

Arrive, Create:

A Dance Research Project Focused on Collaboration and Generosity

by

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ABSTRACT

This document serves as a discussion of and reflection on the collaborative process of rehearsing and performing *arrive, create: a Dance made by Many*. My intention for the work was to deconstruct the traditional performance paradigm, focusing on constructing a generous performance atmosphere. During the rehearsal process the cast collectively worked to develop an ensemble dynamic for improvisational dance making. The construct of the performance encouraged the audience to engage with the work, both physically and imaginatively through sensory interaction with objects as well as verbal conversation. This document: recalls my background in dance improvisation; explores the relationship of philosophical and dance-making practices; discusses the process of making and performing the work; discusses research data collected from participants; and reflects on the project as a whole. Topics explored include: phenomenological perspectives, ethics of care, “moving identity”, dancers’ sense of authorship, transparency of dance work, collaboration, dance filmmaking, and dance improvisation in performance.

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CHAPTER 1

BACKGROUND

Introduction

Ultimately, making, performing, and reflecting on *arrive, create: a Dance made by Many*, has been a process of deconstructing and reconstructing relationships. I wanted to look at the performance venue as a space full of people, each person having a history and a future and a set of endless possibilities in time and space connecting the two. Instead of viewing the performance as a platform for beauty or ideas I was interested in exposing the framework of production, negating some of its power of spectacle. I wanted to invite the audience into the space and ask questions through the work that might cause audience members to shift their perception of what performance is and who performs.

I also wanted to deconstruct who makes dances. I wondered what kind of common vocabulary would arise from a rehearsal process in which everyone had a chance to input ideas and movement. What I found is that possibilities seem to exponentially grow as a group of people embrace common experiences and explore concepts. *Arrive, create* built a frame that was continually filled with living images, sounds, stories, and ideas.

Improvisation as a Way of Knowing

I feel that it is important to articulate and explore my background in dance improvisation in this opening chapter, as it is my experiential through-line for the conception and performance of *arrive, create: a Dance made by Many*. I find that I am free, available, and precise in my movement when I am practicing dance improvisation. I also feel most alive and invested in the present moment when I am faced with the task of constant and aware choice-making. The job of any improviser is to make choices about what to do—what action to take—in the present moment. Dance improvisation is a practice of choosing how to use the medium of the body to express, uncover, translate, or divulge something to someone, or to oneself.

During my undergraduate career at the University of Montana I quickly became entranced with the practice of dance improvisation. My early studies of dance improvisation took place largely under the tutelage of Nicole Bradley Browning. The spirit of play and investigation intrinsic to the form was fulfilling and I found it to be a great choreographic tool. I realized that my insecurities about my technical ability in dance did not negate my ability to express myself through movement. I also found that dance improvisation facilitated my ability to invent movement and be self-aware while moving.

Furthering my interest in self-expression, I discovered the emotional freedom that movement with a witness can provide in an Authentic Movement practice facilitated by Susan Schell at the Seattle Festival of Dance Improvisation in 2009. I had a calm, caring experience that allowed my true presence to come into the room, fill the space, and

interact with others. I felt as though I could be viewed and perceived as myself, that there was no need to perform or project a better version of myself to the person who was viewing me. I was amazed by how safe I felt in that space while moving with eyes closed and being witnessed by a relative stranger.

During my graduate career at Arizona State University my studies with Thomas Lehman stretched my understanding of what improvisation is. Lehman utilized extremely structured modalities of working that included many opportunities for choice-making, but were not specifically dance improvisation. An example of a class structure that Lehman presented was to compose a dance with other dancers that showed the making of the dance. Lehman would call this structure a study of “transparency,” by which he means work that is crafted and at the same time allows the audience to see the medium of the work—in this case stage craft and performers. This idea of transparency in artistic work reinforced both my aesthetic preferences for clarity of form and accessibility of performance structures.

I was introduced to contact improvisation (CI) in a workshop led by Martin Keogh, at the University of Montana in 2003. The physical listening and presence of mind and body that are intrinsic to the form instantly amazed me. Keogh led a class that worked through the fundamentals of weight sharing and partner dancing in a simple, flowing way. Keogh also stressed the importance of creating an emotionally safe place in which dancers can build a sense of community. Trust building and a tendency toward class structures that promote autonomous choice-making revealed to me the larger social ideas that CI supports, such as social justice and human rights. I felt empowered

as a dance artist to have found a form that thrives on curiosity and encourages caring relationships between individual practitioners and the larger society.

Nita Little's workshop, at the Seattle Festival of Dance Improvisation in 2009, worked with the ideas of a spatial presence of the body and experiencing synesthesia through movement. Little was investigating a physical state that she termed "presencing"—the size of a person's kinesphere, or "pillow," can change according to his or her physical and emotional attitude. She also led experiences that focused on the act of "hearing" or "seeing" movement. A synesthetic way of experiencing movement shifts the focus from the shape, quality, and spatial awareness of movement to a textural collage involving all of the senses. I was very intrigued by Little's investigation of the idea of presence and its application to performance, dancing, and everyday life.

My understanding of the practice of dance improvisation and contact improvisation unfolded—or perhaps re-molded—during the summer of 2012 at Ponderosa Movement and Discovery's PORCH Performance Module. At Ponderosa, located in the town of Stolzenhagen in East Germany on an old farm, the resident dance artists meld work and play, art and function. The line between dancing and cooking, gardening, and performing is blurred on the rustic campus and in the hayloft studios. Ponderosa co-founder Stephanie Maher, who lives full time in Stolzenhagen, encourages festival participants to view life as improvisation in an honest and functional way. The mission statement on Ponderosa's website reads:

The goal of the Ponderosa Movement & Discovery is to create a multifaceted experience for all who join us. We encourage being present with our practical selves as well as our artistic selves. We aspire to give the festival a spontaneous

flair, breaking down the hierarchies between professional teachers, the Ponderosa team, the helpers, the visitors, the participants, the performers and the audience member. We encourage people to see the place as raw and ready for attention.

Focusing on all aspects of the term improvisation, we hope to give room to our visitors to participate on many levels. (Ponderosa, web)

Maher's approach to learning about performance was simply to perform. She prompted the group to perform for one hour. So with no audience and no traditional performance space the group of 15 or so dancers performed. There was movement, walking, the use of props, talking, and finding a purpose in a group. I was deeply informed by this session. I realized that my understanding of dance improvisation was quite structured. I was accustomed to setting goals and guidelines and working to create an aesthetically pleasing product. I also realized the deep social implications of the act of performance. To perform is to show something, and often the thing performers show is not themselves. There is often a metaphorical or representative meaning to performance work. In my experiences viewing dance, it is rare to see a person perform as him or herself.

Jess Curtis, a colleague of Nita Little and a resident artist at Ponderosa, explored the meaning of performance by studying the act of being present. He led several sessions that focused on performing for a single other person. Curtis shared his investigation of performance in terms of purpose. He presented a focused list of five perceived purposes: to impress, inform, affect, infect, and utilize. My experience at Ponderosa and with Curtis helped me to look at performance through a much broader lens. By asking *what performance does* instead of *what performance is about* the function of performing can be more clearly investigated.

Overall my exploration of dance improvisation and contact improvisation has led to a line of inquiry about the nature of choice-making and the function of performance. Both of these subjects relate to the everyday experience. The choices each person makes every day can be viewed within a larger improvisation (life). And we all perform for others—telling a story to a friend or teaching a class can be viewed as acts of performance. For me the question then is not how to make art, but rather how one's decisions in making art relate to larger theories and life practices. I have found that focusing on generative, community-building dance making practices, guided by philosophical theories of phenomenology creates aesthetically intriguing dance works and builds working relationships that reflect my values.

CHAPTER 2

RELATED RESEARCH

Care and Phenomenology in Dance Making

This chapter explores theory and research that has informed and relates to the creative process of rehearsing and performing *arrive, create*. I focus largely on elements that are generative, by which I mean ideas and processes that are creative and productive. However, I feel that it is necessary to contextualize the conversation within predominant and historical dance making practices.

My interest in researching collaboration in dance making has arisen out of questions about the seeming disconnect between the revolutionary social messages of contemporary dance works and the processes through which those dances are made. The methodology that dance makers follow does not always parallel the value systems that their work portrays. I have noticed that many historically celebrated choreographers have created work in a traditional authoritarian manner, despite the fact that the message of their work is often socially progressive, examining topics such as class structure, race, gender, and sexuality.

Robin Lakes has written extensively on the dichotomy between liberating dance works and authoritarian pedagogical and rehearsal practices amongst dance makers. In her research Lakes evidences that outdated teaching methods involving manipulation and intimidation of dancers are often engaged both in rehearsals and in the classroom of artists who are otherwise producing work in conversation with progressive social change. “No matter how liberating the subject matter may be, it can be undermined by oppressive ways of working in the classroom. Teaching behaviors and methods of the teacher teach a

set of rules, beliefs, and ideologies as powerfully as does the curriculum, the syllabus, or the lesson plan” (Lakes, 3). Lakes relates an authoritarian way of running a rehearsal to the perception of the choreographer as a “guru” whose teachings are aesthetic, rather than religious. “Terms like ‘guru’ become highly problematic, however when the master teacher consciously cultivates and imposes idolatry from the students, an unfortunate reality within the pedagogical heritage of dance training” (9).

This tension within dance pedagogy is present in my own history of training in dance. I am continuously aware of the complexity and subtleness of power structures in relationships between myself and student, collaborator, teacher, or peer. I have found that my predisposition to rely on my history as a dancer does not always help realize my goals as a teacher or choreographer.

One of the reasons dogmatic choreographers are seldom challenged about their rehearsal processes is because of the special status that has been granted to great art makers. Genius is a term often applied to great art makers.

From the late eighteenth century to the present, the term genius has come to be used to describe people who are seen as innovators—a notion which was fostered in relation to and by other tenets of modernity. The modern notion of originality gathers its meaning in Romanticism, wherein philosophers (and thinkers of all kinds, especially poets) viewed persons as geniuses if they were understood to be able to create ‘original’ and ‘exemplary’ works of art. (Hughes, 81)

Many of the dance artists Lakes researched were seen as innovators of dance, pushing the boundaries of concert dance by applying abstract concepts, challenging the use of physicality, shifting gender roles, and addressing racial tension. However, many of these

artists failed to apply these progressive theories on an interpersonal basis. The conception that breakthrough dance artists were the “geniuses” of their time often granted them exemption from normal ethical standards, the argument being that if an action is done in the name of great art and by a great artist, it is justified as a means to an end.

In Brian Hughes’ dissertation, he argues that the traditional notion of genius undermines art education and mystifies art making.

By failing to take responsibility for the educational value of the discourse surrounding genius, the concept is turned inside out and understood and discussed from the perspective of the audience—the consumers of art. This has the insidious effect of passively influencing art pedagogy that, in turn, trains students to appreciate art that is made by someone whose phenomenological experience is safely and conveniently inaccessible for the purpose of critique. (Hughes, 85)

For Hughes, “genius” is not a productive way of viewing artists, as it categorically omits recognition of how the life experiences of that artist have influenced the art. It also creates a false understanding of the nature of creativity—some people are innately creative and others are not. Hughes argues that inquiry is the foundation of art education, citing John Dewey’s philosophy of progressive education.

The authoritarian methodology of dance pedagogy and the concept of “genius” as an exceptional member of humanity both create systems of exclusivity. There are power structures central to the workings of both authoritarian pedagogical methodologies and the traditional understanding of “genius” that fail to develop an inclusive group dynamic that is productive, and I would argue central, to art making. One of the tenants of building

inclusivity in a group is the reciprocity of respect and understanding intrinsic to caring relationships.

Carol Gilligan's 1977 essay *In a Different Voice: Women's Conceptions of Self and of Morality* began a movement of thought and theory now characterized as the ethics of care. In this essay Gilligan called for the feminine voice to be more present in developmental theory and challenged the traditional notion that rational thought processes supersede emotionally driven thought processes.

The vision of Luther, journeying from the rejection of a self defined by others to the assertive boldness of "Here I stand" and the image of Plato's allegorical man in the cave, separating at last the shadows from the sun, have taken powerful hold on the psychological understanding of what constitutes development. Thus, the individual, meeting fully the developmental challenges of adolescence as set for him by Piaget, Erikson, and Kohlberg, thinks formally, proceeding from theory to fact, and defines both the self and the moral autonomously, that is, apart from the identification and conventions that had comprised the particulars of his childhood world. So equipped, he is presumed ready to live as an adult, to love and work in a way that is both intimate and generative, to develop an ethical sense of caring and a genital mode of relating in which giving and taking fuse in the ultimate reconciliation of the tension between self and other. (Gilligan, 481)

Gilligan specifically focused her argument on the work of psychologist Lawrence Kohlberg and his study of moral development in boys and girls. In his study, Kohlberg found that girls tended to develop more slowly along the hierarchical system of moral development he had established. One of the survey questions in Kohlberg's evaluation,

the Heinz dilemma, asked children to make a choice in a hypothetical circumstance involving the care of a family member. Kohlberg's system valued the patient's ability to make a decisive choice, thus proving their ability to use reason in emotionally charged situations. He found that the boys he interviewed were more able to decisively choose an action over the girls, who often struggled to answer the question because of their emotional attachment to the characters in the scenario. The girls Kohlberg interviewed were much more likely to extrapolate many different outcomes of the hypothetical situation and begin exploring possible repercussions of the situation, rather than choosing one of the two solutions Kohlberg was offering.

The proclivity of women to reconstruct hypothetical dilemmas in terms of the real, to request or supply the information missing about the nature of the people and the places where they live, shifts their judgment away from the hierarchical ordering of principles and the formal procedures of decision making that are critical for scoring at Kohlberg's highest stages. (Gilligan, 512)

Gilligan critiques Kohlberg's method of measuring moral development as having gendered implications, ranking the qualities of males above qualities of females. Gilligan also questions the use of rationality in moral decisions. She calls for the consideration of care and responsibility in how moral decisions are made and for more room for the feminine voice in theories of developmental psychology.

In the realm of dance making, I make a correlation between care-based ethical theory and collaborative methods of making dance work. It is more traditional to choreograph a dance work single-handedly. However, I believe it creates caring relationships for a dance maker to involve the cast in the creation of the dance work. If a

dance maker has an ambition to honor the dancers' artistic input and promote equity amongst the cast, working collaboratively is an effective way to employ a caring ethical standard.

As Gilligan contests morality based on hierarchical developmental theories, phenomenologists Edmund Husserl and Maurice Merleau-Ponty contest the idea that the world can be understood objectively and quantitatively. These founders of the field of phenomenology were developing theories in a time when Cartesian thought ruled. Rene Descartes developed a framework of thought that separated the thinking mind from physical reality. Cartesian thought supposes that the material world operates according to measurable principles. Descartes' *Meditations* published in 1641 defined the world in terms of laws of operation and mathematical cause and effect. This way of viewing the world has led to many breakthroughs in scientific thought and inventions that have profoundly affected the human experience. However, the quest for objective truth and quantifiable knowledge, which has been the dominant paradigm of scientific thought since the age of enlightenment, provides a limited framework of thought, like all philosophical paradigms.

In the early 1900s Edmund Husserl began to lay the groundwork for the philosophical discipline of phenomenology. Husserl saw that the early field of psychology was beginning to treat the mind as an object of sorts. Husserl began to steer the theory of the mind in another direction. He was interested in the subjective, everyday experience. It is the everyday experience that excites curiosity and leads to scientific thought, after all. Husserl wanted to study the lived experience, not to control it, but to better understand it.

Husserl's definition of phenomenology was grounded in the non-material world of the mind. And his work was criticized as being inherently solipsistic—unable to recognize anything outside of the self as reality.

Husserl struggled long and hard to answer this important criticism. How does our subjective experience enable us to recognize the reality of other selves, other experiencing beings? The solution seemed to implicate the body—one's own as well as that of the other—as a singularly important structure within the phenomenal field. The body is that mysterious and multifaceted phenomenon that seems always to accompany one's awareness, and indeed to be the very location of one's awareness within the field of appearances. (Abram, 37)

Husserl came to the realization that the body was in fact the source of knowledge and understanding. He defended the subjective nature of his theory of phenomenology by recognizing that information comes through the senses of the interconnected structure of the body, and thus provides each person with a singular (and subjective) experience.

Susan Kozel, a dancer, philosopher, and multi-media choreographer has researched the work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty extensively and approaches dance making from a phenomenological perspective.

A phenomenological approach manifests itself as a way of living in the world that integrates intellect with sensory experience and does not flinch from that which seems to be paradoxical or ambiguous; it can be used to construct meaning, to celebrate the mundane as well as the extraordinary, or to critique thought, attitudes, or social structures. (Kozel, XXV)

Kozel philosophically grounds her work in phenomenology, the lived experience. She combines live performance with cameras, motion sensors and other technologies in her work, and writes about her experience applying a phenomenological perspective to work that, interestingly, includes virtual realities. Kozel is inspired by the writings of Merleau-Ponty, but does not swallow his philosophical viewpoint whole. She understands the social and cultural influences of Merleau-Ponty's writings, especially regarding women and technology, and has extrapolated from his early writings on phenomenology, in order to bring those thoughts into a current framework. "In my view, phenomenology can never be adopted as a doctrine because it is experiential and not prescriptive, but paradoxically, by not being doctrinaire about phenomenology it is possible to become ever more vibrant phenomenologists (2)."

The phenomenological approach discussed above provides an inclusive and investigative framework for the construction of dance works. I have followed a phenomenological approach to dance making that focuses on the lived experience of each performer, with a special emphasis on the theme of identity. *Arrive, create* became a process for each performer to better understand the world they construct for themselves and how their actions relate to the environment that the group created.

Collaboration and Ownership of Dances

The decision to make *arrive, create* in a collaborative way was not only one of questioning the dominant paradigm of the artist as sole creator, it was also a decision to invite a generative way of making work. In past choreographic projects, I have found the process of single-handedly shaping work aesthetically to be both fulfilling and finite. In fully choreographed works I found it satisfying when the work achieved the shape I had envisioned. I also always felt that the work was sadly finite after the performance. The idea had been done, the shape made, and my interest had faded. In successful works that were performed in several venues, I struggled with re-staging the work because it seemed like an attempt to chase the past, and both the other performers' and my own excitement in the work seemed to fade with time.

My intention for *arrive, create* was to make this project something that continued to generate ideas and understandings beyond the final day of the performance. I intended for the process of making the work to be guided by clearly articulated questions that would produce decisions in relation to the work, and would then generate more questions to follow in future works. I also strongly believed that building knowledge as a group of people about a line of questioning is much more efficient and interesting than generating ideas as a single person. Thus a collaborative process seemed a generative choice.

Karen Barbour, a New Zealand choreographer wrote about her experience in the professional dance scene in New Zealand and her struggle to stay afloat as a dancer/choreographer. She came to the realization that many artists were suffering from burn-out and that the dictatorial company model was often destructive to professional

dancers. She decided to explore publically engaged ways of making dance work, and wrote an essay paralleling the concept of sustainability with collaborative dance making.

To return to my initial question, 'how can understandings of sustainability be applied to the process of dance making?' it seemed to me that developing sustainable dance making would entail consideration of the creative and rehearsal processes so as to meet the needs of all involved, as well as working to nurture and enable all for the future, within the specific contexts of dance making.

Integral to the process is respect and acknowledgement for all involved, something I am sad to say is often missing from professional dance 'industry' practices. (Barbour, 44)

Barbour related the definition of sustainability as a practice that sustains the environment for the use of future generations as applicable to making dances in collaboration with the performers. I believe, and I think Barbour agrees, that the practice of collaborating infuses the future generations with a sense of identity in the arts.

As the collaborative model becomes more commonplace in dance making, questions arise about the sense of authorship a choreographer has over her work. Who “choreographs” if the movement material is sourced from the dancers? Is it manipulative to craft movement that is tied to a dancers’ sense of identity? After much deliberation I decided to title myself the “director” of *arrive, create*. I did not feel like I choreographed the work, but rather gathered the material, created a structure, and participated in it while it unfolded. New York Times critic Claudia La Rocco commented on the trend of choreographers to “source” movement from other dancers and popular culture:

Mr. Dinwiddie is among a number of choreographers whose recent work raises questions of authorship and originality. Rather than creating a unique movement language, a la Martha Graham or Merce Cunningham, and maintaining a company of dancers to hone those techniques, they are focusing on conceptual issues, drawing on collaborators who shift from project to project and employing new strategies to share information. In short, these artists are playing with the very definition of choreography. (La Rocco, 25)

La Rocco brings up a sensitive point for choreographers—why do they get that title if they aren't creating the movement on stage? Of course there is much more to making dances than creating movement, crafting a piece of art on the stage involves much skill. And many arts steal, borrow, and exchange material from one another.

'We're seeing surfacing in American contemporary dance work in recent years the deliberate use of strategies that have long been common artistic practice in other art forms,' Carla Peterson, the artistic director of Dance Theater Workshop, wrote in an e-mail message. 'Appropriation, sampling, referencing and dialoguing with other artists' works, notions of authorship, dissolving of genres, the rethinking of dance's relationship with movement, and with audiences, etc., are all in play.' (La Rocco, 25)

Andy Warhol's work, which references popular culture and includes huge vibrantly painted photos of celebrities, shows that the choice to use material from outside sources can be as much a comment on the content of the material as it can be a tribute. When the material comes not from an outside source but is appropriated directly from the

performers in a work, I believe that it is important to consider and honor the performer's sense of self that is inextricably woven into the movement.

Jennifer Roche writes about the changing nature of the professional dance world, and the implications that has on the role of the dancer in the choreographic process. The emergence of the independent dancer, who operates outside a company structure and canonical dance styles, has made a paradigmatic shift in dance-making. Thus we require new definitions of the divisions of labor in the choreographic practice. Repositioning the dancer as interrogator of the dance-making process affects a change in power balance and perspective that has political implications for the dancer's positioning as a self-reflective and creative entity. (Roche, 106)

Roche calls for a re-ordering of the creative process and for dance makers to recognize the contribution of highly skilled and diversely trained dancers to the artistry of the completed works. Roche points out that current professional dancers seek out movement training and creative input from an increasingly diverse array of practices. Professional dancers in recent history have typically trained with the artistic directors of the companies in which they work. The diverse training that dancers now seek out facilitates a rich and complex approach to movement that audiences see on stage.

Roche has developed the term "moving identity" to describe the embodied knowledge that dancers bring to dance works.

The dancer's 'moving identity' is the result of the accumulation of choreographic movement incorporations and training influences. It holds traces of past embodiments that are also available to the dancer to be re-embodied again. Thus

the moving identity highlights the underlying sense of consistency in how the dancer moves and could be regarded as the movement signature that the dancer forms throughout a career path. (Roche, 111)

Roche's sense of the "moving identity" as the accumulation of experience—a sort of sifting through of ideas and aesthetics—that dancers are exposed to in their careers, calls for a new definition of the role of dancers. This line of thinking parallels the questions I have been asking about how the creative process and the traditional performance paradigm honor dancers' contribution to works. In the work I did for my project I invited dancers to view their "moving identity" as an accumulation and conglomeration of their training and artistic histories as well as their social, familial, and emotional histories. My hope was that by inviting this sense of self into the work I was recognizing the cast members and myself as artists, collaborators, and human being.

Changing Paradigms in Dance, Past and Present

The questions I chose to research with this project were outcomes of my curiosity engaged by my personal history as a dancer and dance maker. I was also reflecting an understanding of the ever-changing performance and rehearsal paradigms in the field of contemporary dance and broader questions dance artists are asking.

The Judson Dance Theater was an experimental artist collective where many assumptions about the nature of dance were challenged. A group of dancers, improvisers, writers, and musicians coalesced during the 1960s and 1970s to share space and investigate questions about the nature and functionality of performance and movement.

The choreographers of the Judson Dance Theater radically questioned dance aesthetics, both in their dances and in their weekly discussions. They rejected the codification of both ballet and modern dance. They questioned the traditional dance concert format and explored the nature of the dance performance. (Banes, xi)

A group of artists, originally brought together for a choreography workshop taught by Robert Dunn at the Cunningham studio, began to meet weekly at a space devoted to social change: the Judson Church of downtown New York City. From these meetings many Concerts of Dance (#1-#16) were created, including work by Yvonne Rainer, Steve Paxton, Judith Dunn, and Elaine Summers.

Within the Judson workshop, a commitment to democratic or collective process led on the one hand to methods that metaphorically seemed to stand for freedom (like improvisation, spontaneous determination, chance), and on the other hand to a refined consciousness of the process of choreographic choice. In general,

questions of technique and its perfection were considered less important than formal compositional problems. (Banes, xvii-xviii)

Though the work that was produced at the Judson Church in the early years of the Judson Dance Theater was diverse, the common values that the group of artists came to are representative both of the social change that was happening in the country at that time and the importance of those ideas to creating change in the field of dance. I resonate with the democratic process and the value system which placed more importance on choreographic problems than virtuosic technical aims that the Judson Dance Theater developed, because they understood dance to be a platform for representing a value system, rather than a purely aesthetical form intended to share beautiful images.

Contact improvisation, which had begun its life at Oberlin College, also took root in the Judson Church. As I reflected above in the background chapter, I was strongly influenced by the care and physical listening of contact improvisation as well as the democratic class structure the form necessitates. Creating and using scores is one specific mode of exploring dance improvisation that informed the making of *arrive, create*. In dance improvisation a score outlines to the dancers the parameters of their performance by delineating a parameter in space, time, theme, energetic dynamics or intention. Other influential ideas that arose from the Judson Dance Theatre include questioning the traditional role of the audience, investigating where in space dancing takes place, and who constitutes a “dancer.”

One currently working artist who continues to investigate these ideas is David Dorfman. Dorfman, artistic director of David Dorfman Dance, has questioned the boundaries and construct of contemporary dance with his work since founding his

company in 1985. Dorfman often works in a highly collaborative way, creating a sense of community amongst the cast of dancers for each project. He has worked with non-dancers, hosting workshops and putting untrained performers on stage, he has blurred the lines between musician and dancer, and he has openly created a dialogue about what the function of dance is in people's lives.

...what is perhaps the most radical of all Dorfman's innovations, is the very subject of his choreography: the stuff of daily life. For even the lowliest among us, Dorfman recognizes, just being alive is dramatic. Honoring the welter of emotions, choices, and connections that constitute the most seemingly mundane of existences, Dorfman concerns himself with physicalizing the inner life. He reveals his own experiences with a candor that can be startling, and, while it is heartfelt, this intimacy of revelation is thoroughly free of mawkishness or bathos. In refusing to ennoble or aggrandize his life and thoughts, Dorfman creates ground for us to recognize ourselves in these dances. (Carbonneau, web)

While Dorfman's dances are often highly athletic and, in their own way, virtuosic his commitment to the recognition of what makes us human—the everyday dramas—continues to make his work revolutionary.

Meg Stuart, dancer and director of Damaged Goods based in Brussels, is an artist investigating the form and purpose of dance in a very different, though equally revolutionary way. Her processes often mine out states of being from within the dancers and actors she works with. She explores vulnerability and extreme emotional states alongside the mundane and everyday experience. Her experience making and performing dances is chronicled in *Are we here yet?* edited by Jeroen Peeters.

Vocabulary is the way in which a person moves. The body has an intelligence of its own and a way of digesting complex situations which spoken language can't touch. How do people move? How do they feel in the world? How do they hold their body? Why would they dance? There is the vocabulary of everyday life, which is linked to the history of every single body. (Stuart, 25)

In this passage, Stuart reveals something about her way of constructing dances. Stuart recognizes a need for investigation into movement and goes beyond Roche's understanding of dancers' "moving identities" into an incorporation of any and all histories a person and body experience.

How does the shared vocabulary of a piece come about in the first place? Perhaps a task of a scenario or the rules of the world the dancers inhabit create a vocabulary. In every work it's different. Often the vocabulary isn't completely defined until the piece is almost finished. (Stuart, 25)

This way of constructing performative works changes Stuarts' sense of authorship over the work. She doesn't make the movement, necessarily, but rather guides it or conceives of a scheme to create it.

Stuart's sense of the dancing body and the every day body being inseparable, and in fact profoundly linked, is at the root of my exploration of the "moving identity" with a cast of dancers. The professional working model of separating the self into categories of thought and ways of functioning is not very interesting to me, and actually seems counter-productive in many ways. I find that seeking the answer to my curiosities in all realms of my life is much more fruitful than separating myself into parts. Of course I set

boundaries for myself to function socially and professionally, but I try to let my questions permeate my life, float around and collect information.

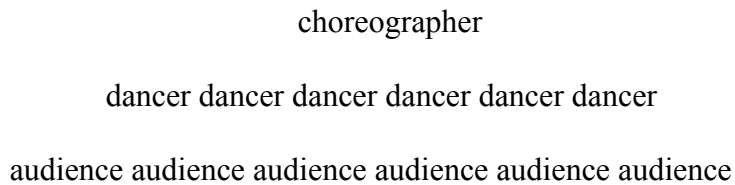
CHAPTER 3

PROCESS AND INQUIRY

Many Questions

I began making this dance with the query: how do I make a dance that breaks down hierarchical power structures between both the performers and the audience and the choreographer and the dancers.

In the above question, I have assumed that the traditional power structure occurs where the choreographer directs the dance work, the dancers perform, and the audience observes. This structure sets up a hierarchy in which the omniscient choreographer holds the highest rank, the performers become conduits of the choreographer's will, and the audience (assumed to have less facility and less knowledge) becomes the subordinate of both the choreographer and the performers. This relationship is shown below.



My intention to break down, re-organize, or deconstruct the above hierarchical power structure came from my interest in a sense of equity amongst all those involved in creative projects. Much as the Judson Dance Theatre once questioned the role of the audience, I wondered if a sense of equality between audience and performer could encourage the audience to engage with the work in a different way. I was also interested in creating a relationship between the cast of dancers and the dance maker in which

respect and creative input would be reciprocal. This line of questioning led to the following research question, as stated in the proposal for my project:

How can I create an experience in which audience members are willingly engaging in movement arts through their senses and imaginations?

This includes:

- kinesthetic empathy of full, expressive movement
- audience being able to create while experiencing someone else's creation
 - moving around and creating your own adventure
- engaging with more than auditory and visual senses (Wall-MacLane, referenced from prospectus)

Beginning in the Spring of 2012 a cast of three dancers and I explored the potential of the internal courtyard of the Nelson Fine Arts Center, creating a structure for an improvised score that included tying string between landmarks in the space, the invention of movement based on the texture of the space and the line of the architecture, and a game that involved jumping between stepping stones. Each dancer contributed one element to the score. Our rehearsals were primarily dedicated to the performance of the score while we simultaneously focused on creating a group composition. We became curious about the way phenomenological perspectives can be used to explore dance improvisation and devoted several rehearsals to discussions of this kind.

For my first project showing, the dancers and I performed a 15-minute version of this improvisational score. During the showing the cast interacted with the audience for the first time by inviting them to tie lines of string to points in the courtyard in order to change the structure of the space. The intention was to involve the audience in a tactile

way. The audience (mostly committee members) was very willing and open to the experience, but by the end of the 15-minute score the courtyard looked like a giant spider web and all the audience members were pushed to the edges of the space.

I quickly realized that my intention to create an inviting and engaging space was not met by this score. Not only did the creation of the web of string literally push people to the edge of the space, the figurative connotation of rope as a barrier was hard to escape. I decided to re-evaluate my goals for the work and scrap the courtyard score.

At this time in the process I was in conversation with resident artist Thomas Lehman about the scope and focus of the project. In talks with Lehman I realized that shifting the focus of the work to the spirit of generosity would provide an inclusive scaffold for creating an engaging dance work/experience. I was finding that working in opposition to a perceived problem—that of hierarchical power structures—consistently brought me back to that very problem. It seemed a better thought to focus on the solution. This conversation clarified my research question and it developed into the following:

How can I make a generous dance work that:

- asks for audience engagement without demanding it
 - viewers choose how to engage with and view work
- honors performers identity (self)
- is created in a democratic way
 - i.e. by means of a collaborative process

As the research process moved forward, the meaning for the word *generous* became more clearly defined in relation to the work. For example in this phase of my research I related a generous way of creating work to a care-based feminist ethical theory. This led to a set

of improvisational structures that utilized the concept of the “moving-identity”. The use of the word *generous* was key to my understanding and to the re-organization of the process for the work.

Returning to the studio after that showing, I decided to work with one dancer at a time. I chose to focus my study at this time on the dancers’ interpretation of Roche’s concept of the “moving identity,” what that meant to them and how to use the concept to create movement material. In those sessions I brainstormed environments with the dancers in which they felt the most themselves—places that texturally and imaginatively represent their preferred movement qualities. I would add one environment that I perceived to represent or characterize the dancer. I would then videotape a section of the movement based on imagery, and the dancer and I would watch the video together and build a phrase from that material.

All three members of the cast collaborated with me in this way to develop a movement phrase that represented each dancer’s “moving identity.” This first phase of the rehearsal process concluded with the end of the school year, and left me with the following questions to carry me into the summer:

- how does one honor the “moving identity” of a dancer when that identity changes from day to day?
- what is important to me about audience interaction?
- how does the layout of the performance space encourage interaction and choice making of the audience?
- is it important to have choreographed movement material in this work?

During the summer months, I held several rehearsals in ASU's Nelson Fine Arts Dance Lab room 122 and also had a change of cast. One dancer chose to step out, and I decided to ask two dancers that I had worked with before in a previous choreographic project, *speaking/hearing listening/telling* to join the cast.

With this new cast I chose to change the structure, to focus on how the "moving identity" might interact with externally sourced phrase material. I decided to create a movement phrase and teach it to the cast of dancers. After I had created a movement phrase, I asked the dancers to change my phrase in any way to make it "theirs". This structure also brought in elements of text. The entire cast would then workshop each dancer's movement by watching them perform and then telling them the qualities and elements of the movement that they would characterize as elements of their personality. Each dancer would then re-work the phrase to highlight the personal elements that were described by the cast.

Another score that I developed involved story telling. Again the cast worked in pairs. One dancer would perform his or her movement phrase for the other. Once the viewer got a feel for the movement, he or she wrote a story about the person or about the imagined environment in which the dancer was moving. We then performed the movement while the viewers read their stories aloud. I created a group score in which anyone could enter and perform his or her movement and anyone could read any story at any time. Both movement and spoken story could overlap and create relationships.

I found the story telling score to be extremely fun but also very complicated. The dancers performing movement found it difficult not to want to literally fulfill the story. At times this desire to fulfill the story manifested itself as literal and even mimetic

movement. It was also challenging to overlap spoken text and movement without becoming confused. This phase of rehearsal was successful research in that it investigated some possible origins of movement vocabulary and catalysts for movement invention. It invited a sense of moving that is present in the whole life of a dancer into the performance space, an element of everyday movement that Stuart describes. The summer offered time to explore through the use of improvisatory scores, the various meanings that movement can convey and the relationships between those meanings.

Making Dances at Ponderosa

At the PORCH Performance Module summer session at Ponderosa Movement and Discovery I devised and performed two works. I also developed an understanding of improvisation as a lifestyle. The structure of Ponderosa, as described in Chapter 1, is one of presence and improvisation as a way of life. The boundaries between “work” and “play” and “art” are purposefully blurred. Dancers are encouraged to dance, and cook, and garden, and take out the trash with an equal purpose and function given to each task.

For an informal showing I performed the story telling structure from the summer rehearsals. I had a single rehearsal during which a small group watched one another improvise and write short stories. The stories attended to the mover, and could be based on truth or fabricated—the content of the stories was completely up to the whim of the writer. Within this structure any performer at any time could change fluidly between the role of the mover/improviser/storyteller.

This score was performed with four other PORCH participants at an informal showing at Ponderosa in the Engang Theater in July, 2012 (below). The general consensus from the feedback I received was that the movement and text had a sentimental feeling. Mary Pearson, one of the resident artists, said that she appreciated the interweaving of the text and movement, but that the message of both together was not clear.



photograph 1 by Marc Seestaedt

Another project I developed was informed by my connection to the physical environment of Ponderosa and by some of the research the performance group had been doing with Curtis about the act of being present. I developed a quick physical intimacy with the places in and around Stolzenhagen, in part because of the cultural atmosphere cultivated at Ponderosa and in part because of the clean openness of the landscape.



photograph 2 by Laurel Wall-MacLane

I decided that the focus of this project would be on the physical environment itself and that the medium I would use to portray it would be film. I chose spaces that were symbolic of the place and environment of Ponderosa, spaces that had shaped my experience and that represented my sense of identity there. In the filming I was curious about the simplicity of the landscapes and playing with my body both in and out of the frame of the camera.



photograph 3 by Marc Seestaedt

I chose to edit on camera as much as possible, making a stop motion of sorts. I performed live with the film projected on me and added the sensorial element of an oscillating fan, which created wind that moved the fabric of my clothing. A few of my closer friends said they found it to be a very honest performance, both intriguing and pleasing.

As I noted in the last chapter, my experience at Ponderosa helped me to clarify my current interests in dance. I began to view performance in terms of purpose and function. The two choreographic projects I presented at the festival helped to define my interests in the use of text and the act of being present in live performance.

The time at Ponderosa also created space for me to develop a clearer understanding of the themes I was interested in investigating in this choreographic project: identity in relation to community, interaction through the use of text, and

performative presence. I also became aware of the necessity to develop a generative group dynamic, one that encouraged discussion and inventive physicality among collaborators.

Arriving to Create

Coming back into the studio I felt a renewed enthusiasm for the potential of creative work in a group. I had a sense that all the work I had done with the cast up to this point was valuable research that had helped me to hone my concept. However, the movement material that we had developed no longer served the project. Inspired by the performance project I made at Ponderosa, I decided to integrate film-making into the final project—using the work I had made there as a model.

In creating the video work my goal was to expand on the “moving identity” by exploring and visually representing places the cast members identify with. I was interested in investigating a sense of presence by performing alongside the videos in a simple and conscious way. I was also excited to begin investigating the nature of performance and collaborative dance making with the cast. The question of how to make a generous dance work seemed to start with creating a generous rehearsal process.

For the first several weeks of this phase, I developed scores exploring concepts relating to performance and self. Similar to Kozel’s research, the group used the theory of phenomenology as a framework by studying the continually constructed present moment. Scores we explored as a group are described below:

- perform being present for one other person without moving anything other than your eyes
- create a written score for yourself and perform it individually within the group for 20 minutes
 - leave the written score in the space and practice performing someone else’s score

- standing in a circle, one person at a time move to the center and sing a pop song
 - the circle supports the singer
- move and describe what you are doing while you are doing it
 - describe what someone else is going while they are doing it
 - direct someone else to move
- perform a solo dance improvisation while telling a story, the “audience” (the rest of the cast) gives suggestions
 - one of the suggestions is to not listen to the suggestions, but rather do what you want to do

These scores began to develop into a repertoire of ideas surrounding dance improvisation, identity and performance. Stuart articulates the process that results when a cast builds movement vocabulary together. In a similar way, our cast started to recognize themes in how we were interacting, using text, and moving. At this point in the process I asked each dancer to write a personal score, sourced from everything we had done thus far in the rehearsal process. We then combined the elements of those personal scores into a master score:

open the space
 this is what I know about
 taking off and putting on clothes
 having a party with random objects in the space
 allow reaction to an image/ event
 say what you are seeing
 sing a song
 be someone else

- by mirroring them
- by trying to embody their identity

 stillness/ listening
 do something you want to do

suggesting things for one another to do
talking to audience members
inviting your own movement vocabulary

We then began running the piece as a group improvisation with entrances and exits using the (above) master score as a reference point.

I had the intention of interweaving some partnering and choreographed movement phrases. While I was committed to a work that focused on performing improvisation, I wanted for the work to include weight sharing and interaction between the dancers. My interest in contact improvisation is keen, however I realized that the cast of dancers I was working with did not have enough experience with contact to be able to utilize it in performance in a dynamic and engaging way. During two separate rehearsals I had dancers draw straws to create duets and trios. I did this in order for chance to be incorporated into the rehearsal process, and so that my hand in shaping the duets and trios would not be based on personal biases and pre-existing aesthetic assumptions.

To develop the duets and trios I asked the dancers to use movement material that they had created in the rehearsal process and put the movements and shapes of the body in relationship to one another so that each dancer's original movement remained recognizable. After the duets/trios were developed, the members of the cast who were not in the duet or trio would constructively critique the works, in order to make the flow of the duet or trio more seamless and the intent more clear.



photograph 4 by Tim Trumble

This process produced some very diverse material—which I believe was representative of the personalities of the dancers making the work. We then began the process of teaching one another the various parts of each duet and trio. By the end of that process we had multiplied two duets and two trios into four duets and four trios. I was curious about dancers taking on one another’s movement as a way of representing how the cast had assembled a collective movement vocabulary and group dynamic over time. The movement the cast had been exploring was largely based each member’s “moving identity,” however as the group continued to work together that individual identity was informed by interaction with other cast members. Learning another dancer’s role in a duet or trio became a representation of that process.

Alongside these group cast rehearsals I began shaping a duet with a community member I had met through contact improvisation jams and through work I had done with

the Mesa Arts Center. Sue Anne (pseudonym used for anonymity) immediately struck me as a curious mind and a thoughtful, graceful mover. I brought Sue Anne into the process through my interest in making art in a self-sustaining way. I had already been working with her in other projects, so in an effort to draw on resources already available and present in my life I asked her to join the project. Having her in the work also supported my interest in seeing diverse bodies and ages on stage and the meaning that has to a larger community.

I brought Sue Anne and Tony together because I thought they had similar energetic tones in their movement and personalities. I also wanted Sue Anne to integrate into the process with ease, and was aware that the rehearsal process as it was might be overwhelming for someone not as immersed in dance. For Sue Anne and Tony I chose to create a more concrete and chronological score that focused on the present moment and opening up visual and energetic awareness.



photograph 5 by Tim Trumble

While we developed this movement score Richard came in to begin collaborating on the musical component of the work. For this section of the work he developed a relationship between the duet and his piano playing that was based on a call and response sensibility between the dancers and himself. He also sourced musical material from a sense of kinesthetic empathy he was experiencing while viewing the movement.

As the components of the work began to come together I also introduced everyday objects—paper, marbles, and glass jars—that served as musical instruments and encouraged the dancers to utilize them to create a live sound score for the improvisation. I chose those objects because they fit with the everyday sensibility of the work. Inviting and re-purposing glass jars and marbles paralleled my understanding of inviting the dancers' history and full self into the work, or inviting the audience to view their choices on how to view the work as artistic decisions in themselves.

Towards the end of the rehearsal process the rehearsals began to run as a performance. The score had been narrowed down to:

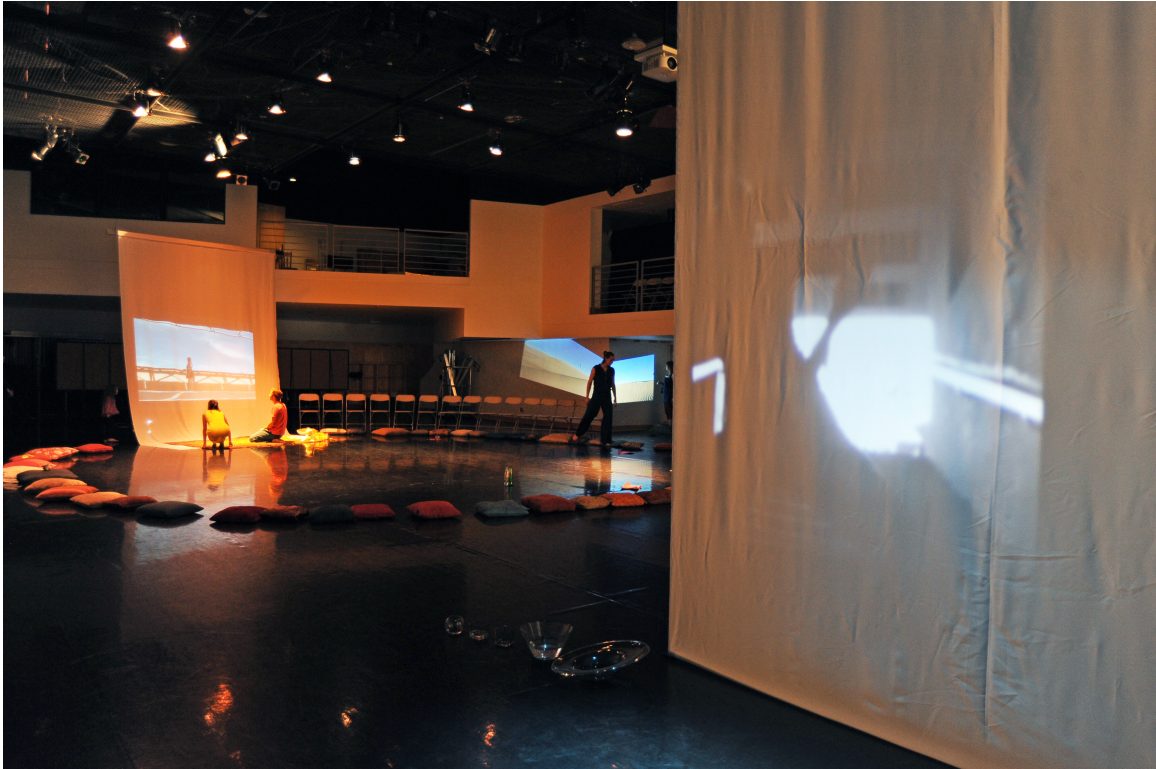
open the space
say what you see/ know
listen
do what you want to do
move

The score had been narrowed down through discussion and the groups' aesthetic direction, as well as by function. Taking out any redundancies or things the group was no longer doing left us with a much more refined "master score."

I primarily made the production decisions on set design, costume, and publicity—though in relationship with designers. Jacqueline Bernard helped me actualize my vision of pedestrian inspired dance costuming using a primary color scheme. Melissa Rex helped build screens and design their location and height in the space. And Kelsey Wall-MacLane created the design for the simple and elegant posters and postcards using my specifications as a guideline (see appendix). Collaboration takes a lot of discussion time, and time always runs short when producing live performance. I also had the original intention of editing the videos collaboratively, however dancers' schedules prohibited that from happening. As I edited the films, I attempted to let the movement of the natural landscape guide the rhythm of the film.

The overall scope of the evening was also something that I designed, based on my research question that focuses on creating a generous performance paradigm and including audience participation. The videos were projected onto walls of the space, Nelson Fine Arts Center Dance Lab, and onto screens hung from the ceiling. One sensorial element was added to each video space—rocks, water, fake fur, a bamboo nest,

and chocolate and figs. The space was set up as a theatre in the round with one row of pillows and one row of chairs, some beginning in a circle and some being moved mid-performance, all asymmetrically placed in the space.



photograph 6 by Tim Trumble

For the first section of the piece, the audience is asked to explore the space and interact with the sensorial textures in the space. Richard strikes a chord on the piano to indicate the second section with the audience seated in the round, the duet between Sue Anne and Tony. At the conclusion of that section all the dancers take a moment to look around the circle in silence—this begins the open score in which the cast of six performs using the “master score.” The end of the work is marked by silence and another round of looking around the circle at all who are present.

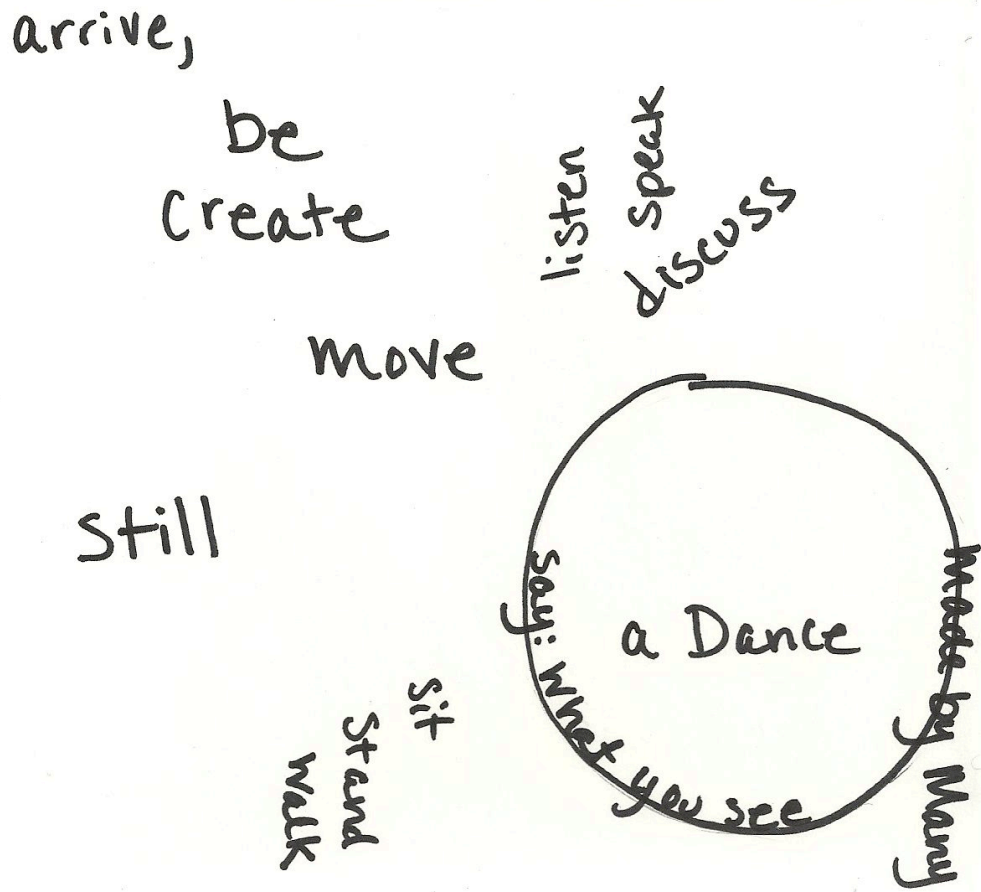


figure from program

CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS OF PARTICIPANTS' EXPERIENCE

This chapter acts as a witness and reflective discussion of the participants' experience of the work. I am viewing both performers and audience members as being participants in *arrive, create* given the interactive nature of the performance. Through this reflective analysis of data gathered from the participants I hope to better understand the impact that the rehearsal and performance process has on the collaborating artists, especially surrounding the use of collaboration in art making. I also discuss the influence of the interactive performance design in shaping how the audience viewed this dance work, and what underlying thematic messages the audience received from engaging in the performance. In my reflective interpretation of the data several themes emerged: a sense of authorship among the performers, responsibility in collaboration, utilization of collaboration, use of interactivity in performance, the enjoyment of viewing the work, confusion relating to the role of the audience, and interpretation of the underlying concepts of the work.

The data gathered consists of verbal interviews with each performer who took part in the collaborative process and a survey of comments, which were written anonymously by the audience at the end of each performance. Pseudonyms for the dancers will be used for the purposes of privacy. The interview questions were generated from my research queries, rehearsal process methodology, and objectives for the work. The questions centered on the concept of collaboration as a method for creating dance work and the performers' perception of their contribution to the work (see Appendix for interview questions.)

Dancers Sense of Authorship

All the performers felt like they had a sense of authorship over their ideas in the rehearsal and performance processes. Tony said, “the day of the performance I felt like it was mine, that I was responsible... for myself—for what I did, the relationships I built, that it was authored or co-authored.” In this response Tony is re-defining improvisation in performance as an authorship of the moment. Richard thought of authorship more in terms of what the rehearsal process produced. “I felt a sense of authorship and responsibility for the performance product. I feel like, because it was collaborative, that I was probably my own harshest critic. I contributed my ideas and ultimately that’s what the piece was made of—our collective ideas.” Overall there was a sense of self-authorship and an agreement that each contributor’s ideas were heard in the process of making the work.

I am currently experimenting with the use of the term “authorship” in relation to dance work because it encompasses a complicated relationship between intellectual property and self-expression. Each performer had a different definition for the concept of authorship, but in one sense the definitions aligned. All of them felt authorship in the work when their own ideas were incorporated and retained in a recognizable form. The term authorship illustrates the complexity of collaborative work—if everyone creates together how is each artist’s autonomy maintained? When group mentality trumps individual decision-making, how do individuals problem-solve and feel heard? When working collaboratively, it is interesting to consider how the collaborators perceive their authorship of the work.

Responsibility to the Group

As Tony's comment above indicates, the notion of responsibility was a through-line for many of the performers. The dynamic between being responsible or "in charge" of one's actions and taking note of what is happening in the group can be overwhelming for many improvisers. In rehearsal I urged the performers to keep an awareness of the group while committing to their own choices of action. Tony talked about the various relationships intrinsic to the performance of improvised work. He felt accountable for the reciprocity of those relationships. "There was so much responsibility all over the place. You're responsible just to yourself, but you're also responsible to the group. And you're also responsible to the audience; and all those levels changed every day, so the performance changed." Holly viewed the rehearsal process as a place where she felt personally responsible for her actions. At some points her creative input felt strenuous, "sometimes going into the rehearsal I knew it was going to be hard work and I knew it was going to be exhausting and I just didn't want to go." The sense that responsibility in performed dance improvisation is overwhelming was a theme that ran throughout the interviews. It is important for me to note here that choice-making in the moment in relation to a group of people is a skill—and just as any skill—it can be honed, focused and refined.

Responsibility to Self

Conversely, some members of the cast found the charge of performing improvisation to be freeing of responsibility, and serve as a kind of study in presence. Eva said, "I didn't have to memorize anything I could just be and that's enough." In performance, Eva felt very connected to the present moment and her everyday self. For

Sue Anne, responsibility to the self took the form of a struggle between the fear that something interesting would not be generated and the “powerful and fulfilling” feeling of arriving at the present moment in performance. “It’s just a fabulous experience to be in that moment and just see where your body goes...and taking off—seeing just a little something that [Tony] might have done and all of a sudden trying that. Ultimately there was no thought really—in the best moments---just letting it happen internally.” Sue Anne’s way of expressing her view on the responsibility to self has much in common with the phenomenological perspective. To trust that the present experience contains all the knowledge one needs has the potential be a very easeful state of being—and one that I believe permeates the audience with a sense of present being.

The notion of responsibility in collaboration and in improvisational dance performance relates to both reciprocity and aesthetic notions of success. As it became clear to the performers that their actions, energetic sensibility, and level of responsiveness affected the other cast members, I found that each dancer took on a renewed sense of responsibility. This sense extended from their own actions to those of the group. Some of the dancers’ sense of responsibility seemed to come from an empathetic impulse, which contributed to a reciprocal group dynamic, while some came from a self-conscious and aesthetic understanding of how actions, shapes, and movement would be viewed. When rehearsing dance improvisation in a group the notion of individual responsibility becomes a critical subject.

Dancers’ Preference for the Use of Collaboration

Many of the dancers articulated opinions on the collaborative process of creating dance work. Richard said, “I personally feel like collaboration is capable of generating

much more profound art than somebody working by themselves.” Holly expressed her dislike of un-collaborative work, “I feel like when I watch pieces I can tell when there was no collaboration, and I don’t find them as satisfying... Especially when I know the dancers I’m like ‘why are you doing that movement, that’s not something that you do.’ ” Despite this general interest in collaboration, many of the dancers voiced their appreciation of working in a more traditional structure. Tony used the example of working with someone with a highly defined aesthetic, “when you have someone who is interested in working within a hierarchical structure, where they’re the ‘boss’ but they happen to be incredibly creative those can be really fulfilling projects.” Eva also noted the efficiency of working as a single choreographer. Overall, the performers spoke of their preference to work in projects that have a clear aesthetic goal or thematic guidelines and use collaboration between the dance maker and dancers. This “middle ground” is where most of the cast aimed to create work and perform it in the future.

I am particularly interested in the opinions of the cast regarding the success of the process for *arrive, create*. The use of collaboration combined with the use of improvisation in performance at times brought the work to an amorphous place. The cast as a whole seemed to find the constant re-defining of the final section of the work to be confusing and creatively draining. Part of this confusion arises from the lack of structure and part from the uncertainty surrounding the roles that each performer had in the collaboration. In future research I would be curious to explore how defining those roles early on in the process might avoid a sense of ambiguity and hence confusion.

Dancers Evolving Definition of Collaboration

The definition of “collaboration” evolved during the process of rehearsing *arrive*, *create*, which was reflected by the cast. For some performers, the collaborative process was a new way of working. Kara said, “I don’t think I necessarily—going into the piece—had an understanding of what collaboration was... I found myself enjoying the setup (of rehearsal) because it was a different kind of engagement of your mind... I like feeling like I could resonate with the context of the material right away.” It took some time for the group to build a collaborative model for rehearsing. Eventually the model for rehearsing became the model for performing the piece. Eva noted, “the performances were basically the same as the rehearsals,” and in both of those spaces she felt like her, “ideas were heard and used as they were intended and if not it was a discourse on how things could be incorporated and used.” This definition of collaboration as a conversation and an inclusion of ideas resonated with other cast members. Tony said, “I think that collaboration has more to do with sharing the conceptual work.” Many of the dancers when interviewed individually came to the realization that collaboration did not always equate to consensus in the group. The rehearsal process and its accompanying conversation likely had a strong impact on this shared definition.

From a phenomenological perspective, the dancers’ definition of collaboration evolved with their engagement in the work. I suggest that the process of *arrive*, *create* informed the collaborating dancers’ perception of the nature and form of collaboration. The above stated understanding of the nature of collaboration as a group process of creating a supporting conceptual network mirrors conversations that were held in the rehearsal process.

Dancers' Perception of Interaction in Performance

One element of the performance that the performers seemed to find universally successful was the interaction with the audience in the first section of the work. Eva said that many people spoke to her about their joy in exploring the space and interacting with the props. Kara articulated my intention for that section very well, "I think that having the space be so interactive with all the different props gave an environment where the audience could be aware of what's happening in a way that's less cryptic."

In my view, this section of the work demands presence of being from the performers and challenges the idea of performance in a tangible way. To share space with audience members, interact with them, and encourage them to engage physically with the environment, requires the dancer to take on a non-traditional role as the host and instigator of engagement. At the performances I felt a palpable sense of enthusiasm shared amongst everyone present. The audience members shared the excitement about the interactivity of the work.

Generosity =Reciprocity: Asking the Audience to Give

As I investigated the notion of generosity, I realized that part of being generous is having a willingness to receive. There is a basic understanding that being generous involves giving to others energetically, emotionally, or materially. However, I found that in my everyday life part of what constitutes true generosity is the ability to take things when they are offered. Taking up a host on an offer of food and drink is often done in the spirit of generosity. It is recognition of the hosts' place and a sharing of wealth. This receiving may be done energetically and emotionally as well; in a generous relationship it is just as generous to receive as it is to give. It was important for my research to get a

sense of what the audience perceived from the work. The act of asking the audience to leave a response to the work allowed for a sense of reciprocity that is central to generosity.

Audience Enjoyment of the Work

I received many positive comments from the audience regarding the experience. One comment from Saturday read, “It was a piece of art and enjoyed it very much. Love the silence dances a lot. Great work.” On Sunday this note was left, “This was unlike any other dance concert I’ve been to. Very thought provoking and intriguing. All components of dance, music, and visual were well combined.” These comments refer to an excitement about the structure of the work, inferring that this way of viewing dance was a wholly new experience. The second comment also indicates a resonance with the unified aesthetic design and the transparency of the space—the exposure of all the production elements. On Friday this concise, but telling comment read, “It was weird. But I get it, awesome!” This comment is raw and honest, seeming to express that the experience was foreign, but that the viewer understood and appreciated the intention for the work. Favorable responses were the most common, leading me to believe that people were excited to be included as participants in the work and, in the spirit of generosity, chose to respond positively. I deduce from these responses that audience members found the performance to be a cohesive and even pleasant aesthetic experience.

Questions about the Role of the Audience

There were also several comments that portrayed a sense of confusion. From Friday one note read, “I liked the performance! Even though the audience was close to the dancers, and there was an inviting message on the screen, I did not feel invited to

participate as a spectator. If the intension was to engage everyone, maybe the message or the invitation method needs to be changed. Thank you!” The language used in this note leads me to believe that this is a viewer with an education in performing arts. Many other viewers of the work verbally relayed this confusion to me with regard to the third section and its open score. The invitation for interaction is very clear in the first section, however that invitation seemed to be revoked once the audience was seated in the round. My intention was to encourage people to understand the experience of viewing the movement as a fundamentally interactive one. I also hoped to encourage people to verbally say what they saw (as depicted in the program sketch.) However the lack of spoken direction seemed to leave audience members in an uncertain state. Another comment from Sunday alluded to some confusion, “I see people watching and waiting, some excited and some wondering.” This comment illustrates that sitting in the round allows the audience to view other audience members. This comment uses a directive from the open score, namely “say what you see,” to express something to me: that some people were lost. The ability for the audience to stay engaged with a constantly shifting work—an ensemble of people who make and dissolve images through improvisation—really relies on each audience member to make choices about what and how to view.

These comments are an indication to me that an improvisation can easily lose focus—and it may take time to re-define that focus. Some audience members have a propensity to view and engage with the ever-changing focus of a group improvisation, others do not. There is also a certain amount of education and experience that allows a more seasoned audience member some insight into the concept of dance work like *arrive*,

create, whereas a newcomer to dance might be ungrounded in their perception of *arrive*, *create*.

Audience Interpretation of Underlying Concepts

Many audience members left behind notes that resonated with the deeper concepts of *arrive, create: a Dance made by Many*. On Friday this note was accompanied with an illustration, “Piano chords or chords of people making snow angels on that furry rug. Lights dim-focus. Two in the circle~ praying mantises at play. The circle—in its power. It draws all into its center even when it is empty. Perhaps even more so when it is empty—we want to fill it.” And on Sunday this comment was offered, “I saw friends playing and demonstrating trust. I saw individuals opening themselves to strangers and sharing moments of confidence and uncertainty. I felt challenged as an audience member to go beyond viewing a performance. Instead I felt I was part of the experience rather than an observer.” Also on Sunday, a list of words was submitted which seemed to be written by three people,

“symmetry
youth
creative motion
beauty
mesh
fusion
experience
elegance
joy
strength
delight
tension
concern”

These three comments—which seem to me more like offerings—portray not only an understanding of the meaning and the tone of the work, they reveal a deeper notion of

phenomenological and care-based ways of being. They also represent an understanding of community building that this work identifies with and a valuing of creativity and the choice-making that is intrinsic to human existence.

There are several methodological assumptions that must be noted as I reflect on and synthesize the data gathered here. One such is that it is relevant and permissible for me to interpret the meaning of these interviews and comments through the lens of my own phenomenological perspective and research interests. Another is that in the interviews with the performers I assume that the main subject of research in *arrive*, *create* is the nature of collaborative work; however, the performers may or may not view this as the central interest in the project. I also assume that the audience's perception of the work shifted because of the interactive nature of the performance and the transparent performance design. Several questions have been generated during the discussion of data that are relevant to the larger field of dance performance: When collaborative methods are used to create work, how clearly can the collaborator's roles be defined and does the group agree on a definition of what constitutes collaboration? When the performance paradigm uses interactivity, what are the most effective ways to communicate to audience the role they are to take in the performance?

CHAPTER 5

REFLECTION AND CONCLUSION

It did not take long for me to process the performance of this work, as I felt like I was reflecting on the experience while in it. However the “success” of the work is something that I am still ruminating on. Luckily no black and white verdict need ever be made on any of these aforementioned matters, and I can allow remnants of my research questions to continue to riddle my thoughts and inform future projects.

The process of directing and performing in this work required both an attention to and a distancing from the subject of the performance. I was at once the chess master and a pawn, though felt at times much more like one or the other. In rehearsals I found myself trying to invite idea sharing, while simultaneously trying to get the group to focus attention and maintain an awareness of the overall composition of the work. The task of performing dance improvisation can be at once overwhelming and self-negating. A dance improviser must make choices while allowing choices to be made by others—finding a balance between the two makes for interesting improvisational performances.

I felt similarly as a director, I was always trying to cultivate a space where everyone could be heard while simultaneously trying to focus the attention of the group. There came a point, one week before the show opened, when I sat down with the cast and explained that my intention was to create a performance with this particular cast because I found them to be interesting dancers and interesting thinkers that could engage an audience in a unique way. This talk was crucial to the success of the work because the group was beginning to lose the focus and cohesion that had been automatic at the

beginning of the process. The sense of freedom of choice was swallowing the group's ability to make clear choices.

This improvisational “mush” seems like an occupational hazard for all dance improvisers. One can only avoid the “mush” by embracing uncertainty—it seems like trying to control an improvisational structure can quickly be the death of it. I had a constant inner discourse between my choreographic want to control and shape the work and my intention to be present with the unknown, which manifested in how I related to the work. However, I can only guess how my interaction with the structure affected the group dynamic.

A discussion of the “success” of the work is tied up in what success means. In terms of research, I find this choreographic and performance process to be very successful. I created a methodology and utilized it, resulting in a work that reflected my research questions, and gathered some interesting data from the participants. It was a very scientific process for a very un-scientific project.

In terms of the performance aesthetic or quality, the project is much harder to deem a success or failure. Each performance was different—and the proximity and interest of the audience affected the performance of the work much more profoundly than I had anticipated. The Friday night showing had the fullest and most invested audience, it was also the night in which the second and third sections of the work seemed the most focused and aesthetically successful. In the Saturday and Sunday showings the first interactive section of the work became more familiar to the performers, and the audience seemed more adventurous. Conversely, the second and third sections of the work seemed to lose focus as the run went on and the audience numbers shrank.

I am more attached to the third section of the work both because it was rehearsed the most, and because it contained the most formal dance performance structure. I wanted to deconstruct the performance paradigm in this work—however I maintained a structure that was recognizable both to audience and myself. It was difficult to be a performer in the work, knowing that I could not control it, even at the times when I experienced it disintegrating. There were successful moments, when the performance “gelled” at each showing. The feedback I received from all participants—audience and performers—was overwhelmingly positive. Most who interacted with *arrive, create* seemed to be excited by the opportunity to participate in the work in an unconventional way, and seemed invested in the production. The overall arch of the work—following the classic build, climax, and release was achieved more fully in earlier runs, such as dress rehearsal and opening night, than later, such as the Sunday matinee. It does seem appropriate, however for such a lived and felt piece of work to be present with its own demise. The fact that the reciprocity of the audience was so central to the success of the work is interesting in itself and speaks to the aim of interaction with the audience.

In conclusion, I find myself less interested in whether or not the project was a success than what lines of inquiry I will continue to follow in my dance career. I know that my interest in dance improvisation in performance will live on—and in a way I feel like it is just beginning to take shape. My interest in unconventional performance venues that challenge the boundary between performer and audience is also being continually informed by my experiences teaching, making, and viewing live performance. And my understanding of collaborative work and all its manifestations is just beginning to be grounded in experience. This project has turned out to be more of a beginning than an

end.

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APPENDIX A
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Is there anything you've been thinking about in relation to the rehearsal and performance of *arrive, create* that you'd like to share before I ask any specific questions?

Do you feel a sense of authorship of your performance body and ideas in the rehearsal process?

How do you currently define collaboration in dance work?

How/ when do you think collaboration was utilized in the process of making and performing *arrive, create*?

In relation to other dance pieces you have rehearsed and performed in, what is your personal preference about the use of collaboration as a way of creating dance works?

In this piece we defined generosity in performance as a shift in the performance paradigm away from a traditional dance presentation model and toward an inclusive, interactive, and more transparent way of presenting dance.

Do you feel *arrive, create* was able to achieve generosity in performance?
what elements seemed most generous to you about the performance?

Do you feel like your sense of "moving identity" was honored doing this work?

Do you think the breaking down hierarchical power structures creates more opportunities for creativity?

When does creativity seem limited by more democratic processes?

APPENDIX B

A SELECTION OF AUDIENCE COMMENTS

Friday December 7, 2012

“Loved the laughter and how alive it was. Interactions are real! Dance work was strong. As a viewer I felt honored to be part of this piece”

“1. Became familiar with the space first: changed my perspective of the center. The center was part of the whole instead of on stage/offstage. 2. Blurred line between improv and fixed movements.”

“It was weird. But I get it, awesome!”

“I liked the performance! Even though the audience was close to the dancers, and there was an inviting message on the screen, I did not feel invited to participate as a spectator. If the intention was to engage everyone, maybe the message or the invitation method needs to be changed. Thank you!”

“Piano chords or chords of people making snow angels on that furry rug. Lights dim-focus. Two in the circle~ praying mantises at play. The circle—in its power. It draws all into its center even when it is empty. Perhaps even more so when it is empty—we want to fill it.”

Saturday December 8, 2012

“symmetry
youth
creative motion
beauty
mesh
fusion
experience
elegance
joy
strength
delight
tension
concern”

“I saw art and imitation and movement that transcended time.”

“It was a piece of art and enjoyed it very much. Love the silence dances a lot. Great work.”

“I saw friends playing and demonstrating trust. I saw individuals opening themselves to strangers and sharing moments of confidence and uncertainty. I felt challenged as an audience member to go beyond viewing a performance. Instead I felt I was part of the experience rather than an observer.”

Sunday December 9, 2012

“This was unlike any other dance concert I’ve been to. Very thought provoking and intriguing. All components of dance, music, and visual were well combined.”

“I saw constant movement and collaboration.”

“I see people watching and waiting, some excited and some wondering.”

APPENDIX C

A SELECTION OF INTERVIEW RESPONSES

Holly

“I feel like working on your project helped me feel confident in my senior project... and it was really interesting reflecting back on how I approached the improvisation aspect of it and how that relates to how I approach everything.”

“That happened by our rehearsals becoming our performance, so setting up our rehearsals as the performance would be, because we did that for a month or two before the performance.”

“I think the whole idea of making new movement every day... eventually I had this huge phrase that I still feel like is mine... the accumulation of all of the things that I had made together.”

“I feel like if you hadn’t set up a structure for collaboration, someone else would have.”

“I don’t think that it’s possible for there not to be a leader in a collaborative experience.”

“I would say a lot of the stuff over the summer didn’t feel collaborative.”

“That whole section didn’t really connect with this collaborative idea, which now I’m glad that it was left behind.”

“I don’t prefer being given material and that’s it. That doesn’t appeal to me at all. It feels really fake to just do something someone else has given me.”

“I also find that collaboration that was as open as your piece was exhausting.”

“I feel like when I watch pieces I can tell when there was no collaboration and I don’t find them as satisfying... Especially when I know the dancers I’m like ‘why are you doing that movement, that’s not something that you do.’ ”

“I felt like how I came into the rehearsal affected how creatively I could approach the rehearsal.”

“Sometimes going into the rehearsal I knew it was going to be hard work and I knew it was going to be exhausting and I just didn’t want to go.”

music “I feel like that was another way to equalize all of us.”

Kara

“During the process I felt like I was thinking a lot about how the structured improvisation to thinking about opening up my awareness in a kinesthetic sense.”

“I feel like my first initial impulse to move is not based on thinking of it as an ensemble, but thinking of it as “this is what I want to do” ... and I felt like I was moving away from that and I felt satisfied with that because I felt like I was leaving more room for different outcomes.”

“I diffidently felt a sense of authorship when you asked us to draw from personal stories.”

“I don’t think I necessarily going into the piece had an understanding of what collaboration was... I found myself enjoying the setup (of rehearsal) because it was a different kind of engagement of your mind... I like feeling like I could resonate with the context of the material right away.”

“I think that having the space be so interactive with all the different props gave an environment where the audience could be aware of what’s happening in a way that’s less cryptic.”

“There’s an attempt to be available to the audience about what is happening.”

Eva

“I think that most people just commented on the interaction... and a lot of people really liked it.”

“I didn’t have to memorize anything I could just be and that’s enough.”

“I think that the performances were basically the same as the rehearsals, so yes I feel like my ideas were heard and used as they were intended and if not it was a discourse on how things could be incorporated and used.”

“A group of people that come together and create something.”

“That whole using dancers movement without calling it a collaboration is different... like a duet I did I credited it as a collaboration, but that doesn’t stop me from using people’s movement.”

“I thinking the breaking down in the power leads to way more choices and I think some people can’t handle that so they stick to their own creativity... keeping it as a hierarchical gives more structure sometimes to rehearsals when it needs to be done quickly.”

Richard

“I’ve thought a little bit about the relationship of sound and environment and the kind of randomness of improvisation and when that overlaps with intentional stuff.”

“I felt a sense of authorship and responsibility for the performance product. I feel like, because it was collaborative, that I was probably my own harshest critic and I contributed my ideas and ultimately that’s what the piece was made of—our collective ideas.”

“I personally feel like collaboration is capable of generating much more profound art than somebody working by themselves.”

“You are both attempting to describe some kind of space with your medium, pitch space energy, literal space, musical space.”

“I felt like there was a lot of collaboration in terms of me offering and getting feedback... what I observed from the other dancers at that time was a kind of disinterest in the actual generative aspect of collaboration and a little bit of more unfocussed play.”

Tony

“The idea of something being material and immaterial at the same time... conceptually we think of dance as being something that only lasts for a certain duration so I think it kind of falls into the past really easily. It’s hard for it to be present ... something about having a score and having a written score brings it into the material in a sense.”

“The duet with [Sue Anne] I felt like I had a lot of responsibility and authorship was mine—I felt like it was mine.”

“The day of the performance I felt like it was mine, that I was responsible... for myself—for what I did, the relationships I built that it was authored or co-authored.”

“ I think that collaboration has more to do with sharing the conceptual work.”

there are different roles people take on

enjoy score initiator—and set work

“I really realized that I like very set scores.”

“It was so open that it was hard to have to re-define myself within it each night.”

felt responsible for the group

having something more set makes it easier to adjust—know what

prefer half way point between set and not set

“If I showed up in a very un-generous place then I think that came into my performance.”
times when the group wasn’t generous with one another so focused on audience not generous toward each other

“There was so much responsibility all over the place you’re responsible just to yourself but you’re also responsible to the group and you’re also responsible to the audience and all those levels changed every day so the performance changed.”

“When you have someone who is interested in working within a hierarchical structure, where they’re the “boss” but they happen to be incredibly creative those can be really fulfilling projects.”

Sue Anne

“What I ultimately wound up doing was totally improv. based on a little suggestion of a pattern.”

“If I came with more than a little bit of a suggestion, one it didn’t happen the way I had thought about so I just kind of let that go and arrived at the moment, the sheer moment.”

“It’s just a fabulous experience to be in that moment and just see where your body goes and taking off—seeing just a little something that [Tony] might have done and all of a sudden trying that our ultimately there was no thought really—in the best moments. Just letting it happen internally.”

“The sensation of that is powerful and fulfilling.”

“It’s a trust—is it going to happen?”

“A lot of stuff comes up. I struggle with perfectionism and trying to be sure, definitely something I’m trying to continually let go of.”

“The best representation of me was being that in the moment in the improv and working to own something created by something else.”

“I’m not a prima ballerina I’m just doing what I’m doing at this age the fact that some older women were touched and maybe even drawn in to think maybe they too could become involved in dance.”

APPENDIX D
IRB EXEMPTION

To: Mary Fitzgerald
PEBE

From: Mark Roosa, Chair
Soc Beh IRB

Date: 10/15/2012

Committee Action: **Exemption Granted**

IRB Action Date: 10/15/2012

IRB Protocol #: 1209008315

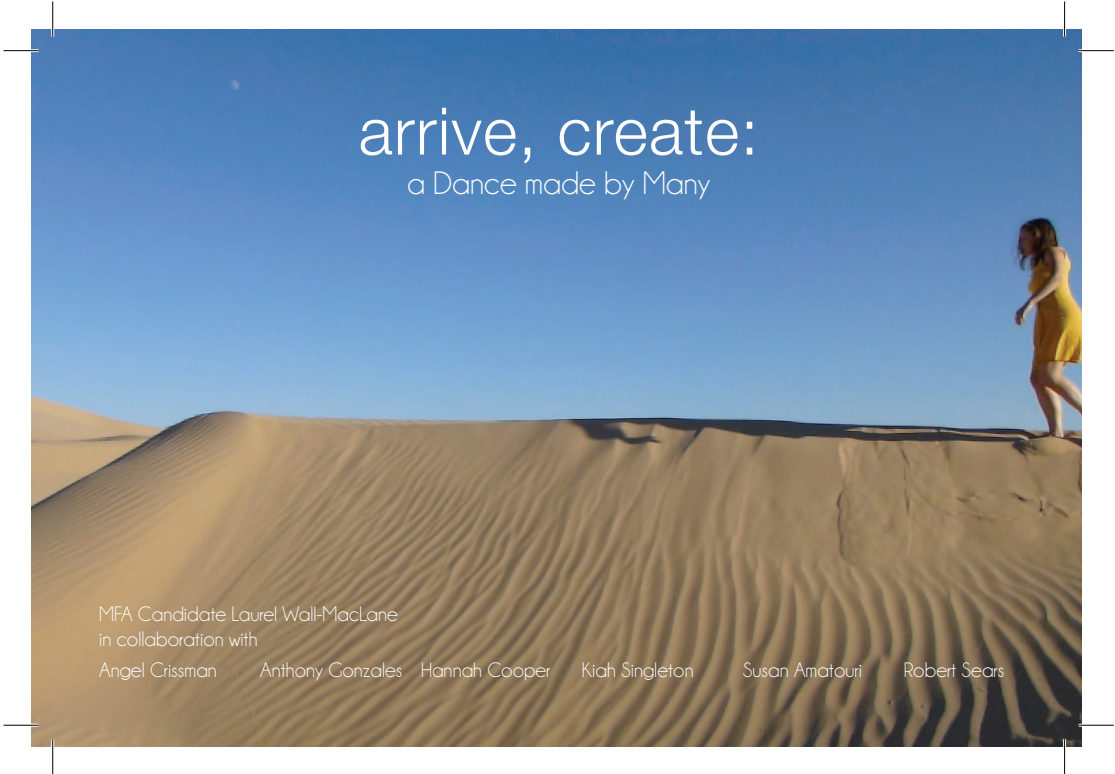
Study Title: MFA Project and Document

The above-referenced protocol is considered exempt after review by the Institutional Review Board pursuant to Federal regulations, 45 CFR Part 46.101(b)(2) .

This part of the federal regulations requires that the information be recorded by investigators in such a manner that subjects cannot be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects. It is necessary that the information obtained not be such that if disclosed outside the research, it could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability, or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation.

You should retain a copy of this letter for your records.

APPENDIX E
POSTCARD



arrive, create:

a Dance made by Many

MFA Candidate Laurel Wall-MacLane
in collaboration with
Angel Crisman Anthony Gonzales Hannah Cooper Kiah Singleton Susan Amatouri Robert Sears



ASU Herberger Institute
FOR DESIGN AND THE ARTS
ARIZONA STATE UNIVERSITY

arrive, create:

a Dance made by Many

Emerging Artists II

Dec. 7-9, 2012

Dance Lab, Nelson Fine Arts Center room 122

December 7, 2012 at 6:30 p.m.
December 8, 2012 at 7:30 p.m.
December 9, 2012 at 2:00 p.m.

Tickets at Galvin Box Office or alturl.com/5gx4z
\$16 General; \$12 Faculty, Staff, Seniors, Groups, Alumni; \$8 Students



Photo: Tim Tumble

APPENDIX F

POSTER



arrive, create:

a Dance made by Many

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in collaboration with

Angel Crissman

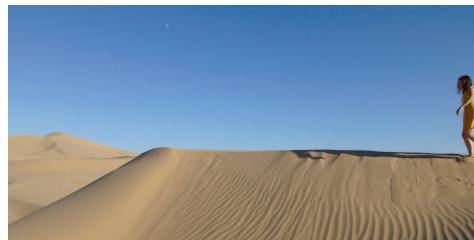
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Susan Amatouri

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School of Dance

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