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## "An Organized Power": A Choreographic Process

Summer Beasley

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"AN ORGANIZED POWER"  
A CHOREOGRAPHIC PROCESS

Summer Beasley

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the Master of Fine Arts in Theatre  
with an emphasis in movement at Lindenwood  
University.

2002

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of  
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Upon the recommendation of the Department of Performing Arts, this thesis is hereby accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of Master of Fine Arts.

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## Prospectus

The concept I am proposing for my MFA thesis is a dance exploring images of peer pressure. I will use approximately six dancers. There will be two main dancers who will perform a duet within the dance. The remaining dancers will move in and out of the duet. The piece will be at least twelve minutes long, but not longer than twenty minutes. The music will be composed by a solo guitarist while choreographing the movement.

The first chapter will discuss choreographer Bill T. Jones and dance technician/choreographer Erick Hawkins. Jones and Hawkins are two choreographers who have inspired my movement and choreography. Bill T. Jones has been a wonderful influence in my work because he uses all body types and theatrical impetuses in his choreography. Erick Hawkins has inspired the movement I use in my choreography. Hawkins' technique is simplistic and

uses the body's own natural movement; however, it takes years to master. I will introduce the selected dancers to the principles of these two inspirational choreographers while also giving them the views and techniques I have developed through my learning process.

The second chapter will discuss the development of the piece. I will ask the dancers to talk about their most unforgettable peer pressure experience. I will then use their experiences to develop images and movement. A dialogue will develop from the dancers' experiences. Selected words will be spoken throughout the choreography that will help the audience to identify with the images made by the movement throughout the dance.

Chapter three will explain the process through a rehearsal journal. The journal will explain how the dancers and I are working and how choreographic decisions are made. Tim Moody will compose the music to accommodate the choreography. He and I will collaborate so that the music composition will adjust to fit the choreography. Since this is part of the

rehearsal process, it will be explained in the rehearsal journal.

Chapter four will talk about the complications and advantages of the process. As a group we will experiment with improvisation and counter balancing. I will also give them movement and ask them to explore it. This experience will help me to further my choreographic skills and explore new movement. The piece will be developed over the semester and will allow the dancers time to develop technique.

Chapter five will be an evaluation given to the dancers. They will be asked to evaluate my choreography and rehearsal process. The dancers will also be asked to evaluate their movement awareness from the beginning through the end of the process.



# Chapter One

## "Moving"

"Our existence is moving our muscles" (Hawkins 28). This statement made by modern dance pioneer Erick Hawkins has had a tremendous impact on my movement as a dancer and choreographer. When I first heard this statement, I thought about it for a couple of days before truly understanding it. A person would not survive on his or her own without involuntary muscles that allow his or her body to function on a daily basis. Movement is a part of our everyday existence. Hawkins' statement gives rise to pedestrian movement in modern dance choreography. Pedestrian movement is movement that is done on a daily basis by a person who has not studied dance.

There are many different ways a person uses movement throughout a day.

One may use movement before getting out of bed by expanding the muscles and body through stretching. This helps to prepare one's body for the day. As the day progresses, movement is used to express emotion from one person to another. The movement of one's body through posture can often tell the story of a person's life and/or personality. A person with a very vertical posture may appear direct and proper. A person who slouches the shoulders may be viewed as humble or weak. Posture and simple movements can be used to inspire a concept for a choreographer.

A concept is an idea or thought that can be developed to create a dance. When an audience member notices pedestrian movement in a dance, one may say any movement can be categorized as modern dance. This may or may not be true depending on how a choreographer develops the movement. A dancer may perform movement on stage that appears to be simple and ordinary, but, in actuality, is the hardest to execute. Walking across the stage is the hardest movement for a dancer to execute. When walking across the stage, dancers may have a tendency to retreat to their "street walk." A person's street walk is the

walk one does in the process of everyday life. When walking on stage, a dancer must walk from his or her center with body alignment always in mind. Walking is deeply instilled into the body and can be very hard for a dancer to change. Once muscles are trained a certain way, it takes time and exercise to retrain the muscles.

Erick Hawkins has been a major influence on my movement career. Isadora Duncan and her ideas of natural dancing influenced Hawkins' movement. Although Hawkins was a predecessor of modern dance, Duncan was the pioneer of modern dance. Like Duncan, Hawkins believes dance should consist of natural movement of the body.

Early in his dance career, Hawkins studied with Martha Graham and George Balanchine. The methodologies of these two are very different, but they both utilize the center of the body. A person's center is where his or her movement originates. The location of a person's center varies from technique to technique, but it is generally in the same area of the body. A person's center can be anywhere from the solar plexus to three inches below the bellybutton and three inches in the middle of the body. Graham teaches a contraction-based modern technique, and

Balanchine teaches a Russian-based ballet technique. Although both techniques concentrate on the center, Graham and Balanchine's techniques put great strain on a dancer's body. The two techniques put a strain on Hawkins' body leaving him with a major injury on his knee and lower back (Brown 9). Both injuries are common among poorly trained and kinetically uneducated dancers. Knee injuries are caused from dancers turning the leg out from the knee joint and not from the hip joint. The knee is a hinge joint and the hip is a ball and socket joint. The ball and socket of the hip allow the leg to rotate side to side without injury to the joint. The hinge joint of the knee does not give way to rotating movement. When a dancer turns out from the knee it causes the knee to torque. This means the knee joint is twisting within itself. Cartilage, ligaments, and tendons are torn and permanently damaged after many years of turning out from the knee. Imbalanced muscles are also common injuries in dancers of all styles. Many injuries of the lower back are due to weak abdominal muscles and the wrong use of the rotator, gluteus maximus, adductor, and abductor muscles. When abdominal muscles are weak, a dancer tends to over-use the lower back muscles causing spasms and severe straining and

cramping of the muscles. Many imbalanced muscles are due to overuse of one particular muscle such as the rotator muscles. These imbalances often cause strain and spasms in the lower back. Both of these injuries can be prevented by correct usage of the muscles and alignment. Balanchine's ballet technique and Graham's modern technique are both very strenuous on the body because both techniques ask the body to defy the natural motion of the skeletal and muscular systems.

It is interesting to note that Hawkins began his dancing career studying under George Balanchine at the School of American Ballet (Dixon, 213). Modern dance was born from ballet; because of this, there are many similarities between the two styles of dance. There are also many differences. Hawkins explains three differences between the two styles of dance. The first is in "how the body feels as it has been awakened to feel in the most completely sensed way, true to its own nature and possibility" (33). The second is the difference between the theoretical aspects of the styles. Balletic movements are registered positions of the body that are made to the fullest extent of the body (Hawkins 33). Modern dance explores the transitions of movement and tries to recognize the total body feeling or total

coenesthesia. Coenesthesia is the "undifferentiated complex of organic sensation forming the essence of our sense of body and bodily condition" (Hawkins, 28). Early exploration of movement in modern dance starting with Isadora Duncan was motivated by coenesthesia (Hawkins 33). The third difference between ballet and modern dance is that ballet technique emphasizes the vertical trunk and allows the extremities to move separately, while modern dance technique emphasizes coenesthesia (Hawkins 33). This difference can also be explained by what Hawkins calls "centered" movement and "excentered" movement (qtd. in Brown 18). "Centered" is movement controlled from the pelvis and "excentered" is movement controlled peripherally (Brown 18). Looking at these three differences one can see that a modern dancer would be contradicting his or her movement by studying ballet technique.

There are many obvious differences between ballet and modern dance an audience member can see just by viewing a performance of each style. The emotion a dancer feels while performing a ballet is not the personal emotion the dancer feels but the emotion of the story's character. An audience member can see how ballet defies the nature of the human body just by

noticing the turn out of the legs and point shoes worn by ballerinas.

Ballet technique is muscle bound. A ballet dancer uses many muscles to hold the legs in the turned out position and to keep the torso held upright while the legs move separately. Many dancers believe a good modern dancer must have good ballet training. Hawkins answers this question by discussing and defining technique. He describes technique as the concrete element a dancer achieves in order to perform technical skills in the theater (Hawkins 31). He uses the example of the traditional Swan Lake ballet to explain this statement. If one wants to perform the traditional Swan Lake ballet, one would study ballet, which would prepare a dancer to perform this traditional work (Hawkins 31). This view of technique leads one to believe that if one wants to perform ballet, he or she would study ballet technique. In the same way, if one wants to perform modern dance, he or she would study modern dance technique.

Many modern dance warm-up techniques developed from the ballet warm-up. For example pliés, tendus, relevés, and sautés all originated in the ballet barre warm-up. If a ballet dancer took a modern dance class, he or she would recognize these steps used in

the warm-up. Hawkins' technique breaks down these basic ballet steps to allow the body to move more efficiently. Pliés are not about the bending of the knees and pulling and pushing of the quadriceps muscles. In Hawkins' technique, the fall and suspension of the pelvis cause the plié. Tendu, in ballet, means "to stretch." A tendu occurs when the foot is stretched to the front, side, or back of the body. The movement of the tendu begins in the center and moves down the leg and out through the toes. In tendus, pliés, and relevés the quadriceps muscles should be relaxed allowing the leg to feel as if it were dangling from the pelvis. The injuries Hawkins had endured led him to question the training he was receiving (Brown 9). It was at this point that he realized what Duncan had meant by natural dancing (Brown 9).

Hawkins became determined to find a way to dance naturally and more efficiently in order to protect his body from further injury (Brown 9). Hawkins found this protection through the study of kinesiology (Brown 10). Kinesiology is the study of the bones and muscles, and how the body moves (Fitt 3). Studying kinesiology allowed Hawkins to discover how to use his muscles more efficiently without exhausting the



muscles. Hawkins' ideas differ from Duncan's in only one aspect. Duncan believed a dancer's center was the solar plexus. Hawkins believed a person's center was the pelvis. Although the two pioneers differed on the location of a dancer's center, both agreed that the center initiates all movement and the rest of the body follows.

Many teachers use images to help students understand what should be going on inside the body. A student may intellectually understand the image and what should be going on inside the body, but it takes time, sometimes years, for a student actually to feel what the image is portraying inside the body. Hawkins uses several images in his teachings.

Hawkins refers to the image, "Tight muscles cannot feel" (69). After studying this technique for many years, I am just beginning to be able to incorporate this image throughout my muscles. This is an example of intellectually understanding an image but not being able to execute it throughout the body. Looking at this point from the biological side makes sense. Hawkins emphasizes the importance of exact knowledge of the human skeleton and the correct placement of the bones in relationship to each other (Brown 14). Hawkins does not discuss the muscular

system because a person does not give instructions to the muscle directly (Brown 15). The neuromuscular system gets the message that the brain desires the bones to move to a new location and the muscles automatically move the bones (Brown 15). Beverly Brown, formerly a member of the Erick Hawkins Dance Company says, "The learning process in the Hawkins dance training is to know the anatomical facts of the body, and then at the moment of moving, to focus the attention clearly into the place in the bones and muscles where the action should occur" (Brown 15).

Hawkins discovered that the most important muscles for support and movement extend deep into the trunk of the body; they are the iliopsoas muscles (Brown 16). The iliopsoas muscle is deep in the pelvis area making it very hard for a dancer to be aware of this muscle. Correct body alignment would be shoulders over the rib cage and the rib cage over the pelvis. I have found that this body alignment is also beneficial in ballet technique. If a dancer has correct body alignment, it is easier for him or her to lift from the appropriate area of the body. Lifting is a term used in dance techniques to align the spine in a vertical position. Hawkins explains that the appropriate place to lift is in the deep front pelvic

muscles or iliopsoas unit (Brown 17). Hawkins helped his students find the correct place to lift by using this image: "Imagine a person suspended in a canvas seat that has two holes for the legs, a swing-like apparatus, such as one would have for an infant; the feet are touching the ground but the weight of your body is supported at the pelvis" (Brown 17).

Breath is a large part of movement. If one does not breathe, oxygen does not get to the muscles in order for them to work properly, causing them to become tight and the movement bounded. A dancer's knowledge of free flow movement and bound flow movement can help him or her better understand the use of breath with dance.

"Free flow movement is ever moving, ever active, quick shifts of weight, joyous, and unleashed spirit that is life-giving and is right" is how Hawkins describes free flow and bound flow movement (123). Bound flow occurs when the body is constricted and unable to move naturally. Free flow movement is just like breathing. This is why in order to have true free flowing movement one must use breath with the movement. In theory, one does not use percussive or staccato breath with sustained movement. Although it may be interesting, it is not natural. The breath

helps make the movement free and natural. Hawkins' ideas of free flow and bound flow movement are influenced by Isadora Duncan's philosophy of allowing the body's movement to be natural and without strain. An excellent example of this is something I have picked up along the way in several dance technique classes. Allowing the bones to serve their purpose by stacking each bone on top of the other will balance the body naturally without exhausting the muscles. I like to use the image of stacking poles. If a person gets them right on top of each other, the poles will balance on their own. The slightest bit of misplacement will send the poles leaning to one side and falling. Hawkins describes this as a bricklayer's plumb line (Brown 18). Finding the correctly centered plumb line of the whole body, one can find the place where there is the least struggle to stay vertical (Brown 18). When the body is learning to balance, muscles may be used to keep the body in correct alignment.

Body awareness and alignment should be taken full advantage of in making movement easier to perform and view. In Hawkins' technique the pelvis initiates all the movement and the arms, legs, and head are like tassels reacting to the movement of the pelvis (33).

Another good example of allowing the body to move naturally is the concept that all movement originates from the center allowing the rest of the body to follow. When movement comes from the center, one does not use as much energy or muscle to complete a movement. Many dancers use the image of an energy ball originating from the center. Once the movement has been initiated from the center it moves like a ball of energy flowing through the body and out the extremities and reaching past the head, fingertips, and toes. This ball of energy helps to articulate movement and sends energy through the body and out to the audience.

I learned how to use my breath while dancing and how to move from my center around the same period of time, literally within days of each other. Hawkins technique helped me to broaden the movement from my center and allow it to travel through the whole body and out in the space surrounding me. His technique has also helped my movement become fluid and connected.

Although Hawkins technique is the base influence of my movement, many other teachers have had an influence on me. Three of these teachers have studied Hawkins technique. There is a significant difference

in the way each of them describes images. There are also different images used by each of the teachers. Although these teachers have been trained in Hawkins technique and it is the base of their movement (influence), they have used Hawkins' philosophy to explore and find their own philosophy of movement. Having teachers who teach Hawkins-based classes, but with different ideas and images, has allowed me to discover movement in different ways and to discover new movement within my body.

Erick Hawkins articulated a philosophy of movement that has changed dance forever. He has made dance and the teaching of dance a mind-skilled task on a kinetic level. Dancers now learn how to use their muscles and bone structure more efficiently. It is extremely important for students of dance to understand the body and how it works physiologically and kinetically.

While learning Hawkins' technique and taking dance technique classes from a number of other dancers, I have found my own style of movement. This style is most comfortable to my body and the build of my body. The way my body moves derived from Hawkins' technique and his thoughts of pelvic initiation. I teach my students to move from their centers and also

to feel the head and tail connection. I have studied the head and tail connection in several dance classes with several different teachers. This connection of the head and tail is the feeling of the top of the head and the tailbone being connected to the same spine and the way they move in relationship to each other. The connection can be explained by showing a contraction of the torso to the front in a standing parallel position. As the dancer is standing, he or she should feel the vertical alignment of the spine. The contraction begins with the naval going towards the spine and the top of the head and tailbone moving closer together to put the torso in the shape of a C. The use of a demi plie (a bend of the knees with the heels still on the floor) allows the pelvis more mobility, therefore allowing the shoulders to stay directly over the pelvis and the C-curve to be larger. Many times a dancer will miss the head and tail connection because he or she does not allow the tailbone to curve under making the lower part of the C. The same connection pertains to the straightening of the spine. The head and tail should be reaching away from each other while the spine is going back to vertical.

The head and tail connection is very beneficial when a dancer moves quickly from a standing position towards the floor or from the floor to a standing position. It has been my experience that it is easier for shorter dancers to move to and from the floor more quickly than it is for taller dancers. The taller the dancer the more he or she needs to feel the head and tail connection to move quickly to and from the floor. Taller dancers often complain that it is harder for them to move quickly because of their longer limbs and torsos. I always argue that longer limbs and torsos are irrelevant to moving quickly. My philosophy is that the more one expands the body the longer and bigger it appears--just as the more one condenses the body, the smaller it looks and the easier it is to move quickly.

Movement must be natural and organic to my body for me to feel comfortable with the choreography. In the process of choreographing, one may find a style of movement that compliments his or her body. Inventing movement that is natural to the body and unique can be challenging. The invention of movement falls under the first function of art. I have experimented with different ways of moving my body, but I always come back to the same original starting place, breath and



center. Breath allows the muscles to relax, therefore using less energy to move. As Hawkins says, "...the body will do what is needed without strain" (126). When choreographing I allow movement to originate from my center. Although the pelvis is near the center of the body, initiating movement from the pelvis is different than initiating from the center. Movement can originate from the center without the pelvis moving. It is natural for the body to release when the breath is exhaled and to expand when the breath is inhaled. Every time I choreograph a piece using these guidelines, the dancers walk away with a better sense and understanding of the movement.

Many people ask what modern dance conveys. A majority of the audience wants to know what the choreography is about. The audience member does not want to make a decision based on his or her own feelings, thus missing the whole concept behind modern dance.

Isadora Duncan's belief that dances did not have to have a story but that dance could be an emanation of the soul and emotions influenced Hawkins' choreography (Humphrey 15). Hawkins expands on this idea by discussing the first and second functions of art.

In Hawkins' book he explains the two functions of art and relates them to dance. The first function refers to movement for movement's sake. This applies when the movement is not coming from a certain image or feeling, but from the body experiencing movement through the space. The first function of art in dance refers to the technical aspect of dance and how the body moves. It consists of all the basic movements and steps in their basic form. When choreographing, in the first function of art, the dancer is moving just to feel the mechanics of how the body moves. Hawkins defines the first function: "Movement in all its living mystery is the principal material in the art of dance in its first function, just as colors and shapes are in painting, or sounds are in music" (34).

The second function of art is slightly more complex than the first function. The second function is what a choreographer uses to convey what he wants the audience to feel. Hawkins describes this as, "the use of wondrous primary material, movement, to convey extra ideas or aspects of human experience or knowledge other than the movement in and for its own sake" (34). This is the function that tends to inspire my choreography. I have found it easier to choreograph a piece that has true human feeling than

one that is choreographed for the sake of movement. It is easier for one to choreograph when he or she has felt the feeling that is being conveyed. In everyday life every time the body moves there is a reason for the movement. A head turns when one wants to look at something or when one hears an unfamiliar noise. If the body itches a hand moves to scratch. There is a reason behind our posture and why sometimes it is correct and sometimes it is slouchy.

The process of creating "An Organized Power" has helped me define a choreographic process that is natural to me. I approached "An Organized Power" in a way that made me feel most comfortable. It took a few times of listening to the stories for me to become inspired with movement, but once the feelings set into my body, the movement development began. There were a few times I would begin rehearsal without any movement prepared for the dancers. I avoided preparing not due to laziness; I did it to be spontaneous. There were many times I would spend hours working on movement and walk out of the studio with no choreography. Some of my most interesting movement phrases have sprouted off the top of my head. After I have the movement phrase, it can then be manipulated.

Choreography is a hard thing to research. Of course there are many books on choreography and how to make a good dance. The only problem is that not all of the same concepts work for all people. It has been helpful for me to read and study some of these books while others were not so helpful. A lot of research in choreography comes from one's own trial and error process. By trying different techniques, I have discovered that manipulating phrases of movement and working without music is what works best. After I have a few phrases of movement in place, I try to locate music that gives me the same feel as the movement. I prefer to have a musician compose the music to the movement. In the case of "An Organized Power" the musician who composed the music never saw the dancers doing the movement until the night of the performance. I explained to him what the movement was about and asked him to incorporate his feelings into the music. He also estimated the length between tempo changes.

Once the music was completed, the dancers and I sat down and just listened to the music. We listened once and then put the movement to the music. This was a wonderful and interesting process for me but a slight burden, I think, for the dancers. Their lack

of experience made it difficult for them to change accents and timing.

There is no one or correct way to choreograph. The way a person choreographs depends on his or her personal preference and what inspires him or her. Some choreographers begin with a piece of music and then choreograph movement to the music (I believe this forces the movement to express the music and not the true feeling of the movement). I agree partially with Erick Hawkins that new choreography should have new music. Hawkins says that if a choreographer creates a dance to old music the dance is old (748). A composer, who composes a score based on a score already written, has not used his own creativity to compose the music. Music can be a big part of conveying the choreographer's idea to the audience. Music helps to set the mood of the dance. Other choreographers begin with an equation and then develop the movement.

There are also choreographers who begin with an image or concept and then develop movement based on their image or concept. They then choose music and put the choreography to the music. There are some choreographers who choreograph the movement then have music composed to fit their movement.

The development of movement is what makes choreography interesting. There are several ways to develop movement. My favorite and most interesting way of developing movement is to do a particular phrase as slowly as possible and then again as fast as my body can move. When the phrase is done as fast as the body can move, I sometimes find my body is moving differently than in the original phrasing. When the phrase is done as slowly as possible, I can find little holes in the movement where it feels appropriate for my body to move in a different direction than the phrase was originally choreographed. Movement phrases may also be developed by changing the direction of the phrase; exploring the dynamics, timing, or rhythmic pattern; changing levels throughout the phrase; reversing the phrase as a whole or piece by piece, and changing spatial patterns, by repetition. There are many different ways to develop movement. Some choreographers stick to the same way of developing, while others choose different methods for different choreography.

Images are used not only by the choreographer to develop choreography, but also by the dancer to develop emotion. The dancer uses images to expand the body's movement and to give emotion to the movement.

When a dancer uses an image with movement it allows the dancer to connect the movement with an emotion within the body.

Bill T. Jones is a modern dance choreographer and dancer. His choreography has been an inspiration to me time and time again. Jones is the founder of the Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Dance Company. He uses his choreography to share his life experiences. Like Jones, I want to use choreography to open society's eyes to experiences and issues it may otherwise overlook.

When looking at a person's choreography one can make a good assumption regarding his or her view of society. "Whenever I stand onstage--whenever a work of mine is up in front of an audience--I'm offering this thing that crashes or slips into the world" (Jones 132). A majority of Bill T. Jones' choreography gives the audience an illusion to take in and interpret. In his book *Last Night on Earth*, Jones says, "[I] wrestled with the audience's expectations, wrestled with the fact that I was a composite of preconceptions, biases, and fantasies--a mere projection. I believe that by talking honestly about my life and my feelings, I was saying no to illusion and expectation" (138).

Bill T. Jones' early choreography was inspired by his childhood. He was able to express his childhood through his movement. He says he was "performing to be using the body, the mind, and memory to connect with an assembly of people" (Jones 138). Movement allows Jones access to new levels of emotion and meaning (Jones 141).

Reading a book can make a person feel. The feeling may be happy, sad, angry, excited, or any other sort of emotion. Just as reading a book can make a person feel, Jones' choreography makes me feel. His choreography arouses emotions and feelings that can be hard to define at that very moment. These feelings are difficult to define sometimes because his choreography deals with situations a person may deal with on a daily basis and, therefore, may take for granted. This is a strength I hope to achieve during my choreographic career and one I may have come close to in creating "An Organized Power."

There have been many pioneers of modern dance but Erick Hawkins and Bill T. Jones have had the greatest influence on my movement and choreography. The following chapters will explain the process of choreographing "An Organized Power."



## Chapter Two

### "Experiences"

"An Organized Power" is about peer pressure and how it affects the way we live our lives. The choreography for this dance was inspired by the personal experiences the dancers shared with me. This chapter explains the stories which are based on personal interviews with the dancers, how the stories inspired the movements, and the concepts of the choreography. There are many concepts within the choreography that symbolize more than one dancer's story. This choreography is based on the peer pressure experiences of several different people. This gives the concepts within the choreography more than one perspective and movements more than one image behind them. The feelings each dancer has as an

individual allows the movements to have different interpretations.

I did not ask the dancers immediately to share their experiences. I waited a few rehearsals and allowed them to become more comfortable with each other. I let the dancers know one rehearsal in advance that the next time we met I would ask them to share their experiences. This allowed them time to think about what really affected their lives. The question I posed to them was "What about society has changed the way you live your life?"

At the next rehearsal I reminded them to think about what they were going to share and to be prepared to talk near the end of rehearsal. One dancer asked if he or she had to share his or her story with everyone. When this question was brought to my attention, I realized it might create a major concern, and that some dancers may change their minds about what they were going to share. The answer to the question was, "Yes." Receiving this answer, the dancer looked at me and said, "Okay," then walked away. I explained to the dancers that sharing was not mandatory. If they did not feel comfortable talking to the rest of the group, they did not have to share anything. I did explain to the dancers that sharing

experiences would make it easier to understand the meaning behind the choreography. A dancer must know the meaning or feeling behind the movement in order to convey this meaning or feeling to the audience. If the dancer does not know the passion behind the dance, he or she cannot expect the audience to feel the passion.

When there was about an hour left in rehearsal, I asked everyone to sit in a circle. I could see by the looks on their faces that they were not thrilled with what was about to happen. I asked the dancers for permission to tape the stories using a video camera. I promised not to record faces and never to allow anyone to listen to the video. I also assured the dancers I would not use names in this chapter. All the dancers granted permission, and we were ready to begin.

By the end, there was an hour of information I had to organize. With so much information, I knew I would have to choose small portions of each story to develop movement. I began listening to the video over and over. I wrote down words that caught my attention or that stood out from the rest. I then had to decide how I was going to approach the choreography and dialogue. I was not worried about the choreography.

The dialogue was another issue. I wrote several short phrases, but they all seemed too long. The dialogue and some of the movements in this piece have very literal meanings. I wanted to get my point across without being too literal. After wrestling with these matters, I decided that it did not matter if the movement and dialogue were too literal. It does not matter if something is "in your face material" and someone gets offended. The stories the dancers shared with me were definitely confrontational, so I decided not to scale them down and did not worry about offending the audience. Performing arts are where people can express their feelings.

I could tell no one wanted to be the first to speak so I volunteered to go first. If I was asking them to share a personal experience with people they barely knew, I should share a personal experience as well.

My personal issue with society is who dictates how a woman should physically look. Ever since I was in junior high school, I have battled a weight problem. I have never physically been over weight by more than five pounds; however, I have a mother who is extremely overweight. Not only have I been cautious about my weight because of my mother, but also since I

am a dancer, I look at myself almost everyday in a mirror with only a leotard and tights on my body. I would page through magazines and see all of these very thin and beautiful women. I had friends who could eat anything they wanted and not gain a pound. I, on the other hand, only had to look at the dessert table to gain five pounds. Over the years, I struggled with depression and bulimia. I felt I must look a certain way to please myself, but I was really trying to please society. I allowed society to take over my life, what I thought about myself, and how I should live my life. Growing up, I was never taught differently. No one told me the models in the magazine were not average people or that photographers used airbrushes and computers to hide cellulite and pimples. Although I know these things now, I still have a problem with how my body looks. This is how I allowed society to affect me.

In order to express these feelings, I used movement that was sustained and had an inward focus. Sustained movement has no beginning and no end. It is generally done in a slow tempo. The sustained movement symbolized the slow and painful process of depression. Like sustained movement, depression may feel like it has no end. Contractions and the

extremities reaching out and pulling back into the torso depict the inward focus. For example, when the stomach is contracted the naval goes toward the spine.

The first brave dancer spoke out, and I think everyone was stunned. I will call this dancer "Dancer #1." Sex is something everyone experiences. Some people experience it as a bond between two people while others view it as an act that is expected of women. Society teaches both ways. "Dancer #1" was taught that sex was an act and it was expected of her. Her boyfriend raped her when she was fifteen years old. She had invited the boyfriend over to her house. As they were making out, he decided he was going to have sex with her whether she wanted to or not. She finally got the courage to tell a friend who replied; "You invited him over, didn't you?" "Dancer #1" became confused. She was taught that just because an individual was making out, this did not necessarily mean she had to have sex. This lesson taught her differently. After this experience, she thought if she dated someone and the relationship reached the make out point, the boy expected sex and would take it whether she wanted him to or not. She began to give sex so no one could take it from her. Her peers told her this rape was her fault and that what her

boyfriend did was acceptable. This experience affects her still today.

When I listened to "Dancer #1's" story, her voice was soft and she used many deep breaths within her speech. I could also hear the anger in her voice. The movement inspired by "Dancer #1's" story was timid and explosive. The timid movement was small and slowed down as if the dancer was afraid to do the movement. The explosive movement generally came immediately after the small movement with the body releasing at the end. The release was to convey a feeling of exhaustion. Her giving sex away even though it was not what she wanted caused the explosion. I felt as if she were throwing sex into the faces of others.

The next dancer I will call "Dancer #2." "Dancer #2" took a big risk talking about her experience, abortion. Since this is such a controversial issue, she took a risk of having the rest of the dancers judging her. She confided in a good friend and her boyfriend to help her make the decision. Her friend told her several times the abortion was the best thing to do and that she needed to think about her future. "Dancer #2" said she never really thought the whole thing through herself. This was a major decision that

would affect the rest of her life. Her boyfriend worried about what people would think since they were not married. She felt she had not made the decision, but allowed other people to make the decision for her. "Dancer #2" took a job working with children after making her decision. She admits to not knowing whether she would have made the same decision or not. She does wish she had made the decision based on what she wanted and not what the people around her wanted.

The visual I had of "Dancer #2's" story was one of confusion. I chose to use confusion in two ways. The first was an angry confusion. I gave the dancers five counts to throw their bodies in various directions using percussive movement. Percussive movement is sharp and quick. The second visual of confusion was at the end of the dance. I gave all the dancers the same choreography and told them to decide where, within that movement, they would start. Then they partnered with each other and decided how fast or slow they would go together. When it was all danced at the same time it was very confusing from the audience's perspective. While watching this part, the audience's focus gets pulled back and forth across the stage and almost confuses them over where to look.



There was quite a bit of silence before "Dancer #3" spoke up. "Dancer #3's" story really established what I was looking for. She felt she could not be herself. I have found from just talking to a small group of friends that most people feel they cannot be themselves. Society expects people to live their lives a certain way. If one's lifestyle does not conform to what society thinks is acceptable, one is not encouraged to be an individual. "Dancer #3's" family made this decision for her. Her older siblings were not what her parents thought of as ideal children. Her sister became pregnant when she was a senior in high school, and her brother was into drugs. "Dancer #3" was the one child who was going to "do well." Growing up, she knew the pressure and expectations her parents put on her. She explored society with her peers just like every average teenager, but she did not explore society the way she felt she should. She was afraid to cut her hair, wondering what people would think. She was afraid that others would not know her as the same person with her hair cut short. She asked herself, "That's myself but is that how myself is supposed to be?" She based her decisions on who she thought would be disappointed by her decisions. At this point, someone asked

"Dancer #3" a question. This was the first time there was any indication the other dancers were listening. The question seemed to break the ice between everyone. The question was, "How do you decide what is good or bad?" "Dancer #3's" reply was "However my parents or authority figures looked at it. Generally, all society looks at it as either good or bad and that's how I decide what is good or bad for me" (Dancers). I think the answer stunned everyone. Every person in the room was a product of his or her society. We all have to make the decision of whether or not we are going to allow society to control our lives and how we are going to behave and believe. We all must decide if we are going to work at fitting into society or live as individuals.

There were many places within the dance where one dancer would control the movement of another dancer. These controlling movements were inspired by "Dancer #3's" story. There was also a part toward the end where a number of dancers were improvising. The structure of the improvisation was based on negative space and penny pinching. Negative space is any space that is not occupied by a person's body. When using a person's negative space, it is almost as if one is hoarding that person's space. Penny pinching occurs

when a dancer is always in contact with another person as if a penny were between the two bodies. While keeping the penny in contact between the two bodies, the control over the movement switches back and forth between the two people. When these two structures of improvisation were used together in a group of eight dancers, every movement was initiated by another movement, giving the image of society controlling a person's life.

Fitting into a society was "Dancer #4's" dilemma. Interestingly enough, this story was similar to the previous two. How does one become an individual and not allow society to control a person's decisions? "Dancer #4" did not fit in with his family. He was the only member of the family without the talent to sing, dance, play a sport, or play a musical instrument. His looks were not as attractive as other members of his family, and he was built smaller than the rest of the family. This "not fitting in" followed "Dancer #4" into his first couple of years in college. "Dancer #4" became a member of a national black organization, but found himself in theater rehearsals rather than spending time with other members of this organization. He was looked down upon and accused of not being loyal to the organization or

to his race. "Dancer #4" had made a realization that he loved theater and that is where he wanted to spend his time. He broke away from the norm of his society and what was expected. He was disrespected for following his dream and what he loved to do. The people of the organization accused "Dancer #4" of thinking he was better than the organization. The organization made life harder for "Dancer #4." He had to live not only with the discrimination of people around him, but also with the discrimination of the people in his organization. "Dancer #4" explains his experience: "People are constantly pushing you into the direction that they think you should go. The way they feel you should take on account of their upbringing, on account of their experiences" (Dancers). "Dancer #4" stood up to society and took control over his life.

"Dancer #4's" story inspired the beginning of the piece with the dancers walking directly across the stage. There were other concepts within the choreography that had the image of his story behind it, such as the structural improvisation and the slow sustained movement with an inward focus. The image of the inward focus and sustained movement created the feeling of being the "outcast" of society. The

directness of the walks at the beginning is parallel to the directness in his voice at the end of his story.

"Dancer #5" shared a story about control. When she was four years old her parents took control of her future. She was told that no matter what, she would go to college. Her parents told her, "It does not matter where; you have to go" (Dancers). Her sister was not what her parents thought of as an ideal child, so they pinned all their hopes on "Dancer #5." On top of the pressure from her parents, she lived in a competitive community. "Dancer #5" excelled at everything she tried. Living in a competitive community pushed her to do everything anyone told her she could not. She does not go back to visit the community due to her fear of this competitiveness. She is afraid to find out she is not doing as well as she should be. "Dancer #5" is not satisfied with anything that is average. She describes her whole life as "Either you can't--it's impossible, or you have to, you will be successful" (Dancers). The community she grew up in is a small part of a larger society. Society wants to encourage us to be the best we can, but what happens when that is not good enough? What happens when people expect more than what one can

give them? "Dancer #5" deals with the fight of competition and striving to be the best at everything everyday. She feels there is no space to let go and be her own person. Competition is what she knows; it is how she has lived her whole life. Socially, she is accused of trying too hard and being snobby. Sometimes she is so afraid of doing right or wrong that she does not want to be around people.

"Dancer #5's" story brings out the smallest movements of the choreography. Her story gave the feeling of her being the least important person in her life and the lives around her. Her life was controlled from day one just as the very first movement of the piece was one dancer being controlled by the other dancer. The bodies thrown in various directions, along with the confusion at the end of the dance, showed the confusion "Dancer #5" felt inside about how to act around other people.

"Dancer #6" was a young child when his parents thought he might be a gifted child. His parents had him taking tests most of his childhood. They were excited because they thought their child was a genius. They also created a structure for his life, putting him in every gifted program they could find. He would correct his parents on the names of insects. His

immediate family thought this was great, but no one else ever talked to him. As he got older and started school, the other kids began to notice that "Dancer #6" was being excused from class to do special projects. The other kids assumed he knew everything and would ask him questions, expecting correct answers. Since he was only in elementary school "Dancer #6" did not know all the answers, so he would make them up. He felt he should know the answers and felt badly when he did not. As he got older, there came a point when he closed the door on his parents and school. He wanted to live his life in a way that would make him happy. His parents had an idea of how his life should turn out based on what they were taught by society. Their structure was crushed when he rebelled and stopped reading, paying attention in class, and studying. The pressure he had from his family and school pushed him in another direction.

The control "Dancer #6's" parents took over his life as a child is the control seen from one dancer to another in the penny pinching improvisation. There were a few places in the dance where the dancers were given movement and asked to do it as fast as they could. The frantic look of this fast movement symbolized the feeling "Dancer #6" finally came to

before he broke free from the idea his parents had for his life.

Religion is a touchy subject for many people. Man has tried to help people understand and give them something to believe in by organizing religion. Organized religion tells society what we should believe and what is right. I was glad to hear the story "Dancer #7" shared with us. Faith played a big part in "Dancer #7's" life. She attended a private Catholic girl's school that taught organized religion. They taught her everything they knew from the Bible, but they did not have answers to her questions. She rebelled and started reading about other religions, looking for the truth. The books answered some of her questions, but she had still more. She was curious about people with a lot of faith, wondering where their faith came from. She wanted something to believe in, something positive to base her life around. As humans we are looking for something or someone to answer all of our questions. Religion, in any form, gives us something to believe in and something to base our lives on. Organized religion forced her to look beyond society for what would make her happy. She said, "It doesn't matter what faith



you are, as long as you have that faith and it keeps you positive" (Dancers).

There were many moments in the choreography where a dancer had to have faith in another dancer to catch or lift him or her. This image refers to the faith in "Dancer #7's" story. Like many of the other stories, this story is based on confusion. She was confused as to which religion to believe, which left "Dancer #7" feeling alone. There was a short solo in the dance that gave the audience an illustration of being alone, confused, and trying to figure out where life might be taking an individual.

There were two dancers who did not share their stories. One did not share simply because she was not at that rehearsal. I tried to make it a rehearsal everyone could attend, but if I waited for that there would not be much time left to choreograph. I did not make this dancer share a story. I did not feel it was fair that the other dancers had to share their stories with everyone else in the group and this dancer did not. I knew I could ask her to share her story with everyone, but that would also not be fair because she did not get to hear the other stories. I had more than enough material and decided I did not need the extra story.

The second dancer waited until everyone spoke and then said he did not want to share anything because he was still dealing with the problem. He did give me a word to use. The word was "selfishness." I respected the fact he did not want to say anything but was also glad he wanted to help out by giving a word to describe his situation.

There were two parts of the choreography that referred to all of the dancers' stories. The first one was a duet with one dancer pushing and yelling "say it" at the other dancer. After a few pushes and a couple pushes to the floor, the dancer being pushed hugs the dancer doing the yelling and pushing. At one point in every story the dancers felt as if society was pushing them. Instead of running away from society, they ran into what society wants. The second part was when all the dancers ran downstage throwing their arms forward and yelling, "Shove it." At one point, whether it was at the time of their peer pressure story or later in life, all the dancers came to a point where they no longer cared what society wanted from them.

In the process of choreographing the movement, I found myself using sustained and percussive movements more than the other three qualities, swinging,

vibrating, and suspending. I did not want to use only two of the five qualities. I wanted the choreography to be dynamically parallel to the lives of the dancers. The video recording of the voices was useful not only in the beginning of the choreographic process, but also at the end when I needed a little more inspiration. After a couple of weeks of not listening to the video, I found it beneficial to go back and listen again. I would clear my mind and find new feelings which would give me different movement qualities. I was then able to make decisions on what movements provoked the most feelings in me. This helped to make the choreography more dynamic.

## Chapter Three

### "Rehearsal Journal"

This chapter is a rehearsal journal of "An Organized Power." The journal covers everything from the audition to the last performance. Keeping the journal let me go back and really analyze the rehearsal process. It was most beneficial to write in the journal immediately after a rehearsal while thoughts were still fresh in my mind. Rehearsal can be frustrating not only for the dancer but also for the choreographer. I was able to release my frustrations in writing rather than in rehearsal. The best thing about keeping the journal was that I could document things that did work and did not work for future reference.

1-31-01

The first part of the rehearsal process is the audition. At the beginning of my search, I was looking for experienced dancers and pedestrian movers. As I watched the audition I focused my attention on the more experienced movers. I was looking for people who were really trying to move like me. There were dancers trying to figure out how to move the way I was moving. I definitely want to use two males but was unsure of how many females. There is another audition on Friday. This audition may change my mind back to what I wanted originally.

2-7-01

The first rehearsal went great. I taught them a little choreography and talked about where movement originates in the body. I was able to expose them to my movement and how I like to move and image things.

2-10-01

The second rehearsal was more successful than I could ever imagine. I gave them a few ideas of partnering, and they took off with ideas. They were so willing to explore each other's weight. I used the last part of the rehearsal to share experiences. I informed them

at the beginning of rehearsal to think of what they wanted to share. Dancer #1 asked if they would have to share the experience with the rest of the dancers. My answer was "No, but I do think if you are doing movement, you should know why you are doing that movement." When the time came to share, it took a moment for them to open up. I could tell it was very hard for everyone. I recorded the conversation so I could go back later and really digest the material for movement. I'm not quite sure what kind of experiences I expected, but I know I did not expect what I got. I was overwhelmed by what they were willing to share with me. I was feeling a mix of emotions. I felt sympathy for them, but I was also happy about all of the information I was receiving for this project.

2-11-01

Words from the experiences.

Positive	Holding in
Feelings	15
Telling	The right way
The good way	Friends
Expectations	Fitting in
Small	Taking
Talking	Organizations
Where do I fit in?	Family
Who am I?	Making out
Decisions	Sex
Selfishness	College
School	Immerse

Competition  
 Attitude  
 Options  
 Community  
 People  
 Best friends  
 The best  
 Laughing  
 Average  
 Trying  
 Hiding  
 Everyday  
 Little  
 Kids  
 Youth  
 Parents  
 Knowledge  
 Assumption  
 Say it  
 Information

Shut off  
 Is it me?  
 Changes  
 Stop  
 Enjoyment  
 God  
 Truth  
 The story  
 Rebelling  
 Religion  
 Questions  
 Curiosity  
 The base  
 Beliefs  
 Strength  
 Faith  
 Alone  
 Communication  
 Perspective

2-17-01

This is the first time I have worked with dancers who are this inexperienced. I have found that I can manipulate them, but they do not understand my images or terminology, and/or they have a lack of dedication. I think it is hard for them to understand the process I am using. I am choreographing chunks of material then putting the chunks together. Today's rehearsal went slowly but was very productive. I knew what I wanted, but ideas kept popping into my head. I think it was confusing some dancers when I had to change things. As a dancer, one must be able to learn and adapt to choreography quickly. A choreographer should try to change movement before it gets into the

dancer's muscle memory. I am having a slight problem with the dialogue. I'm not sure there will actually be dialogue or just random words with movement images. I have a page full of words. I'm not sure they fit together in any way. I may have them sound the words out at various tempos.

2-19-01

As I am sitting here looking at these words and phrases wondering how I am going to use them, an idea came into my head. All the words that are repeated on the tape are words that refer to society.

2-21-01

I gave Cleve and Katie dialogue along with movement. It worked perfectly. Improvisation helped them develop the dialogue. This helped me because I could see what worked and what did not. Katie began with a four-word phrase. I thought it was too long, so I cut it to one word. I started a trio with Mandi, Steve, and Michelle H. It took a while for us to figure out how to proceed, but I figured it out after a couple of tries. When it comes to improvisation with words or lifts the dancers are great, but movement is another story. They are a little shy to develop and explore



the movement. I have many sections or phrases, but nothing put together. I'm getting nervous that the phrases are not going to fit together. I think I want different sounds made by the pronunciation of the words. Steve and Cleve are going to need a lot more direction as far as the movement goes. I tell them what to think of while moving and give them images. Either they don't understand what I am saying, or they choose not to understand. I think they choose not to understand. I gave Deby and Laura some movement. Deby is very good at mimicking movement. She also asks a lot of questions to make sure she knows exactly how to do the movement. Laura moves very well, but she does not move from her center. I know she will eventually figure it out because she is already very close. Michelle H. has a little bit of a hyper-extended back.

2-28-01

I began to put the movement together. I started at the beginning and got everyone on stage. Katie and Mandi's duet needs to be longer. I have music, but it needs to be a little different. There needs to be a rhythm throughout the whole piece. I think it would be neat to have the rhythm change, but I'm not sure

all of the dancers could handle it. They do not know where their center is yet. I also think they are afraid to get too close to each other. Once I show them how to do something and they see how close I get to the other person, they tend to loosen up. I let them know how important it is to stay close to the other dancer during partnering, and how much easier partnering is when they use each other correctly. The dancers who haven't partnered a lot have a hard time lifting themselves during a lift. In general it's hard to know where to lift when one is not sure where to lift from the start. I feel like the sections are too close together. They definitely need to be more developed.

3-3-01

We were unable to get into the studio today. We rehearsed in Mandi's basement. This made it very hard to accomplish anything. I really wanted to move on and develop more of the dance; instead, I had to teach them another phrase of movement. The piece has to be finished in four weeks for the American College Dance Festival. I am a little nervous that the dancers will not feel comfortable enough with the movement to perform it. It is harder for the less experienced

dancers to remember the choreography. Michelle W. was having a hard time balancing with her head to the floor. I explained to her where to lift from and gave her some images to think about. When she tried it again, she was amazed at how much easier it was. It was rewarding for me that she accomplished this.

3-13-01

I had a rehearsal with only Mandi and Katie today. It went very well. I got a lot of choreography done. Right now I have enough choreography to finish the piece, but the dancers do not know it well enough for me to develop the movement. I seem to be using a lot of controlling movements. I am often using one dancer to control another dancer. I still do not have the music. Tim is working on it today. It has been very difficult to collaborate with him. I don't think he is into collaborating like we both thought. This is somewhat challenging for him because he has never worked with dancers before. Another challenge is that he is unable to attend rehearsals to see the movement. He only sees videos of rehearsal. I know a small amount about music but nothing about music composition. This makes it hard for me to tell him exactly what I want. It's also very hard for the

dancers because they have only heard a very rough draft of the music and have not rehearsed with any music at all.

3-15-01

I keep going back and forth with the idea of a dialogue. I can't decide whether or not to use it. I can't decide on using only words or a full dialogue. I finally have all the music on a CD. Here are some things that have been going through my head:

People are an amazing species. They can do anything. Why do you do things you know you do not want to do? People make each other do spectacular things. Welcome to society.

Why do you shower everyday? Do you think you are dirty from sitting on the sofa all day and night? Do you ever wonder why your skin is so dry? Oh, it must be the weather. It couldn't be because you are stripping your skin of its natural oil everyday and then supplying it with false moisturizer.

Let's go to church. Why do you go to church? You're supposed to go to be a good person of society. Do you go to be a good person of society or just because you cannot organize your own thoughts towards your own religion? The key word here is organize.

Society organizes one's life while one is still in the mother's womb.

One must find individuality but also be the best at what society expects for his or her life.

3-23-01

We had our first showing tonight. The piece doesn't suck, but I got what I deserved, I guess. I expected non-dancers to be able to pick up movement that was meant for more experienced dancers. Now I have to go back and change some major choreography. Well, now that I think about it, maybe not so many major changes have to take place. Some of the people are just not remembering the movement. It's not their fault they are just not used to it. I do admit I am a little concerned about the piece. At this point I have to create movement for them. I will not be able to help them explore their bodies and movement. I chose some inexperienced dancers for a reason and now I know. It is very hard to work and choreograph for them when you are not used to it. More dialogue:

We lean on and trust what is familiar to us.

We are covered from the beginning by society.

What thrashes out is not a beast; it's individuality.

Shove it! Into a place where you can't find it.

3-24-01

The piece is finally put together. I'm not sure why, but my brain tends to think differently when I am trying to explain order to my dancers. The dancers had a hard time understanding what I wanted and when.

More dialogue:

What do people expect? That you follow the right path, the yellow brick road.

We compete against each other for acceptance from society and our own minds.

3-27-01

I keep going back and forth from dialogue to words. I have finally decided on both. I was going to let Scott read all of the dialogue since he has missed so many rehearsals, but I changed my mind. I think it would be more effective to have the dancers speaking. Now I have to play with where this dialogue will be said and who will say it. What might happen is only a few parts of the dialogue will be spoken and repeated a number of times.

3-28-01

Tonight we went through the choreography slowly with the music making sure everyone could hear and understand the musical cues. Most of the dancers have never danced without counts. This music does not have counts. There are some places that have somewhat of a rhythm, but it does not last long. At the end of rehearsal a few of the dancers were still unsure of the musical cues. I believe a lot of it had to do with them not paying attention. Some of the dancers I am working with are not serious dancers. They like to dance, but they are not making a career out of it. This makes it hard to develop choreography. The less serious dancers do not remember the choreography. Not only does it take them longer to learn and understand the choreography, it also takes them longer to memorize it. The movement is not familiar to their bodies; therefore, it takes their bodies longer to understand it. My movement tends to begin from the center and is very breath oriented. If someone does not know or understand where his or her center is, it is hard for him or her to get the right quality and make the movement look the way I want it to look. I feel that some of the dancers are not interested and do not care to learn how to move from the center.

They spend a lot of time in rehearsal talking and thinking about other things. I do believe that with other dancers the piece would pull together easier and faster. I did not think it would be this hard to work with inexperienced dancers. You definitely have to compensate for the piece to look good. Maybe the movement is not difficult, but that does not mean it cannot be interesting movement. I was hoping to finish the piece and then go back to develop and clean. I will be lucky to finish the piece and for the dancers to know what to do without my telling them. The achievement of this rehearsal was that the dancers were able to become more familiar with the music. Steve is no longer a part of the piece. He taught his part to Scott.

3-31-01

The piece is almost finished. I still have a few things to develop. I partnered the dancers, gave them some movement, and asked them to do the movement together but only one person's feet could be on the floor. I was amazed with some of the creativeness. I put the two boys together to make more of a visual image for the audience. For a second I thought about not partnering them but then decided there was no way



I wouldn't put them together. When all the dancers showed me what they put together, I was very excited. Their movement was not only creative--it flowed. Maybe they are learning something from me.

4-4-01

The piece is finally totally finished. There are only a few places to add transitions. There was only an hour with everyone at the rehearsal. Half of them had to leave for Jan's rehearsal. After they left, we worked on contact improvisation. Michelle H. was very frustrated and began to get an attitude. Michelle H. gets frustrated when she does not do something perfectly the first time. This tends to frustrate me because she gives up trying to make it better. When I go into rehearsal I have an idea of what I want and how I want it done. I find it funny that the dancers are very willing to give their opinions. When I am learning a piece from a choreographer, I keep my opinion to myself unless I am asked for it. Everyone works differently. You have to allow the choreographer to work the way he/she wants and is able to work. I gave them some phrases and places to vocalize them. We need to work on how and where to say the phrases. Spacing has been a slight problem.

They have a hard time maintaining their spacing because they are unaware of where they are in the space. They are unable to know spatially where their bodies are in relationship to another dancer's body. We clarified a few details.

4-7-01

It's finished all the way through. Transitions and all! Rob came in to look at the piece. He told me what parts made sense and what parts I needed to look at again. At the beginning of the rehearsal I was thinking whether or not to use the vocalization and pushing more not to use them. By the end of the rehearsal they really began to work for me. I cut some of them out and made the phrases I did keep more vocalized. I need to find a way in the beginning of the piece to make the phrases more audible. The phrases work in the piece, but the audience would get a better image if I could introduce the phrases earlier in the piece.

4-11-01

I arrived at rehearsal with several different ways to change the beginning. I was not more attached to one

than the other. I decided to bag all of them and go for the easiest and fastest solution. Instead of the "chorus" crossing the stage with movement they will walk plainly across the stage saying their phrase at the appropriate time. It looks wonderful. I am very proud of the dancers. The road has been very long and bumpy. We had problems with rehearsal space, dancers not being at rehearsal, and one dancer not being able to perform the piece at the American College Dance Festival Association (ACDFA). I have to admit I was pretty nervous about the piece and had my doubts. The piece has come a long way in the past two weeks. At this rehearsal we were able to go through every movement and its origin in the body. The transitions have been smoothed out, and I feel the dancers are comfortable with the choreography. There are still a few places where they are either not hearing the music cues or just not being aware of the music. At this point I do feel they should know the music well enough to feel it. I say these things, not remembering that I have more experience than they, which makes it easier for me to pick up choreography and know the music faster than they do. We have one more rehearsal, and I feel the piece will be ready for performance. The main thing now is to instill

confidence. It's amazing what confidence will do for dancers.

4-16-04

This was our last rehearsal before ACDFA. Everyone was extremely tired, but they pulled through. I am still trying to get Cleve and Scott to release through their necks. We finally got the costumes and were able to work with them. It's hard depending on someone else for things, especially if you don't know the person. I am not unhappy with the costumes, but they are not at all that I expected. The tops are different material than I thought, and they are not different in color. I asked for a little paint to be splattered on them to add more color. I guess the costumer did not have time. The jeans look good. There was a question that they would get in the way, but they don't and they look great!

4-21-01

This piece has pulled together more than I could ever imagine. I took one phrase of movement and manipulated it to make creative choreography. I structured it so that in the beginning Katie is manipulated by Mandi. Then Deby manipulates the two

of them, then Michelle and the others come in. By the end they are all doing choreography that is based off of the same movement as the beginning. The audience responded very well to the piece. There were no decisions to make on lighting. All the dances received the same white light. Good choreography does not require intricate lighting. I have to admit this dance took over the stage. Professors from other universities complimented the dance. Knowing that people who are educated in dance appreciated my work is a wonderful feeling.

4-25-01

Rehearsal was okay tonight. I put Laura and Michelle W. back into the piece. I would not choose dancers who would not be performing the piece every time again unless they were very strong dancers. Michelle and Laura are doing a good job, but they are not as familiar with the way I want them to move as the other dancers. I realize this is my fault and that the piece should have been rehearsed the same amount with them as without them. I also feel as though we did not have enough time for me to teach and for them to understand how to move from their center the way I have instructed them. One aspect I do think they

learned is how to breathe together and with the movement. Without counts to the music it was hard for the less experienced dancers and even the more experienced dancers to be together with their movement. The dancers had to learn how to listen to the music and take musical cues along with cues off of each other. Once they became comfortable with the cues and places in the movement where I told them to breathe, the piece pulled together. I could really see how they were working not only on their own body movement but also with each other. There was not enough time for me to give direction for every movement, so I gave direction where I thought the choreography needed it the most.

4-29-01

We did not have rehearsal Saturday. There were too many dancers that would be gone. I also decided it would be better for the dancers to rest. If I had rehearsal and began to give them corrections it would change the way they were moving; I was afraid it would be too much for some of them during show week. I went in for dry tech. tonight at 6:00pm as posted. As soon as I walked into the gym I knew there was a disaster. There were no lights in eyesight. This was a huge

problem. I have done too many concerts to know this is not how things work. I know that everyone is busy at this time of the year. This is no excuse for what happened. My first question was are we going to have a dry tech. tonight? My next question was if all these things were not completed why were the choreographers not informed. I would have gladly come in to help finish the flats if I had known they needed to be finished.

4-30-01

Tech. rehearsal went okay tonight. I was unable to be there on time because I had to work. Rob lit the dance for me. I'm sure it looks great. He had made a suggestion to lower the music at the beginning and end in order to hear the speaking. I would rather the dancers speak louder, but since this has not happened yet and it is the week of the concert, I agreed with lowering the music.

5-03-01

Tonight was the first night of the concert. The dancers had a lot of energy. There were a few mistakes, but nothing that was not covered up. I was a little nervous about what the less experienced

dancers might do if something went wrong. Scott showed me first hand when he and Mandi missed a lift. He did a fabulous job of using his energy to let Mandi know what was going to happen. I knew there was supposed to be a lift there, but the audience didn't know. Another thing I have found to be similar between dance and theater is that everyone on stage has to be able to pick up energy from the other performers. Scott may not have a lot of experience in dancing on the stage, but he does have experience acting on the stage.

5-04-01

Typically tonight's performance did not have the energy of last night's performance. The second night of the performance always seems a little lax. The performance of the dancers was not terrible. It was the energy needed to convey the message that was missing. When the dancers came backstage, they knew it was not their best performance.



5-06-01

A friend of mine attended the performance last night. Her reaction to "An Organized Power" was not what I had expected. She said she did not enjoy watching the piece and that she could tell that the audience was uncomfortable. When I first heard her comments I was upset and could not believe her thoughts on my choreography. I took in what she said and thought about what I wanted out of the choreography and performance. I wanted a reaction from the audience, and that is exactly what I got. There were people who did not make any comments, which led me to believe they did not understand the dance. I did not want the dancers to feel discouraged by the comments or lack thereof, so I decided not to discuss it with them.

5-07-01

When I watched the piece today I tried to look at it with a totally different view. I guess the context of the choreography was not as disturbing to me because I have researched it and thought about it for a long time. At this point I am more interested in how the dancers are performing it and their dedication to the choreography. I remember a point when Michelle Wilkerson was watching the ACDEFA cast rehearse. She

was very surprised at how the piece looked as a whole. While she was dancing in the piece, she could not see what it really looked like; therefore, she was not confident in what she was doing. I think all the dancers went through this "not knowing" phase during the rehearsal process. I hope that the dancers not only learned from this experience, but that they also consider it a positive experience.

## Chapter Four

### "Evaluations"

As a choreographer, I have encountered many problems while creating a dance piece. I am always concerned with inventing and creating enough new movement to keep the audience interested. There have been incidents where my concern has been about the length of the piece. The piece is too long. The audience is bored. The piece is not long enough for the audience to comprehend a meaning. While working on this piece, I encountered a whole different set of problems. I was concerned with the movement and having enough movement, but now I was also concerned with whether or not the dancers could perform the movement.

I began this process with an idea of how I wanted the dancers to move in the final product. A couple of

weeks into rehearsals I realized that getting the dancers to move the way I wanted may have been harder than I thought. When the piece was completed and the performance was over, I evaluated myself. At first I was unhappy with the completed product. When watching the dancers perform, I felt they lost focus of their movement. I wanted the dancers' movements to be bigger. I wanted them to expand their bodies through the space. I wanted them to feel the movement of the dance through their centers. Watching the dancers perform this piece at the student concert may have been the most upsetting part of the process for me.

I felt I did not teach the dancers what I had set out to teach them. My intentions were to give each dancer the opportunity to discover his or her center and to be aware of one's breath with movement. I could tell some of the dancers were using their centers and breath, while others were concentrating on what movement came next. There comes a point in the rehearsal process when the movement sets into the dancer's muscle memory. The more familiar one is with a style of movement, the easier it is for the movement to lock into a person's muscle memory. Muscle memory occurs when one has rehearsed movement to the extent that the brain no longer has to think about what

movement the body will do next. The less experienced dancers were unable to take advantage of their muscle memory, making it harder to concentrate on the next movements and how to execute the movements correctly.

I gave each dancer an evaluation [see appendix A] and asked him or her to fill it out honestly and return it to me. The evaluations were to be anonymous but a few of the dancers voluntarily added their names to the sheets. I felt the reader should know that, because of the voluntary names, I could tell whether the comment came from an experienced dancer or less experienced dancer. When the dancers returned the evaluations, I realized I had made more progress than I had thought. Results of the evaluations are reported in appendix B.

When looking at the finished product, I was not looking at the beginning pieces. I failed to remember that some of the people I worked with had never performed modern dance. All the dancers had studied some style of dance but not modern dance. The movement I was asking the dancers to perform was much different than the styles they studied before. Modern dance requires a dancer to connect his or her muscles and skeleton differently than other forms of dance. In jazz and ballet dance the extremities can become

the most important part of the movement. In modern dance the main focus is always the dancer's center and allowing all the other body parts to be connected to the center. This connection throughout the body can take years for a highly experienced dancer to find and master. I was asking inexperienced dancers to find this same connection in less than four months.

There were three dancers who were more familiar with modern dance than the others. Having several different levels of dancers was a good and bad idea. I was able to give the higher level dancers movement and let them work without me. This allowed more time for me to work with the lower level dancers. Although this gave me the ability to have more time with the other dancers, it was unfair to the higher level dancers. The higher level dancers may have had more experience in modern dance, but there were still many ways they could have benefited from more instruction. It was also unfair to me as a choreographer. I did not have enough time to develop the movement and teach the dancers how to develop their movements within the body. I had to make a decision as to what would be sacrificed. I chose to sacrifice a small portion of both sides. The movement lacked development in some areas due to the fact that I cut movement out of the

choreography. Cutting movement out allowed the dancers more time to gain comfort with the movement. After watching the performance it was clear the dancers could have used more time.

Frustration was another problem I could see arising and building in the dancers. I was giving the dancers more critiques than they could handle. They did not have an opportunity to digest the material before I was giving them another thing to think about. When teaching a modern technique class, I encourage the students to choose one area of the body or image to focus on for the entire class. During the rehearsal process, there was not enough time to give a class before rehearsal; therefore, the dancers did not have the opportunity to focus on one thing at a time. I noticed their frustration and decided to give them a direction to follow. Although there were other directions given, the two major directions were exploring movement through the center or exploring breath and movement. The dancers were allowed to choose which way they would go with the direction. This allowed the dancers to explore how their bodies moved or reacted to the movement in a way they felt comfortable. This is why I decided not to push the less experienced dancers as hard. I wanted each

dancer to be able to explore not only his or her body but also his or her mind and thought pattern. Although I saw frustration, the evaluations showed that some of the dancers did benefit from my direction and critiques. Here are some of the dancer's comments.

"It's always nice to work with someone who will take time to give body placement corrections."

"The more times I did the movement, the more I was aware of [my] center and [I] learned how to use my breath with this piece."

"It was a big challenge, [I was] pushed to improve, but not so hard that I got frustrated or angry."

"Summer has an incredible talent for breathing that helps support, control, and [to] move freely. This technique has helped me greatly." The technique this dancer is speaking about is a combination of the Hawkins technique and head and tail connection discussed in the first chapter.

"I have never done modern dance before - It opened new avenues of dance for me."

When I asked the dancers what steps or actions might the choreographer make in order to assist the dancers better, I received a variety of answers. One



dancer made several comments on the way I handled the dancers during rehearsal. Here are some of the comments and suggestions. (The following comment particularly is an excellent example of constructive criticism that I received from the evaluations.)

Demanding more attention from the dancers might enable the choreographer to work easier and more efficiently. I found this to be a problem in every rehearsal I had including the performances. Some students consistently did not show up on time or at all without prior permission from the choreographer. It was hard enough to work with the people who had conflicting rehearsals [like] (me). The allowance of the dancers to show up late or not at all and still be in this semester's concert was very frustrating. All of the choreographers put up with this to an extent. This was frustrating to the dancers who were at all scheduled rehearsals (unless previously arranged with the choreographers).

This was a typical complaint among the experienced dancers. The experienced dancers are dancing because it is what they love to do. Many of the other dancers are dancing either for the

experience or just for enjoyment. This was where other problems began.

As a choreographer, I find it hard to demand responsibility from adults. I made the decision in the beginning as to how I was going to conduct rehearsals. I decided to treat them as dancers and students. Treating them as dancers meant I had to give them responsibilities of dancers. The dancers were expected to remember choreography from rehearsal to rehearsal and to conduct themselves as professionals during rehearsal. As students, they were expected to listen and apply all corrections to movement given to them. The biggest expectation I put on the dancers was consistency within the movement. I realized I was too personable with the dancers. Being a member of a professional dance company, I am accustomed to working with dancers whose interest is only what is going on in rehearsal at that particular moment. I am also used to working with dancers who pick up movement quickly allowing time to go back and clarify movement. It was tough being the choreographer and having control over the movement in the piece but no control over whether or not dancers showed up to rehearsal.

I have learned it is helpful to a choreographer to ask his or her dancers "Why are you dancing?" The information this question could offer would give the choreographer guidance on how to approach the teaching process. This question would have been extremely useful for me in the process of inventing and teaching the movement. As the choreographer, if I knew where each dancer's focus was, I could have adjusted how I taught the movement and the movement I chose to use for each dancer. Knowing which movements to give each dancer before walking into rehearsal can cut the learning portion in half, allowing more time to lock the movement into the dancer's muscle memory. I assumed all of the dancers auditioned for my piece because they were serious about dancing. Although a dancer does not have to be experienced with a lot of technique to be serious about dance, I failed to notice that many of the dancers were just beginning to view dance as an art form. There were only three dancers in "An Organized Power" who were there because they love to dance. The other dancers had interests other than dance. I tried to use their other interests to my advantage by allowing them to incorporate their feelings into portions of the movement, i.e. the improvising sculpture.

While thinking about and writing this chapter, I have realized many things I should have done differently. I would have demanded more time from the dancers by adding an extra rehearsal either every week or every other week and demanding more effort. It would be mandatory to attend every rehearsal and to be there on time. This was partially my fault because I chose dancers who were participating in another piece that rehearsed at the same time; therefore, I had to share a number of dancers with another choreographer. This is something I will never do again under any circumstance. Using inexperienced dancers and not having the time needed to manipulate the bodies is hard enough without adding another negative factor to the process. A choreographer should do everything he or she can to help make the process smooth without adding stress to what can be a highly stressful situation.

There was one student who missed a number of rehearsals. I contemplated whether or not to include him in the choreography. I considered using him not as a dancer but as an actor. Acting was this student's primary interest. I was at a point in the development process where I was not sure where or how I was going to use the dialogue. There were several

short phrases I was playing with and a few small monologues that were going through my head. When I realized this student did not know a majority of the choreography, I was sure I would use him to act the small monologues while the dancers reacted to the words. Once I had this plan worked out, a different dancer came to me and said he would be unable to attend the American College Dance Festival Association (ACDFA) where this piece would be performed. This posed a very large problem for the dancers and me. Not only would I have to change the choreography and direction I was taking, but the dancers (some of them already having a problem remembering the choreography) would have to adjust to new choreography and spatial patterns. At this point the only thing I was happy about was the fact that I had not yet inserted or developed the piece with the monologues. In the beginning of the process, I made the decision to use two dancers who would not be attending ACDFA and to choreograph the piece accordingly. However, I decided not to work the piece around the student who decided at the last minute he could not attend ACDFA and omitted him out of the whole piece. I questioned my decision to omit him completely because I had two other dancers who were not attending ACDFA. There was

a difference between the two circumstances. I had known from the time of the auditions that two of the dancers would not be traveling with us. The other dancer waited a little over a week before the show to inform me he would not be able to go. It was easier to take the acting student and put him into the choreography than re-choreograph the movement for eight people. Once again my planned changed. This was the last effort to develop the movement and dialogue.

This situation did not only affect me, but it also affected the other dancers, especially the ones who were performing the piece at ACDFFA. I noticed they felt a little let down by their fellow dancer. They were also concerned the piece would not look up to par. If anything, I think the situation made the dancers work harder which made the performance outstanding.

I have learned that in a situation such as a student concert it is impossible to teach dancers a style of movement. When a choreographer works with students at the college level, he or she should only be prepared to create movement that is more familiar to the dancers. A good choreographer is able to choreograph according to the dancers who are doing the

movement. Class loads and homework do not allow enough time to teach students a new style of movement along with all the choreography of the dance. Rehearsal time is precious.

The concept for this piece was very personal and one many people are afraid to face. Knowing there was potential that the dancers would not want to share their own personal experiences, I decided on a back up plan before rehearsals began. I would use experiences of anonymous people from books and other resources. Although this plan would not be as interesting, I knew the process would be successful. All of the dancers, except for one, chose to give a part of themselves to the creation of this dance. When the dancers were sharing experiences I had no idea what was going through their minds as to what they thought about the concept for the dance. The evaluations gave me comfort that the dancers shared my attitude and supported the concept.

There are lessons to be learned from all of life's experiences. Choreography is no exception. Choreographing is a part of my life and has become a means of learning for me. I have learned a tremendous amount from the choreographic process of this piece. The evaluations helped me understand not only the

dancers' perspective of the process but also my experiences of the process. Every time I choreograph a dance I learn more about myself as a choreographer and teacher. This project was no exception.



APPENDIX A: EVALUATION

Appendix A: Evaluation

### "An Organized Power" Evaluation

Please circle the answer you feel is most appropriate to your experience of working with choreographer Summer Beasley. Feel free to make any comments or suggestions after a question.

1. The rehearsal schedule that was announced at the audition was followed throughout the rehearsal process.
  1. Always
  2. Almost always
  3. Sometimes
  4. Hardly ever
  5. Never
  
2. Rehearsals started and ended on time.
  1. Always
  2. Almost always
  3. Sometimes
  4. Hardly ever
  5. Never
  
3. The choreographer clearly explained the rehearsal schedule.
  1. Always
  2. Almost always
  3. Sometimes
  4. Hardly ever
  5. Never
  
4. The choreographer was on time and prepared for rehearsals.
  1. Always
  2. Almost always
  3. Sometimes
  4. Hardly ever
  5. Never

5. The choreographer's rehearsal process was efficient and productive.
  1. Always
  2. Almost always
  3. Sometimes
  4. Hardly ever
  5. Never
  
6. The choreographer dealt with obstacles and conflicts within the cast in a professional manner.
  1. Always
  2. Almost always
  3. Sometimes
  4. Hardly ever
  5. Never
  
7. The choreographer's movement and development was original and creative.
  1. Always
  2. Almost always
  3. Sometimes
  4. Hardly ever
  5. Never
  
8. The concept of the piece was communicated clearly to the dancers.
  1. Always
  2. Almost always
  3. Sometimes
  4. Hardly ever
  5. Never
  
9. Technical levels of dancers were used to their ability.
  1. Always
  2. Almost always
  3. Sometimes
  4. Hardly ever
  5. Never
  
10. Did you feel challenged by the movement and/or concept of the piece?
  1. Always
  2. Almost always
  3. Sometimes
  4. Hardly ever
  5. Never

11. As a dancer, did you feel performance ready?
  1. Always
  2. Almost always
  3. Sometimes
  4. Hardly ever
  5. Never
  
12. Do you feel the choreographer allowed room for artistic freedom from the dancers?
  1. Always
  2. Almost always
  3. Sometimes
  4. Hardly ever
  5. Never
  
13. Do you feel your body awareness has increased due to this experience?
  
14. What steps or actions might this choreographer make in order to assist you better?
  
15. Overall how did you feel about the concept and movement of "An Organized Power"?

Please use the rest of the space and the space on the back to make any further suggestions or comments.

## Appendix B: Evaluation Results

### "An Organized Power" Evaluation

please circle the answer you feel is most appropriate to your experience of working with choreographer Summer Beasley. Feel free to make any comments or suggestions after a question.

1. The rehearsal schedule that was announced at the audition was followed throughout the rehearsal process.
  1. Always (71%)
  2. Almost always (14%)
  3. Sometimes (14%)
  4. Hardly ever (0%)
  5. Never (0%)
  
2. Rehearsals started and ended on time.
  1. Always (43%)
  2. Almost always (57%)
  3. Sometimes (0%)
  4. Hardly ever (0%)
  5. Never (0%)
  
3. The choreographer clearly explained the rehearsal schedule.
  1. Always (71%)
  2. Almost always (29%)
  3. Sometimes (0%)
  4. Hardly ever (0%)
  5. Never (0%)
  
4. The choreographer was on time and prepared for rehearsals.
  1. Always (57%)
  2. Almost always (43%)
  3. Sometimes (0%)
  4. Hardly ever (0%)
  5. Never (0%)
  
5. The choreographer's rehearsal process was efficient and productive.
  1. Always (57%)
  2. Almost always (43%)
  3. Sometimes (0%)
  4. Hardly ever (0%)
  5. Never (0%)

6. The choreographer dealt with obstacles and conflicts within the cast in a professional manner.
  1. Always (86%)
  2. Almost always (14%)
  3. Sometimes (0%)
  4. Hardly ever (0%)
  5. Never (0%)
  
7. The choreographer's movement and development was original and creative.
  1. Always (86%)
  2. Almost always (14%)
  3. Sometimes (0%)
  4. Hardly ever (0%)
  5. Never (0%)
  
8. The concept of the piece was communicated clearly to the dancers.
  1. Always (71%)
  2. Almost always (29%)
  3. Sometimes (0%)
  4. Hardly ever (0%)
  5. Never (0%)
  
9. Technical levels of dancers were used to their ability.
  1. Always (57%)
  2. Almost always (43%)
  3. Sometimes (0%)
  4. Hardly ever (0%)
  5. Never (0%)
  
10. Did you feel challenged by the movement and/or concept of the piece?
  1. Always (86%)
  2. Almost always (14%)
  3. Sometimes (0%)
  4. Hardly ever (0%)
  5. Never (0%)

11. As a dancer, did you feel performance ready?
  1. Always (57%)
  2. Almost always (43%)
  3. Sometimes (0%)
  4. Hardly ever (0%)
  5. Never (0%)
  
12. Do you feel the choreographer allowed room for artistic freedom from the dancers?
  1. Always (86%)
  2. Almost always (14%)
  3. Sometimes (0%)
  4. Hardly ever (0%)
  5. Never (0%)

Questions 13-14 were summarized and discussed in chapter four.



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