desire to bring to life real or imagined stories that exist within us, stories that pull at us, haunt us, stories that need to be told. In performance, action occurs and something happens. Enter the stage area and suddenly the empty space is altered and image is brought to life. The empty canvas is transformed and some sort of story begins to unfold. The body enters, space is molded and time shifts. The body contours in ever-changing shapes and a flow of energy is released – dynamics punctuate the theatrical space and mood is created. Our perception of what "is" begins to change. Form and content surface. The audience, as witness, inhabits the narrative, and forms its own interpretations and personal meaning of the performance experience.

Whether the vehicle for creating theatrical performance is through image or character-driven, or abstract or traditional: action occurs moment to moment and a story is told. The meaning of story may be literal, associative, or metaphorical; interpretation of story is personal, subjective and full of inquiry. Yet at the heart of all performance, and good storytelling, is the desire to create a world that will evoke, arouse, move, and impact an audience through a transformative experience.

## ***2. What is the balance between the spoken word, the body, and movement?***

**Lourdes:** I see the interrelationship of narrative, body, and movement as fluid and ever-changing. There are no set rules in improvisation or composition and the balance of elements with respect to narrative, body, and movement are certainly particular to one's aesthetic and desired form and content. Sometimes there is an integration of all three and other times there is an asymmetry of elements. How you create action through form and what you are trying to say influence compositional choices. Again, there are many ways to tell a story.

How the spoken word, body, and movement emerge, and get organized in a given performance piece bears some discussion. Artists create material and make compositional choices in various ways. When working in true improvisation – being alive and present in the moment with no pre-planned agenda for action – the unconscious leads the way and expression reveals itself unscripted and raw. In devised collaborative theater-making, improvisation is used to generate material which is then given structure through choreographic and compositional choices. The mixing or disparate use of sound, body, and movement to create a balanced score can happen organically through improvisation or through edited choices. What is important for me, as a performer who likes to work in both genres, is to trust my intuitive sense, to follow what is called for in the moment of creation: physical language, spoken word, or a blend of both; to move the story forwards, backwards or sideways.

As a physical actor and improviser, body and movement are my primary modes of expression or language. Having worked more within the realm of dance theatre and body-based improvisation, my process is to begin with sensation and physicality as a means to develop form. I naturally dive into the elements of time, space, shape and other dynamic qualities on a body level and organically transition from my core into movement and/or language. I listen. I follow inner impulses and play with what arises out of my subconscious. I experiment with what feels most authentic, truthful and compelling. If the spoken word best communicates the storyline for me, it is always supported by the body. And if it is the body that needs to speak, it, in turn, is supported by image, mood and intention. Content is always present. The path to discovering it is an ever-changing process.

In the making of *Diving in Backwards*, finding a compositional balance in a collaborative collage piece meant that we would journey through ever-changing manifestations of story. Different theatrical styles were in conversation and the non-linear storyline that developed made for a very playful relationship between the spoken word, body, and movement – often resulting in the juxtaposition of wildly fragmented narratives that pushed the boundaries of conventional storytelling.

**Marcia:** For me the spoken word dominates: I wrote three different scripts, and kept giving myself and everybody else lines, in a quest to marry the right word with the, at times, ineffable effects we were striving for. For me, characters are brought forth most vividly through their language, their dialect, their speech style. Movement and the body help realize these things, but the primary origin of the character always was, for me, in words and sounds. While working with Lourdes, I had to think more about the body. As a consequence, I now believe that there needs to be a better balance between the language of the text and the language of the body, and that text can tip a performer too much towards his or her linear intelligence and away from visceral understanding. Furthermore, I believe now that some of the most powerful emotional and tonal theatrical images are achieved through the designs, patterns, angles, or placement of human bodies within a real space and an imaginary moment.

### **3. *What specific problems did you have to overcome to create this piece?***

**Marcia:** I had to struggle with my own impulses and habits, question myself constantly, and adjust to Lourdes' timetable, which provided for long experimentation and openness. My impulse was to nail things down, make decisions, decide upon a direction, and then rehearse. I panicked quietly as Lourdes resisted such specificity. I wrote, and re-wrote, trying to pin things down. I wanted to rehearse, to get as close to "perfection" as we could. Until about a week before the performance, I repeatedly asked that we fix the ending into some permanent shape, and Lourdes said "not yet." I finally let go of that impulse and allowed myself to feel the fear of the unknown, and to trust her technique and instincts. I now see that



this was crucial. In the end, I simply did what I do, and she did what she does, and together we blended our work at the margins. It was a very simple resolution to a complex challenge, giving the work a kind of vibrancy and immediacy that never would have been possible otherwise.

**Lourdes:** The making of *Diving in Backwards* was a risk-taking adventure between two women who were willing to jump into the unknown, struggle with chaos, and devise a meaningful story through an improvisational process with no script, storyline or director. Unlike traditional theater-making this project had no real boundaries or guidelines. We created our own road map, built a narrative and put on a show with the logistical constraints of living in different places 175 miles apart.

As first-time collaborators Marcia and I had to develop trust in each other as artists and establish a working rapport to free ourselves and unleash our creativity. Once this trust was established we had to find a shared vision for the scope of the project, agree on a theme, and settle into a storyline. Discovering a conceptual path required deep listening and an openness to the spontaneity of the process as well as respect for our intuitive and analytical processes. As artists and performers we have very different skill sets, creative processes and performative styles. These differences would prove to be both stimulating and challenging.

The generative process demanded that we each take turns being the leader or the follower into an amorphous experience of one another's imagination – often taking on physical and vocal roles and language of great unfamiliarity. Through various improvisational techniques we unearthed a large volume of diverse working material; the difficulty lay in deciding what material would make it to the compositional and editing phase. What were our criteria for selecting what worked and what would end up on the cutting room floor? Who was going to have creative control or responsibility for the final direction of the piece?

These types of questions, I believe, were our greatest hurdle. We encountered creative block at this very juncture – when it was time to give real shape to the loose storyline that had developed. This was a turning point in our collaboration, a moment that required finding creative solutions to bring our artistic differences into a balanced compositional whole. It was the moment of truth – the need to surrender ego and find a mutually agreeable path. How were we going to weave together two disparate worlds into a comprehensible and compelling whole? Could we blend our visions without compromising our personal truths?

In creating original work of a multi-disciplinary nature there are many challenges to be had when seeing a project through from concept to completion. One must become skilled or proficient in multiple disciplines and wear many hats to get a show on its feet. Juggling the myriad roles of writer, actor, director, and producer can be daunting and particularly challenging when these roles are shared between collaborators. Our greatest challenge in conceptualizing our story was in resolving our differing points of view with respect to the unfolding script.

One challenge, for me, was to become more versed in the spoken word. I needed to learn to write autobiographical material when I am accustomed to speaking through movement. Another challenge was how best to embody and give voice to material of a more abstract and poetic nature in a way that could be understood by the audience. Because my work leans into the unconscious for inspiration and is predominantly expressed through the mind-body, how was I going to capture and communicate such elusive and subjective things as memory and the mystery of the past? Out of the unfolding images in my mind, how was I going to build narrative strands, develop story, and integrate them with Marcia's script-driven narrative? Finally, in this autobiographical piece, the challenge was how to make the personal resonate in

a universal way. Our life stories needed to evoke meaning, substance, and inquiry, as well as entertain the audience.

**4. *Because it's a work by and about women, did you feel that sexuality and gender were an important dimension of the piece? How/why?***

**Lourdes:** In an autobiographical piece that explores identity, ancestry, and lineage – sexuality and gender were important aspects of but not pivotal to *Diving in Backwards*. This was a play about women honoring women, women embodying women, women moving and digging into their pasts to discover and understand who and what has shaped them and made them who they are today. From my perspective one cannot travel such a trajectory without revealing characteristics of gender and sexuality – they are a part of our human essence, life experience, and cultural history. However, it was not a conscious choice to examine gender and sexuality and question its significance with regard to our portrayal of character, image, or story.

It is interesting to reflect on the subtle and more obvious ways in which gender and sexuality manifested and colored the landscape of our story. The relationship between our respective characters, a piano-playing Michigan farm girl and a flamenco-dancing mystic who talks to walls, revealed a broad contrast of cultural traditions, social norms and influences. Gender and sexuality can be seen as products of our culture and when viewed in a more traditional and socially constructed way conventional perceptions with regard to gender and sexuality could be seen in the body language, physicality, choice of language and overall presence of our characters. However, the more resonant and relevant expression of gender was through the presence of a more metaphysical manifestation of feminine and masculine energy – a gender duality. In my mind, this is the more compelling pulse or beat in our portrayal of culture and identity.

It is my belief that one's culture and identity are stored in the body and revealed through memory, language, imagination and spirit. The duality of feminine and masculine energy, both yin and yang, danced in a rhythmic and circular path in our storytelling: encompassing the poetry, the music, the language, the movement and our relationship to time and place. We travelled back in time across borders to sacred and mysterious places both to discover how we are connected to our past and how the past informs the present.

What revealed itself to me in this personal journey was the fluidity of feminine and masculine energy in the earth, in memory, in language and the body. The very existence of this energy lives and dances in the soul. It appeared in the rhythmic pulses of my feet and the physical and vocal expressions that emanated from deep ancestral traces embedded within my body. When I think of the various images, sounds, and voices that were blended to create my character – a composite of ancestors from my past with origins from Spain, Cuba and Costa Rica – I see how our unique experience of culture and identity are embodied in our unconscious. I realize that deep within the cultural fabric of my ancestry, both feminine and masculine energy were important sources from which to draw inspiration and deliver passionate, playful, and poetic story.

**Marcia:** We began this process by bringing themes and images we wanted to work on to one another. Our notebooks were full of surprisingly similar material. We both had visions of women travelling, ancestral migrations, rivers to cross, witches and magic spells, and oppression experienced and overcome in various ways. Out of this plethora of material, we began to refine how and why these themes flowed between us, and a common fascination with our foremothers emerged. We named our theatre company of

three, “Women Who,” thinking of all the many and various things we’ve watched our sisters, mothers, grandmothers and other female role models do with their lives, and how they’ve shaped us. I stress that this evolved naturally out of a wide-open process, and was not the result of a pre-determined social or political stance, yet once their stories were developed, their gender became very important in that it connected them to us and to each other, across time and cultures.

Creating these female characters was the highlight of the collaboration for me. They both caught my heart – I grew to love them as we developed and performed them. This is one of the most effective ways theatre can worm its way into the consciousness of an audience: characters can get audiences to love, hate, admire, loathe, despise, in some essential way to be fascinated by them. Once that emotional connection is made with the audience, characters can be forgiven almost anything, just for the privilege of watching their lives unfold. Even Brechtian techniques of alienation take as their starting point the possibility of a deeply empathic union between characters and audience. We inverted that empathy by creating it onstage between characters, as well as in the audience. The dramatic action of *Diving in Backwards* is the unfolding connection between characters who are not sure that the others exist. Angie played a travelling puppeteer, a paranoid matron, and an immigration officer; Lourdes played Mama Nena, a ghostly visionary and a passionate mover; and I played Gog, an earth-bound farm girl who travels in search of an unnamed objective. In most scenes, Gog could only sense Mama Nena’s presence: could almost hear her, almost see her, but never quite did until the climactic ending. Mama Nena, on the other hand, apprehended Gog through physically shadowing her, and speaking to her (unheard) in muttered, passionate Spanish. The piece culminated in increasingly ecstatic improvised movement between the two, a dance in which my character reached climactic release after finally sensing and affirming Mama Nena’s existence. Their shared gender was not the point of their ultimate communion, but it did provide a conduit between them, and between Lourdes and me, as we created and embodied them. Shared gender can mean shared experience.

**5. *There were two different traditions at work here; a more traditional theatrical background, and a more improvisatory background, and they had to find common ground. Where did they merge and where did they resist one another? Was the resistance problematic/productive?***

**Lourdes:** The opportunity to enter an artistic collaboration with someone versed in a traditional style of theater-making and yet interested in and committed to exploring the edges of multi-disciplinary art is one of the primary reasons that I was drawn to working with Marcia. Finding common ground through creative differences produced an exciting interplay between kinship and resistance. The meeting of traditional theater and improvisational theater yielded a devised collaborative approach that blended both of our styles into a fused aesthetic that was demanding, full of risk, chaos, and a delightful sense of serendipity. Throughout much of the working process we truly experienced a harmonious relationship. From the very beginning of our rehearsal process we discovered our affinity for an improvised approach to unearthing material through a wide array of generative exercises and structured improvisations. Some of these exercises were purely improvised, some were taken from scripted scenes, and others were a combination of the two. By experimenting with form we were learning to speak each other’s language. Our kinship developed out of an eagerness to play, explore themes we both valued, and remain present to what was evolving in the moment.

There were no bounds to our generative phase – we shared an aesthetic that enabled us to mutually agree upon most of the music, movement, poetry, and emerging text for our piece. We both assumed the role of



leader in directing the generative and compositional work and this shared role remained fluid throughout our working process. We continued to develop our own characters and personal narratives and shared our progress during rehearsals. Because we had both produced material independently of one another, our challenge was to agree upon a narrative through-line that could embody both of our visions and distinctive vehicles for expressing story – Marcia’s oral history of the past embodied and portrayed through character, the spoken word and in script form, and my history of past ancestral stories and memories stored within the body and unleashed through movement and physical storytelling.

The resistance or conflict of ideas that developed during our working process emerged out of a difficulty in blending our respective stories and finalizing a working script. We found ourselves in a state of creative block and realized that although we valued our working process and each other’s artistic form, we wanted to stay true to our own personal style of storytelling -- yet the script called for a fresh and unconventional approach. I could not fit into Marcia’s scripted narrative any more than she could take on my movement-based narrative. Unforeseen tensions produced a fortuitous and desirable outcome; we discovered that the existing dichotomy between our artistic and narrative approaches fueled our collective story and heightened it with conflict, interest and a welcome element of surprise.

Resistance gave way to a new vision that created a hybrid form of story. In a leap of faith we experimented with an unfamiliar choreographic device – the splicing of narratives. Our final piece evolved as a tour de force of fragmented narrative threads where two stories of disparate form and content were spliced into one another in a non-linear and often parallel form – at times harmonious and other times discordant. Personal and historical fragments and slices of memory were literally and figuratively pieced together into a tapestry. The process unequivocally informed the final product. Our artistic differences paralleled our personal and historical differences in an art-imitates-life experience. The weaving together of our personal narratives created a stream of related ideas where perceptions, associations and experiences of our respective history and identity danced and dueled.

New context and meaning emerged out of this mosaic of our personal stories. Out of chaos we found new fragments, bits of history and memory that shed light on who we are. Our connection to the past is what connects us to what it is to be human. In our differences we discovered sameness – of what it is to belong to a collective whole. This traveling into our own experience led us closer to who we are. Our diverse relationships to borders, memory, language, space and time created a new landscape abundant in mystery and meaning.

**Marcia:** I didn’t foresee how profoundly Lourdes’ approach would influence me in the creation of this piece. I was wide open to whatever I could learn from her, and I learned from her all the time; she was graceful and could meld her body with her mood and her mind in a way that astonished and inspired me. It also felt familiar; playing with being in somebody else’s body is part of the charm of acting for me. It was liberating to play with that ability on a more abstract level, with someone showing me the most passionate and fluid expressivity, and encouraging me to do the same through her example. The fact that we came to that physicality from different traditions made it harder to understand each other sometimes: I would start investing our improvisations with story and character right away, and Lourdes slowed things down, remaining unready to commit to a defined story arc for what felt like a long time. While waiting for her to declare it a finished piece, I wrote three scripted versions. Eventually we did make decisions and narrowed it down, but not until the very end of the process. So much of the rehearsing we did, up until days before the performance, was image-based, improvisatory, and non-linear, resistant to the kind of finality that gave my theatrical heart comfort. This was an amazing learning experience for me. I have trained and train others to rehearse, memorize, stay fluid and improvisatory, perhaps, but be well-

rehearsed and confident and ready to go. Lourdes' approach forced me to shuck off the "plottiness" and specificity of what I was generating in my character work, and just focus on streamlined images. The point was to invest the story we were telling in our bodies, which became part of the story we told.

We came to a creative impasse at one point, when we felt stymied by the question of how to meld our different, but connected, stories into one performance. Lourdes came up with the idea of splicing our pieces into each other, allowing a dissonance to exist rather than resolving it in narrative ways. This allowed us to perform the work to both our expectations, and also allowed for a kind of vagueness and irresolution that worked thematically. The journeys taken by these women were as shaped by chance and happenstance as they were by premeditated decision-making, maybe more so. That's life. In *Diving in Backwards*, we embodied, spoke about, and performed paradox, serendipity, and luck both good and bad onstage, to comic, tragic and absurd effect, because that was what happened in the process of our collaboration: everything.