DANCE MAKING: THE WORK AND WORKING OF COLLABORATION

A DISSERTATION

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS

FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF THE

TEXAS WOMAN'S UNIVERSITY

DEPARTMENT OF DANCE

COLLEGE OF FINE ARTS

BY

JULIE MULVIHILL, B.A., M.A.

DENTON, TEXAS

MAY 2017

DEDICATION

For all kinds of people who do all kinds of dancing

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I gratefully acknowledge the participants for their contributions to this research and for being part of this conversation. Dance practice can include rather vulnerable moments, and I am exceedingly appreciative of the three organizations that gave me access to those moments. I am thankful to Linda Caldwell and my committee for encouraging me and offering endless feedback. I am grateful to my cohort and the faculty of Texas Woman's University for engaging with me in challenging and thought-provoking discourse and for providing valuable critique and support of my ideas. In particular, thank you to Wanda Ebright, Lela Jones, Ilana Morgan, and Hari Krishnan. I am deeply appreciative of conversations and creative work with Caitlin Spencer and Larry Lavender. Special thanks go to Jennifer Gann for editorial perspective and assistance. Thanks to my enduring tribe of girlfriends, especially Jennifer Thornton and Jen Jayaram, for offering feedback and being sounding boards. I am grateful for my parents Nancy and Steve Hearon, Cliff and Kathy Mulvihill, and Alice and Jerry Thornton, who provide encouragement, childcare, and a love for my love of dance. Finally, I am eternally beholden to and in awe of my beloved Robert Thornton, my amazing Fox Thornton, and our enduring Meatball for the adventure of a life wherein following dreams and doing good works is not just encouraged but a central aim of our endeavor together.

ABSTRACT

JULIE MULVIHILL

DANCE MAKING: THE WORK AND WORKING
OF COLLABORATION

MAY 2017

The purpose of this research is to investigate dance making practices and to include the voices of dance makers in a conversation about collaboration. This research is an inquiry into what collaboration means between dancers and choreographers who endeavor to make a dance together and as such, questions what the practice of dance making includes and means to practitioners. The ideas of prominent theorists on relational being are included along with an examination of what it means to be, think, and act together. The experiences of the participant dance makers are considered and presented as embodied theory: they are put into conversation with philosophers creating a dialogue of enacted philosophy. The culmination of this research puts forth four core responses: Listening and Being Present, Voice and Bodying, Living Through, and Thinking Together. These four core responses interact to create a system of collaboration from the interweaving of the experiences of the participant dance makers in creative process with philosophical notions about relationships.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER I

COMMENCING: HISTORY, PURPOSE, AND SITUATION

HISTORY OF THE INQUIRY

I attended a small, private, religious liberal arts university to complete my undergraduate studies. While I was a student, the university received funding to participate, evaluate, and refine an initiative for a particular kind of group work known as *problem-based learning* as part of the core curricula.[1] By the time I was a junior, I remember cringing when professors mentioned the end-of-semester group project; it was always somehow supposed to be the culmination of work for the course, as if the group project meant students were reaching the peak of a mountaintop of knowledge. I was disenchanted with group work, with the way I felt that group work was forced on me, and with humanity as a whole, as it seemed that other people were inevitably much less willing to actually do the work necessary to accomplish what the group originally agreed to do together. I felt that I was left holding the bag for the brunt of many group projects.

One particular experience stands out: During the eleventh hour of a group project, part of the group abandoned the work. I approached the professor to explain that our group needed help with communication and management and that the assigned project our group faced was almost an afterthought as a result of the challenges of simply feeling

[1] This chapter includes reflections on my personal experiences with and understanding of problem-based learning; it is not an empirical investigation or a formal critique.

like and functioning as a group. It was easy to shirk responsibilities, because there was no allegiance to the group, no sense of ownership about the work or the working, and no purpose for us together as a group. The professor advised me to continue to attempt to collaborate and to be sure to record my experiences in my self-evaluation. At this moment, I began to recognize that we as students were being asked to collaborate—in ways that affected us academically—without any instruction regarding productive ways to actually work with each other.

My group project critiques included questions like these:

- How can we speak to each other effectively?
- What does it mean to share a work process (as opposed to a work product)?
- What is it we value? Can the group share evaluation criteria that differ from those of the professor?
- Who are we as a group? Why might that matter?
- Do we have a purpose as a group?

Several years later, as I was engaging in the thesis project for my master's degree, these questions returned to me. The project was a co-produced concert event that was intended to serve as a capstone for both myself and a friend who was pursuing a Master of Fine Arts degree. We were drawn toward working on a project together because we already had a deep friendship and because we were both interested in exploring feminist approaches to dance teaching and dancemaking. She was required to choreograph work for the concert, and my project was to function as a dance dramaturge for and with her work; we also established choreographic scores together for a portion of the work presented. Together we shared and read various theorists, discussed ideas, and blazed a trail for working in this shared manner. We were each required to write our own documents in pursuit of our separate degrees: hers a reflection and mine a theoretical analysis. About halfway through the process, I was abruptly excluded from rehearsals, discussions, and the process in general. In fact, my friend stopped speaking to me altogether. I was astonished and completely confounded by what was happening. Not only was my project thwarted, but my friendship was gone as well.

I wondered about the startling change of behavior from my friend and what I might have done or not done to contribute to the demise of our experiment together. I felt that she seized decision-making power over shared material and experiences in ways that affected me both personally and academically (my lack of access to what had been shared material required me to amend my part of the project at the last minute in order to meet my degree requirements). Although the academic obstacles that her decisions created for me were actually very interesting, I have felt the loss of her friendship deeply, and I continue to be baffled by and without knowledge of how and why the relationship shifted so dramatically. What did I do? Or, perhaps, what did I not do? Why couldn't we talk about it?

After my experience with my master's thesis collaboration, the following questions about group work emerged for me:

- How do my strengths and weaknesses become part of this group?
- Where am I giving or taking power?
- How do we talk about the process?
- How do the perceptions of roles and responsibilities factor into a sense of groupness?
- What is privileged within the working of the group? How is that communicated or revealed?

As I have grown into a professional dance career and investigated both my teaching and my choreography practices deeply, I recognize that I am continually wondering about how to collaborate. For more than 15 years, I have studied partner dancing in the forms of ballroom and social dances as well as through Contact Improvisation. As a choreographer, I am interested in making dances with all different kinds of people. Questions about how partnerships are initiated and sustained and how decisions are made between people continually guide my speculations and investigations. The more I dance and make dances with other people, the more I wonder about what it is we are doing together.

At some point, I began to sense that the ideas surrounding partnership in dance making as a group activity and the ways in which we contribute to group dynamics outside of dance contexts might not be so different from each other. In other words, I have found that my experiences with creating dances with other people over the years have inspired me to be a more kind, sensitive, compassionate, and enlightened person. I want to listen to myself and others in balance and awareness so that circumstances are directed in mutually agreed upon ways—not just in the moment of dancing, but also in my life in general. Ultimately, these thoughts crystallized into a single question: *What might I learn about how relationships are cultivated from how they function in my dance practices?*

PILOT STUDY

During the spring of 2010, as part of my doctoral coursework, I launched a pilot study for my dissertation research. This unpublished study, entitled “Rehearsaling: The dialogical practice of *sight unseen,*" documents and analyzes the journey of one group of people who embarked on making a dance together. This group engaged together, through improvisation and movement prompts, in a kind of rehearsal practice that I termed *rehearsaling*. Rehearsaling included an attitude or spirit of gathering together wherein the members of the group sensitized their awareness to each other in specific ways in an effort to feel each other's location, movement initiation, and movement quality. To do this, the dancers created practices, including closing their eyes yet "seeking" to move together. They also attuned themselves to listening to each other breathing in order to find or avoid each other in space. The group practiced in many spaces, from parking lot stairwells to dance studios to busy walk-through spaces in several different buildings. From these explorations, a dance work emerged that they called *sight unseen*.

As part of my research for this pilot study, I began to explore differing theoretical insights into relationships. This process led me to the philosophy of twentieth-century Russian literary critic Mikhail M. Bakhtin. Bakhtin's work is often framed by contemporary scholars as *dialogism,* which references the dialogical nature of his ideas. Bakhtin's work assumes relationships as preceding all other notions of being, including thinking, speaking, and conceiving of the self. For Bakhtin, being is co-being, and actions are dialogical. Chapter III of this dissertation outlines Bakhtin's ideas in depth and describes how they apply to this dissertation research overall.

I was drawn to Bakhtin's emphasis on the primacy of relationships as I investigated the ways in which the members of the group in my pilot study came together to experience the connections, shifts, and sense of shared knowledge that they described in the interviews and discussions I conducted informally with them. Bakhtin's ideas informed how I was able to frame rehearsaling as the activity of becoming a group. Furthermore, his ideas—along with the experiences of the pilot study participants—guided me toward thinking about how a shared set of circumstances created a shifted sense of awareness of each other for the participants in the pilot study as they emphasized an understanding of personal presence with and for the others in the group. The pilot study participants described this group sensibility by suggesting that they "lived through" experiences together as they unfolded within specifically defined parameters. Thus, the concept I have termed *Living Through* is explored more broadly in future chapters of this dissertation.

The group of dancers in the pilot study included freshman and sophomore university students with differences in dance training and interests; the group members were not all interested in improvisation, and they were not all friends outside of rehearsals. The choreographer/facilitator of this group was a graduate student making a work for an end-of-semester dance showing. Attending rehearsals was always optional and even the choreographer would occasionally be absent. Whoever was present at the time of rehearsal in the allotted space (which rotated frequently) rehearsed the choreographic prompt for that day. The dancers continued to show up and practice being together.

For the rehearsal periods, which occurred twice a week for one semester, the group members seemed to develop a deep care not only for each other but also for the ways in which they were working together. Trust and connectivity developed among the participants in a manner that felt honest, thoughtful, and thought provoking. Beyond the premeditated efforts of the choreographer, the dancers in the pilot study took to emailing each other as a group for accountability and for a record of what had occurred during each rehearsal. The dancers were diligent about reflecting on and discussing what they learned and how they felt they were learning about themselves and each other as they intentionally attempted to experience each other through the dance activity.

The pilot study work inspired me to imagine what dance makers in other dance making contexts might sense about relationships and how they create a shared sense of being and knowing. This led me to develop a new list of questions about collaboration:

- What does it mean to be collaborating?
- What is *not* a collaborative creative process? How are collaborative creative processes created? What happens?
- What are the explicit and implicit "rules" for the partners? How do collaborating partners exchange and mediate ideas, share meaning and perspective, and develop aesthetics and values together?
- What is the connection between the collaborative relationship and the dance being made? Where and how does the dance fit in?
- Are there skills and ideas related to collaborating that can be taught and honed?
- How are privilege, marginalization, ownership, and authorship recognized and addressed? How are the collaborators determined and empowered? How are contributions honored, included, edited, and discarded as part of a democratic process with a negotiated aesthetic? What are the goals of the process?
- How are relationships and interpersonal behavior valued? What happens to—and how important is—the product?

These questions prompted a deeper dive into contemporary philosophers working with Bakhtin's theories, which led me to uncover philosophies rooted in how relationships create a sense of fluidity and process when sharing and experiencing knowledge creation together. Working with the connections found in these explored concepts and the questions from my collaborative experiences and investigations pushed both the development of my dissertation study and the analysis of my data later on. In particular, the work of psychologist and philosopher Kenneth Gergen affected my views on the significance of relationships when questioning how people interact with and through the world. Chapter III highlights ideas espoused by Gergen and other theorists within the framework of my developing understanding of behavior in dance making groups.

Gergen also offers insights into the methodology used to present the ideas and practices discovered while undertaking the dissertation research process. In the following excerpt, he reflects on how knowledge may be created relationally through academic writing:

> As I write these words I am not simply conveying content, I am also entering into a relationship with you the reader. As I select the topics, the genre of writing, the narrative, the metaphors, and the way in which I define myself as author, I invite a particular kind of relationship. (221)

Although this dissertation includes my interpretations, these ideas are not mine alone; they are shared through my interpretations of the theories posited, my perceptions of the research sites, and the experiences of the research participants. I acknowledge that a reader may come to understand an idea presented in this dissertation differently due to differing personal experiences of working in groups. Further, I recognize that understanding for a reader may be a result of the experiences of the research participants and therefore due to the multiple perspectives presented in this research. However, my hope is that in sharing my writing and my interpretation of what I encountered when observing the actions and listening to the ideas in my research sites, I will engage the reader to work with me as we create together new possibilities for how the collaborative process might be imagined and practiced as a way to develop meaningful relationships within the dance making process.

RESEARCH SITES

I am using the term *sites* to refer to the dance making organizations I visited as they engaged in creative processes and the circumstances that shaped my observations and interpretations of those observations. The sites for this dissertation research were chosen because they are organizations that create new dance works, they are openly interested in creative process discussions, and they make use of improvisational movement practices. Creating new work means that the dance companies are not repertoire groups; rather, they invest time in the making of new dances. The organizations that make up my three sites generally share an emphasis on process as evidenced by their programming or mission statements, which are available to the public through the organizational websites. The organizations also share improvisation as a guiding—if not central—feature of the creative process. Chapters IV, V, and VI characterize each of the three sites in great detail.

Site One is that of Company Rose, from Nashville, TN. Company Rose is a small regional postmodern/contemporary dance company that is less than ten years old and that makes use of a roster of area dance professionals on a project-by-project basis. The seven dancers for the project I observed were paid for their performances but not for rehearsal time. They rehearsed consistently once a week for three hours, with additional rehearsals as needed. The artistic director of Company Rose is a friend and colleague of mine through our shared knowledge of teaching the Alexander Technique.[2] I asked the director if my study might include the group's creative process and, after she consulted with the other members of Company Rose, I was invited to observe them working together over the course of four weeks. These four weeks were scheduled toward the end of the group's more than five-month-long process of creating a new work entitled *Pools of Glass*.

Site Two included two dance companies working together to create a new work: Margret Jenkins Dance Company (MJDC) and Kolben Dance Company (KDC) in their shared creative process for a dance work entitled *The Gate of Winds.* MJDC is a company that works internationally, with a home base in San Francisco, CA. It is a postmodern/contemporary dance company with a forty-year history of making dance works. I corresponded by email and telephone with MJDC organizational staff to share my research questions and communicate my interest in establishing MJDC as a research site. MJDC members read my proposal and were keen to participate in my study. When I arrived on site to conduct observations and interviews, I was surprised and delighted to discover that the creative process I was invited to research was a collaboration with an Israeli postmodern/contemporary dance company, KDC. MJDC had informed KDC of my study, and the Israeli dancers agreed to participate. Altogether, there were seventeen dance makers and a rehearsal director in this site. Participation in this dance making

[2] The Alexander Technique is a hands-on somatic method that teaches students about their physical habits and how to improve physical functioning through activities. This is important to mention because Company Rose publicizes the Alexander Technique as informing its creative processes.

process was a full-time job for all of these individuals. I was invited to observe the two companies working together as one group over the course of one week in the middle of their approximately six weeks of pursuing a creative process together.

In contrast with the two dance companies of Sites One and Two was Site Three: the East Coast Contact Jam (ECCJ). The ECCJ is a bi-annual retreat-style Contact Improvisation jam event held near Charleston, WV, just outside of Washington, DC. ECCJ dancers—also known as *jammers*—register and pay to attend the four-day event. I observed the Spring Jam, which had thirty-seven jammers participating in the full event. The ECCJ has a more than forty-year history and draws jammers from all over the country. I have been a jammer at several ECCJ events, and I approached the organizers about using a jam event as a site for this dissertation research. The organizers deliberated and requested that my Institutional Review Board–approved study parameters be posted on the ECCJ's website before registration opened, thereby notifying potential registrants of my study. Jammers who registered attested to their knowledge of the study but were under no obligation to participate. Nevertheless, thirty-five of the thirty-seven jammers agreed to participate in this dissertation study. This site focused only on the practice of improvisation, which I considered "new work" for the purposes of this research.

SITUATING THE RESEARCH PURPOSE

The purpose of this research is to study how the development of relationships influences the creative practices of a group that is making a dance together. My goal is not to investigate and critique collaborative dance making techniques to determine what is good/bad or right/wrong within dance making communities. Rather, I am trying to learn about and share the experiences of dance makers and to understand how they feel they create, maintain, and sustain relationships within a process of making a dance within a group.

When the experiences of dance makers are invited into conversation with theorists who are writing about relationships and interactions, the potential for understanding what dance makers are doing together deepens as it is analyzed through these differing theoretical lenses. My intention in the research is to explore how these dance makers can further add to the theoretical conversations as the dance making becomes an act of theory making. This places the study of the dance making process through those who experience it as a force in future theory making. More specifically for the discipline of dance, insight into how people work together within a dance making process may have applications for inviting new ways of thinking about how we make dances, how we teach dance making, and how we discuss and theorize dance making and collaborative practices in general.

My experiences have shown that projects that require or include working together often disregard possibilities for how working together can be successful; instead, they are only aimed at a particular end or finished product. This dissertation reveals ways in which the experience of dance making—the creative process—can be a gratifying and enlightening endeavor even amidst challenges and conflict. The stories told by the participants as part of this research suggest that a dance making process can be deep, meaningful, and transformative for dance makers beyond the scope of a final product. While interviewing the research participants, I realized that multiple perspectives regarding the work of dance making in groups were emerging that troubled easy answers to my research questions. Further, they also trouble my own habits and experiences as a dance maker. Thus, this research confronts the multiple ways that people theorize and enact collaboration in order to develop new insights into and dialogues involving possibilities for building and sustaining relationships within a creative process.

SITUATING THE RESEARCHER IN CURRENT DANCE CONVERSATIONS

The voices of dance makers are clearly an important feature of this research. Although the perspectives of dance students are often considered in contemporary dance research, I found the collection and synthesis of the experiences of professional or recreational non-student dance artists working within a creative process to be rare. Furthermore, there is very little literature available that connects dancers' experiences of creating dances collaboratively to a philosophical process or that presents these experiences as an embodiment of theory. The following resources provided me with an overview of where connections between practice and theory are emerging and where I found missing voices or overlooked connections that might shift how we think about these ideas in the future.

The article "Voicing connections: An interpretive study of university dancers' experiences" by Lauren Bracey is an example of the literature that consciously seeks and presents the voices of student dancers. This article creates a forum for four undergraduate dance students and one graduate student to express themselves about the ways in which they are or are not being "heard" within dance technique teaching and curricula at one university. Although the author acknowledges the significance of voicing dancers' experiences, the article focuses on the ways in which student voices may or may not affect dance technique curricula. However, it does not address the ways in which dancers relate to or collaborate with one another during the creative process.

There is also a type of literature within the dance field that includes personal interviews with professional dancers and dance making artists. Situated among compelling articles and essays are full-text interviews with professional dancers and choreographers. Texts like *Contemporary Choreography: A Critical Reader* (2009) and *The Body Eclectic: Evolving Practice in Dance Training* (2008) include this style of access to the personal experiences of dance artists. These interviews provide examples of individual experiences while situating historic overviews of personal dance practices; however, they are rarely put into conversation with philosophies that have emerged from other disciplines or analyzed from different perspectives. This encouraged me to create a dialogue between the experience of dance makers working in groups and other theories that address relationships.

In her book *Choreographic Relations: Practical Philosophy and Contemporary Choreography* (2010), German dance artist Petra Sabisch seeks to explore *what choreography can do* as a test of philosophical limits and potential expansion; she is exploring choreography as an act of philosophy. According to Sabisch, choreography "is in method, understood as a singular, material and experimental practice, that choreography and philosophy encounter each other, without concealing their profound differences" (11). In response to Sabisch's work, I became interested in how dance literature can reflect the ways in which dance practice and philosophy dialogue, intertwine, and relate to each other. Still, the dance makers in Sabisch's work do not express their own experiences of how their choreographic methods may be philosophy. Her work is not multi-vocal or expressive of the experiences of the dance makers in her research; rather, it is her own interpretation and analysis of what she understands to be happening in the dance making processes that function to create an intertwining with and representation of the philosophies that she finds interesting. Although Sabisch's work is fascinating, I am interested in presenting the experiences of dance makers as embodied theory from their own perspectives.

When using the search terms "dance and collaboration," the current literature reflects research that includes dance practices paired with other artistic mediums, like music and film, to discuss collaborative practice. I found it was rare to locate current literature about dance making as a collaborative practice in and of itself. Nevertheless, I did find one article on this subject by Melanie George and Joan Meggit entitled "Imbed/in bed: Two perspectives on dance and collaboration." This article is positioned as pertaining to qualitative research methodologies and represents how a dance educator might approach collaboration, with a dancer-collaborating-with-other-dancers scheme, as a research methodology. In the perspective of George, this collaboration happens between her, the choreographer and teacher, and her student-dancers making a dance together. For Meggit, the collaboration includes herself, as choreographer, along with dancers working together in an organized professional dance company to create a dance together. Both perspectives reveal reflective insights into the personal preferences and practices of the authors/choreographers, yet they do not include the experiences of those people with whom George and Meggit collaborate. The article is important to note because it situates dance making as a method of qualitative research, and it frames the reflections as inquiries of dance processes and practices capable of theory enactment rather than positioning collaboration as an achievement, product, or novelty. The article is also important for situating this dissertation research, because it represents current dance scholarship acknowledging the dance making process as collaborative, in and of itself.

RESITUATING THE DISSERTATION PURPOSE

After realizing that very little dance scholarship analyzes collaboration from the point of view of the dancers who are participating in the process, I determined that my research would help open space for these voices to be heard, thereby creating new ideas about dance making. This dissertation presents the experiences of dance makers as enacting and creating theories emerging from a collaborative process; it situates the emergent themes in conversation with philosophies of relationships to which I was drawn. The conversations between the voices of dancers and the ideas posited by differing theorists will, hopefully, open new possibilities for new dialogues to take place as dancers' voices are given an important role in how dance is theorized. Therefore, the insights presented in this dissertation about relationships and collaboration made through the practice of dance making will hopefully prepare and excite future dance makers and provide more possibilities for bridging dance practices with other paradigms of thinking (e.g., disciplines, philosophies, social movements) and vice versa.

Throughout this dissertation, the reader will encounter experiences shared by dance making participants, the theories of different philosophers offered for consideration, and my interpretations and perspectives as the bricoleur of this research. Chapter II outlines the procedures used and the grounding of this qualitative research inquiry and dissertation project. After equipping readers with the theoretical schema mapped out in Chapter III, I invite them into three different sites of dance making, which represent my data collection. Chapters IV, V, and VI present emergent themes from within the data collected from the three different and unique sites. There is no crossover of data or themes in these chapters; rather, each dance making site is discussed in detail separately from the themes unfolding in the other sites. In the last chapter, Chapter VII, I submit my core responses to the data, a synthesis of experiences and connections across the sites, and potential avenues for further investigation.

CHAPTER II

CONDUCTING: PROCEDURES AND METHODOLOGY

RESEACH PRACTICE AND PROCEDURES

Dance making is terminology that is explored, developed, and questioned throughout in this research. For the purposes of this chapter, it is important to point out that I am using the term *dance making* to describe a process in which the prominent and prevailing activity is the intentional generation of movement within a group setting. This research revolves around three case studies in which the phenomenon of dance making within a group takes place. Each case study is a dance making “site” that includes the particular environment, the participants, and the dance making intention. The sites illustrate experiences that are both expected and unexpected of the phenomenon of dance making within groups, and they illuminate and expand the current understanding of human behavior in the creative process. I will address the writing practice and the theoretical grounding for this research later in this chapter, but first I will briefly outline my operations at each site—and thus involving the participants—to clearly introduce my research methodology and procedures.

The three sites were chosen deliberately, with each representing unique circumstances. They present the phenomenon of dance making in groups across the geography of the United States, with one site on the East Coast, one in the middle of the country, and one on the West Coast. The sites address dance making in groups that are part of a postmodern/contemporary dance paradigm that includes improvisation as a key practice; in some instances, improvisation is the only dance making form. The sites are characterized and explored deeply in the later chapters of this dissertation as unique cases. The themes that emerged for me from each site are then synthesized in Chapter VII, where the ideas from each site meld together in dialogue.

I had extensive email communications with people from each site in the months leading up to my observation time. I sent descriptive summaries of my research questions and intentions and was given written permission on organizational letterhead for each site to include in my Institutional Review Board (IRB) materials (see Appendix B for IRB Approval Letter). This back and forth was interesting for me in refining my questions as well as learning about the needs and expectations of each site. Each site had its own quirks and unique features in responding to me and vetting their interests in participating in my study. For example, the director of Site One spent time traveling out of the country as I was attempting to secure permission and schedule times for observation, so communicating with her and obtaining the necessary permissions were arranged for moments when she had access to international internet cafes. Site Two clearly had an administrative team in place that was very specific about my requirements and helpful about how I might meet them; communicating was an easy back and forth. Additionally for Site Two, I recognized that there was a hearty discussion I was not privy to about whether or not to participate in my study given the depth and frequency with which I was responding to separate questions from the administrative team. Because the leadership of the group at Site Three is organized by consensus, they needed time to deliberate and discuss amongst themselves about opening their event to my study. In each case, I learned how to be patient, listen to the needs of each site, and clarify my own needs and interests in various ways. I felt that the representatives I communicated with in each site were choosing whether or not to participate in this research, just as I was choosing them and hoping for their participation.

I spent approximately twelve hours at each site observing the creative process of dance making in group settings as evidenced by the behaviors of the participants. My observation tools included video recording, note taking, and experiencing the dance makers doing their work. Although I was present in each site, I remained on the edges of the practice; I did not interact with the participants, and I attempted to stay out of the way and to be unobtrusive in the environment. I was very sensitive and aware of myself within these sites; I sought a transparency of both my presence and my actions.

When I arrived to each site for the first time, I gave a short presentation about my study and the intentions of my dissertation research. I answered questions and provided hard copies of explanations for my study as approved by the IRB. I also provided my contact information and explained the ways in which I could be contacted privately. Because I had set up the parameters of my study with each organization in advance through email and telephone conversations, none of the people at the sites were surprised by either my presence or the nature of my study. There were two levels of consent required for my study. I explained Tier 1 and Tier 2 consent at this time and then again when I ended my observations in each site.

Tier 1 consent forms were signed by individuals who agreed to be observed by me and to participate in a group discussion. I video recorded both my observation hours and the group discussions, and I also kept a journal of my observation notes. Everyone present in Site One and Two elected to participate.[3] For Site Three, there were two people out of thirty-seven who elected not to participate. Not all Tier 1 participants chose to participate in the group discussion, although the majority did.

The participants at each site determined when the discussion was scheduled for their site. My suggestion for each site was to hold the discussion when my observation period was complete and when participants felt the end of the process had arrived. I thought this was important so as not to affect working habits or relationships until the process was completed on its own terms. I imagined that this end would occur after the performances of two of the groups, but both Site One and Site Two participants elected to hold the group discussions on my last day of observations, which was before these groups performed. The work done at Site Three did not culminate in a formal performance like the other two sites, and the participants there elected to hold the discussion the afternoon before I finished my observations.

Group discussions were casual and open-ended in nature. At the beginning of each discussion, I encouraged the participants to speak, question, and respond to each other, thereby allowing the discussion to meander into subjects that the participants were

[3] During my observational period at Site Two, the organization hosted an informal showing for an audience. I was instructed not to approach the audience members, and they do not appear as consenting or observed participants in this dissertation, aside from a mention of the showing itself.

interested in discussing and that pertained to the dance they were making and how they were making it. I asked an opening question and several guiding questions throughout each discussion; however, for the most part, the participants spoke to each other and wove a dialogue of rich responses that came from many perspectives.

Sometimes the participants agreed with each other, and sometimes they argued about meaning. In the case of Site Two, they argued about specific creative interactions and behaviors. The discussions were a way of having the participants explore the process in which they were engaging. After the discussions, participants from all three sites expressed their appreciation for having the opportunity to discuss the ideas with each other and to develop further connection with and deeper understanding of their dance making partners.

For me, the group discussions were saturated with interesting ideas and dynamics. I felt that, in different ways, each group led its own discussion with conversations verbalizing issues or insights that perhaps were not addressed during other parts of the dance making process. I was careful to watch domineering speakers during these discussions, but even dominating behaviors seemed to be regulated and held in check by each group itself. It was interesting to see people in conflict who were also snuggled together physically, with—for example—one person disagreeing with the person whose shoulders she was massaging at the same time.

At the conclusion of the group discussion and during a moment of gratitude at the end of my observations, I expressed an interest in interviewing individuals at a later date. Those participants who were interested signed Tier 2 consent forms, which gave me permission to contact them to schedule and conduct personal interviews. I contacted these individuals and arranged for interviews via FaceTime and Skype applications, and I video recorded the interviews.[4] The interest in being interviewed was overwhelming and I was grateful that so many people were willing and eager to participate in this research.

There were three personal interviews with participants from Site One and Site Two; for Site Three, I conducted three personal interviews and a joint interview with a married couple. All in all, a total of eleven people were interviewed. The interviews involved hearty and rich conversations. Due to the detailed accounts that the interviewees shared with me, I did not need to conduct follow-up interviews and instead corresponded with interviewees via email when questions arose or clarifications were needed.

The personal interviews occurred several weeks after my observations were finished at each site. I deliberately wanted some time to pass after the dance making process had ended so that participants would have a chance to reflect on the process and so that the interviews would occur after the related performance in the cases of Sites One and Two. I felt like it was important to allow participants to engage with their groups during the group performances before asking these individuals questions that might shift their ideas or hopes within the dance making process.

As I did for the group discussions, I conducted the interviews by asking open-ended questions and by asking the interviewees to speak to their own experiences of the

[4] Video recording was not necessary for the interviews, but I used the recordings as audio records to supplement my interview notes. In several cases, the video recording did not contain the interviewee's image.

creative process during which I observed them. Interviews ranged from sixty to seventy-five minutes in length and were conducted over Skype or FaceTime per the interviewees' requests and in accordance with my IRB agreement. The interviewees were eager and excited to share their experiences; they offered thought-provoking questions back to me, and they gave me rich examples of what they had learned personally. Many of the participants were enthusiastic to engage in the dialogue I am pursuing with this research and thus were grateful to share their experiences with me.

I transcribed the videos of the group discussions and the interviews. I sent the transcriptions to participants, and, in several cases, I revisited an aspect of our conversation with an interviewee over email to affirm what the participant had meant or to ask for edits to a comment. I corresponded with participants via email per their consent and my IRB agreement.

Data was collected and distilled from the video recordings, my observation notes, and the group discussion and interview transcripts; it was compiled and analyzed continuously as each site was completed. Although this study does not involve grounded theory, practices like situational and relational analysis as well as messy maps (as outlined by Adele E. Clarke in her text *Situational Analysis: Grounded Theory After the Postmodern Turn* [2005]) were employed during the analysis and coding of data (see "Methodological Grounding" later in this chapter). As the data were analyzed, I looked for themes within and across the three sites.

I began to analyze the data, one site at a time. I created messy maps for each site that outlined the themes emerging from that site. The messy maps included writing one word or phrase descriptions of the experiences of participants onto a large piece of paper and drawing connecting lines between parallel or contrasting ideas in order to distill out themes. I did not complete each site in order before moving on to the next; rather, I explored Site Three first, then I looked at Site One, and then Site Two. I also began writing while still analyzing the data. I organized the data by the themes I saw emerging and created written memos during the entire process that were then developed later in the research process.

At this point, I referenced my theoretical framework as a "site." To do this, I considered each theorist in a similar manner to my research participants. I coded ideas from the theoretical texts like I did from the interviews. I created more messy maps and thinking frames on large paper by compiling ideas from the dance making participants and from the theoretical texts together. This synthesis, which is discussed in Chapter VII, folds together ideas and voices from all three sites as well as from extant and contemporary theorists discussing issues of import to my research. My writing practice, which is detailed next, continued to uncover the methodology and procedures of this dissertation research. I will ground my procedures and practices in theory related to qualitative research in the last section of this chapter.

WRITING PRACTICE

I began writing by profiling each dance making organization observed for this research while each was in their creative process of dance making. Characterizing each site was helpful as I analyzed the data. The characterizations quickly shifted from what I had imagined as descriptions for inclusion in the methodology to actually helping me interpret the data in the latter part of the process. As I wrote about each site and explored the data, I was able to understand the sites differently from the perspectives of each participant. The way that the participants talked about their own groups and fellow dance making group members gave me insights into their experiences within the process and their relationships. The extended unfolding of the written characterizations of the three sites helped me to see and piece together the data more clearly.

While writing, and in an effort to include more of my observation notes and experiences as well as to break up the data sections, I created what I have termed *Interludes*, which are sections of creative writing. The intent of the Interludes is to provide examples of how I experienced what the participants reference in the data. The idea of the *Interludes* is inspired by the writing style of theorist Erin Manning, whose ideas about movement in relation to others and the world is important to my understanding and interpretation of this research. I find her use of creative writing to be effective for how she actively portrays the interactions between movement and philosophy.

When my site chapters (Chapters IV, V, and VI) were written and revised, I next began writing how I developed my theoretical framework in Chapter III. This chapter incorporates a variation on the ideas of the *Interludes* from the data chapters by developing a series of respites, or suspensions of the theoretical investigation, in order to present movement examples, which hopefully bring to life my understanding of the theories introduced. These creative writing respites are culled from my observation notes or are paraphrased anecdotes relayed to me during participant interviews. The respites are practical examples of how I interpret the theory to be working within the data: they connect abstract philosophical ideas to real operations within dance making. They are meant to give the reader a sense of philosophy in action, or what I call embodied philosophy in the dissertation's first chapter.

I wrote the theory chapter and outlined my conclusions chapter at the same time. I found this to be extremely gratifying, because I sensed the theory developing in synthesis with the data for my conclusions. Moving back and forth between the writing of the theoretical framework and the insights emerging from the data in the conclusion chapter helped me develop a conversation between the theoretical ideas and the insights gathered from the participants and my observations. Thus, I used the theoretical framework chapter as a reference when writing the conclusions and vice versa. The two chapters were in dialogue with one another.

One difference between writing the data chapters and writing the ideas emerging in the conclusion and theoretical framework chapters, Chapters III and VII, is the way that I employed subheadings for the writing process. For the site chapters, the subheadings emerged as I addressed each data point. I wrote first and then organized the experiences into sections for which I created subheadings. For Chapters III and VII, I created subheadings first, because I had a clearer idea of the points that I wanted to be sure to address, specifically the ideas deemed important by the participants. Interestingly, by allowing the participants to shape the important points, and thus the subheadings in the data chapters, I was able to privilege their ideas when putting them in conversation with the theorists: I was diligent to hold the theory that I felt emerging accountable to the experiences and ideas expressed to me by the participants.

The writing practice was important to the research: I uncovered and put ideas together through and with the writing. Interacting with the voices of the participants, returning to transcriptions and video footage, referencing my observation journal, and consulting theoretical texts were embedded and important guides within my writing practice. My hope in creating this document is that the thoughts of many people are put together in conversation, thus creating a "dissertation making" with participants, theorists, me, and hopefully now, the readers. This dissertation also participates in a dialogue about collaboration.

METHODOLOGICAL GROUNDING

This dissertation inquiry is a qualitative collective or multi-site case study that includes the participation of three sites to investigate one phenomenon. As qualitative research theorist Sharan B. Merriam suggests, "Qualitative case studies can be characterized as particularistic, descriptive, and heuristic" (43). The heuristic aspect indicates the relationship the research has between the researcher, the participants, and the readers. For Merriam—and, in my view, for this dissertation research as well—"case studies can illuminate the reader's understanding of the phenomenon under study. They can bring about the discovery of new meaning, extend the reader's experience, or confirm what is known" (44).

According to John W. Creswell, a collective case study or a multi-site case study is a research design in which "the inquirer purposefully selects multiple cases to show different perspectives on the issue" (74). The case study design was determined to be appropriate for studying dance making in groups because of the inspiration of my pilot study as well as my interest in creating a forum for a multi-voiced dialogue among dance makers with varying perspectives. The three sites were purposefully chosen to include particular dance making practices, specifically the creation of a new dance work within a group setting. However, the sites reflect different geographies, sizes, durations of the creative process, and intentions for the works created. The three sites were chosen to demonstrate variation across the data and, as Merriam writes, to enhance "the external validity or generalizability" of the findings (50). The conclusions chapter, Chapter VII, addresses the ways that additional cases may expand the current understanding of the data and the phenomenon of dance making in groups.

Knowing that, for qualitative case study research, "the researcher is the primary instrument of data collection and analysis," I was deeply aware of approaching the participants, the data collection process, and the analysis with an attuned "sensitivity and integrity" (Merriam 52). To this end, for my presence in the sites for observation (the first level of the research encounter that I had with the participants), it was important to make myself as unobtrusive, noncritical, and neutral as possible with regard to my expressivity about the behaviors of the participants in the groups. At the end of my observation periods, many participants revealed to me that they had forgotten I was there. Still, I acknowledge that my presence may have shifted the experiences at each site in one way or another. Although my tasks at each site were similar, the research was accumulated site by site over a period of four months, so my wisdom as a researcher may have deviated or evolved over time.

I was deeply committed to creating an opportunity for participants to think, discuss, and wonder about the phenomenon of dance making in groups, so I conducted the group discussions and interviews accordingly. With that intention in mind, I found myself connecting my methodology with the methods discussed by Antony Williams, a psychodramatist who deals with group work in his practice. Williams calls his method the "Memory Lanes" process, and it involves a family or organization working out a relational problem together by progressing through a memory and discussing the complexities of the issue through time so that history and perspective are addressed and remembered within the process. He writes: "The process leads to an enlargement of sensitivity to the team and its culture, and a more intimate understanding of the cycles and variations that have transpired in the organization" (201).

In his work, Williams creates parameters and directives wherein a group engages together to recreate both their understanding and their actions along a timeline, sitting down at points to discuss disagreements and taking walking steps along the timeline when an understanding is reached together. This group-guided method provided insight for me into how to facilitate a group within certain parameters without aggressively pushing an agenda. Although I did not recreate the score that Williams lays out, I was interested in facilitating the group discussions and the interviews so that the participants asked questions of themselves. This attitude allowed the conversations to develop in ways that felt important and right for each unique case: it invited disagreement among the individual participants and support for individuals to reveal differing points of view in an effort to understand each other more deeply.

Williams suggests that his method contributes to a collaborative frame. He concludes:

> . . . questions produce knowledge as well as seek it. The answers are shaped by the questions, by the frame of the questioner. This is probably so even of the most 'open' question in any form of research—every question comes from a frame and is itself a frame (198).

With the group asking questions of itself, the frame of the inquiry is reflexive, and the investment of the participants is challenged by a call to understand their own work for themselves. Still, as the primary researcher, I framed the overarching topics of the conversations and occasionally initiated questions during both the group discussions and the interviews.

The participants in this study all have something to contribute. Since I am interested in creating a dialogue from diverse perspectives, I approached the group discussions and interviews as conversations, and I had few expectations regarding the achievement of any particular goals. Nevertheless, Merriam reminds me that, in an interview context, "Both parties bring biases, predispositions, attitudes, and physical characteristics that affect the interaction and the data elicited" (109). Asking open-ended questions, listening to experiences, and being respectful and nonjudgmental were vital to the discussion and interview processes as well as to the analysis process.

Listening is also a key action within the analysis of this data. Although this research is not formally grounded theory, features of grounded theory were used when analyzing and coding the data, specifically the thesis that insights or interpretations made by the researcher emerged from the data. When the transcriptions of the group discussions and interviews had been completed and reviewed by the participants, I coded ideas from each transcript, cut them up, and organized them by theme into envelopes keeping each site separate. Some data were included in the envelopes of multiple themes, but I did not analyze across sites at this point. I then organized the themes into large messy maps for each site and fixed the envelopes containing the transcription clippings to the maps. I distilled the data site-by-site with the use of situational maps as outlined by Adele E. Clarke. I created large diagrams of ideas that indicated with directional lines the ways in which activities and concepts were processes, interacting with other people and ideas. The maps allowed me to arrange and rearrange ideas, and they also allowed "the fluidities and actions among structures and agencies to become visible and thus, theorized and memoed" (Clarke 110).

While "listening" to the data and mapping out the interactions of people and ideas, I was also writing memos and characterizations of the three sites. As the maps developed, the characterizations also began to take shape. I would map a theme and then rearrange, edit, amend, or reorganize the characterizations. The site characterizations quickly turned from descriptive memos about each site into written analyses of the revelations of the participants and the relationships with other dance makers in each site.

I sensed that my own experience was important to include at this point, so I used my observation journals to develop creative writing narratives that highlighted my sense of specific experiences within each site. Ethnographer Patricia Leavy, in her book

Method Meets Art: Arts-based Research Practice (2009), writes about autobiographical data collection, analysis, and narrative in her arts-based research practice. Using ideas posited in Leavy's text, I wrote reflexively about what I was experiencing so that, as Leavy states, I could be "consistently noting where [I was] located within the process" (49). In this way, I managed "internal signals" toward building "authentic and trustworthy knowledge" within the research. Some research practices encourage researchers to disavow inner feelings, but Leavy considers "internal signals" as "vital" when pursuing qualitative methods (49).

In several instances, the creative writing narratives helped to create meaning for me as they made connections between my observations and the ideas emerging from the participants. As I organized and edited the writing, I saw that creative writing might also provide a sensorial relationship with the data, thereby making the research experience more personal for the reader. The *Interludes* and "respites," described in the Writing Practice section earlier, are sensorial and descriptive, but they are also examples of embodied and enacted theory that reflect the multi-voiced and bodied nature of the research process.

Karen Golden-Biddle and Karen Locke consider "the qualitative data and the field stories we construct from them" to be "multivocal" (89). The strength of "multivocality is that the crafted field stories express the richness and complexity of real-life interactions and events" (Golden-Biddle and Locke 89). The creative writing narratives speak to real-life interactions and events, and they highlight the richness within the data and the process, thereby grounding the research with deep authenticity and connection to experiences. Merriam describes this as “crystallizing” the data from multiple sources, and she cites Richardson for a definition of crystallization in postmodern research practice. Richardson writes that crystals exhibit,

> an infinite variety of shapes, substances, transmutations, multidimensionalities, and angles of approach . . . . What we see depends on our angle of response—not triangulation but rather crystallization. (qtd in Merriam 216)

This crystallization process includes cross-checking and comparing findings as a way of accounting for the multivocality of the research.

In the case of this dissertation, multivocality means interpreting data from observations, interviews, group discussions, my observation journal, and the writings of contemporary and extant theorists. Further, it includes connecting my insights into the data clearly for the reader. After I established maps and started characterizations for each site, I began to see ways that the sites overlapped, connected, and spoke to one another. In some instances, participants from the different sites used similar language. Additionally, I began to have a sense of how the theoretical framework was developing in relationship to these ideas emerging across the sites. This process is interwoven throughout the three data chapters (Chapters III, IV, and V), as I connected participants’ experiences with the philosophical ideas outlined by the theorists. I had a sense that the descriptions and anecdotes from the participants were in fact illustrating certain philosophical ideas. These then became the basis for the writing of my Interludes and respites and also contributed to my conclusions.

In summary, this inquiry is informed by my personal history and my interest in group dynamics and relationships. It is a collage of experiences that blend together:

folding, twisting, melting, and reconstituting into dialogue. My hope is to inspire and support a dialogue about something that all people do: relate to each other. I am not interested in finding solutions to problems or examining data pursuant to a singular Truth; rather, I am interested in exploring the experiences of people who make dances within group settings and promoting a dialogue among them so that we can seek understanding with each other and insight into this phenomenon.

CHAPTER III

COLLECTING: THE VOICES OF THEORISTS

This chapter traces my journey into understanding overlapping processes of collaboration as an act of philosophy; it highlights the connections, detours, and discoveries I made throughout the research process. Further, this chapter presents theories that address relational being, dialogue, and interacting together, and it demonstrates how I approached my data collection and analysis by outlining the direction these theories introduced to me. Together with extant and current theorists,[5] I will convey in this chapter what I imagine to be a conversation between ideas and actions emerging from these theories, and how these ideas and actions might operate in the context of dance making in group settings.

Within this theoretical framework are experiential respites that I created from aspects of the research data.[6] These respites bring the philosophical ideas to life and reflect my understanding of how specific theories might be revealed within a dance making context. The respites are not a formal presentation of the data, which occurs in Chapters IV, V, and VI, but they are real experiences from my observation notes or as told to me in discussions and interviews with dance making participants. The respites

---

[5] Notable theorists discussed here include Mikhail M. Bakhtin, Kenneth Gergen, John Shotter, Shannon Sullivan, and Erin Manning, among others.

[6] The respites are set apart from the presentation of theory and are formatted in italics.

over experiences from all three data sites equally and are support for my understanding and use of the term “dance making” in this research.

I understand dance making to have manifold interpretations and I do not set out to prove or reinforce one particular notion of it. I consciously use dance making instead of the more academically defined terms of dancemaking or choreography for the specific purpose of aligning my meaning of the term with a more inclusive interpretation of what it might mean to make a dance.[7] In this way, dance making alludes to a process of making a dance, which could include dancemaking, choreography, both, or neither of those. For me, the only signifier is that there are people who engage in the activity together, and so my use of the term dance making always points toward a process that people endeavor collectively. In this process, we can learn about who we are as a group and what is important to us beyond what the dance might reveal or do as a finished product.

If I consider a completed dance to be evidence of knowledge created, then in dance making I can assume that the participants exchange information, which results in the creation of that knowledge (the dance). Ideas are communicated and understood through embodied experiences and sensory perceptions, and the dance emerges from shifts that occur among the dance makers. Nevertheless, knowledge creation in dance

[7] Beyond the extensive conversation of the use of “dancemaking” at Texas Woman’s University specifically, this term is widely used by theorists including Marcia B. Siegel, Francis Sparshott, Mary-Anne Santos Newhall, Randy Martin and many others. Generally, the term is used to include improvisational, emotional, and avant garde practices for generating movement.

making can also be presumed without considering the dance, because dance making is an interaction with the world. It therefore expands and amends how and what dance makers individually—and perhaps collectively—know beyond the analysis of a final product.[8] For this research overall, and particularly for discussion in this chapter, relationships between the dance makers are primary, and knowledge is created as individuals communicate and exchange with each other within those relationships.

My journey with these ideas began with a pilot study for this dissertation research, wherein I observed a specific dance making process and conducted interviews with members of the group.[9] The inquiry revealed that the group developed certain sensing prompts and rehearsal practices, which were further embedded in the emerging dance as well as in the process of dance making. What began as improvisation scores for movement investigation became part of how the dance itself was structured. The sensing prompts and rehearsal practices included having the dancers improvise movement for long periods of time with their eyes closed, with the goal of the group eventually moving in unison. These particular prompts and practices created in each dancer a reliance on and responsibility for the other dancers within the group and invited a collective spirit of cohesion and connection among the group members. The group members indicated this

[8] The work of many contemporary cognitive scientists, psychologists, and philosophers support the idea of knowledge creation as an individual's integration, overlap, and harmonious living with the world around her. For a start, see *Out of Our Heads: Why You are Not Your Brain, and Other Lessons from the Biology of Consciousness* (2009) by Alva Noë.

[9] A deep description of the Pilot Study can be found in Chapter I.

spirit as something special and unique from other group dance contexts they were experiencing simultaneously or previously.

The early research with the pilot study led me to wonder about the ways in which dance makers feel themselves becoming a group within the process of dance making. Further, I recognized that a particular dance making process results in the creation of a particular dance. If the group is changed, the dance is changed, and if the dance is changed, the group is changed. Individual relationships shift, and the ways in which people think, move, and *are* together also shifts.

Through the pilot study research, the ideas of dialogical practice in dance making emerged and I became acquainted with the work of twentieth century Russian literary philosopher Mikhail M. Bakhtin. The theories of Bakhtin, explored in more detail later in this chapter, include privileging relationships in order to understand self and action as a dialogue. Relationships for Bakhtin and other theorists reviewed and studied in this dissertation research, often involve overlapping processes of interaction, communication, and shared resources or situations. In this way, the term "relationships" describes the connection between two or more entities: humans, organisms, ideas, and so on. Relationships are not always symmetrical, that is human to human. Still, the data for this dissertation research reflects the use of relationships from a human perspective, specifically human to human, human to self, and human to ideas. For Bakhtin, dialogue is a process wherein relationships with other people, ecologies, technologies, and histories fluidly merge to create and sustain understanding. Dialogue is an unfolding concept throughout this research and will be explored as a fundamental thread in all of the theories collected in this chapter.

Moving from the pilot study into the dissertation research, I sought out more contemporary theorists who also are interested in the philosophical notion I came to recognize as *relational being*, that is placing relationships as central and primary in order to question how we act, think, feel, and exist.[10] These theorists include Kenneth Gergen and John Shotter, who both use Bakhtin's philosophy as foundational when developing their own philosophies about relationships as fundamental to existence. Gergen and Shotter share similar terminology and philosophical underpinnings for their work allowing both to be in conversation with one another. Later in this chapter, I will discuss how Gergen illustrates relational being and how a relational perspective on thinking and learning could ideally exist in western culture. I will place Gergen's insights in dialogue with Shotter, who also addresses thinking and speaking as well as choice making within a relational context.

While not calling upon the philosophical notion of relational being by name, Erin Manning also emerged as a philosopher interested in process philosophy,[11] movement, as

[10] Bakhtin uses "co-being" to describe his perspective of relationships as essential for understanding existence and action. The terminology of "relational being" is a more contemporary notion of this idea, surpassing the misnomer of co-existence, to get at more clearly the importance of relationships for existence and action. I was using the term from my own readings of Bakhtin and Martin Buber, as well as readings of understanding action as relational, when I encountered Gergen who clearly characterizes the terminology.

[11] Process Philosophy is a philosophical trend that developed from Alfred Whitehead and the Harvard community in the 1920s. It has influences from Plato, Newtonian Science, and Hume among other paradigms of thought.

well as an understanding of the inter-connectivity of beings in action. Specifically, Manning addresses how thinking and speaking occur as actions within a relational process. I am also drawn to her work because of its emergence from her own movement practices and because I find the poetic way she presents her work to mirror the ideas she presents.

The work of Shannon Sullivan is situated within the philosophies of pragmatism and feminism. The nature of Sullivan's work is based in human interaction and transaction, and she believes differences should be assumed while commonalities created, instead of vice versa. The work of Sullivan is sensitive to bodies and how they speak and are affected by issues of power, both individually and culturally. Sullivan emphasizes the connection between bodies and the environments in which they move and how both mesh together to create meaning for the mover. From Sullivan's work on voice, I discovered the work of Judith Bradford and Crispin Sartwell, which I found very beneficial in expanding ideas of dialogue, a considerable feature of all of these theories in conversation together. Again, these ideas will be considered in more detail later in this chapter.

The following sections of this chapter introduce and further analyze the vocabulary of the ideas in conversation among these specific philosophers who undergird the research data analysis and interpretation for this dissertation over all. Within this chapter, I review and develop specific ideas offered by the philosophers, placing them in relationship with the dissertation research data later on in order to open new insights for the act of dance making.

BAKHTIN AND THE EVENT OF BEING

Much of Russian philosopher Mikhail M. Bakhtin's writings and theories revolves around the act of creating literature and literary criticism. However, he quite poetically projects how his philosophy can offer a perspective of reality and existence through relationships, addressing meaning and purpose for life in general. Michael Holquist, the primary Bakhtin scholar cited in this dissertation, uses the term *dialogism* to refer to Bakhtin's set of ideas about relationships. Although Bakhtin never used this term himself, I agree with Holquist that *dialogism,* as an umbrella concept, assists with the translation and understanding of the ideas Bakhtin was pursuing about experiencing: heteroglossia, utterances, and the event of being (terms discussed directly in this section). These terms, according to Holquist, are part of a dialogical understanding of being, and are significant to how I began conceiving of collaboration in dance making after working with the pilot study discussed at the beginning of this chapter.

According to Holquist, every verbal and nonverbal utterance "takes place between speakers, and is therefore drenched in social factors" (61). The utterance is just as much what is said as what is left unsaid, for there are certain social assumptions made about a particular situation that can make even silence a different kind of effective communication. People who create a situation together begin to share references and an understanding of that situation. This act of sharing within a specific situation then creates a shorthand for their ongoing discourse and provides commonalities for ease within their dialogue in the moment it is shaped. Holquist outlines the interactive and emanating nature of an utterance, suggesting that an utterance is "on the border between what is said and what is not said, since as a social phenomenon *par excellence*, the utterance is shaped by speakers who assume that the values of their particular community are shared, and thus do not need to be spelled out in what they say" (61).

Levi leads an activity that is about exploring dancers' choices. He indicates a hope for silence and for an internal reflection from everyone, yet he encourages people to use the word "Stop!" The activity involves applying direct pressure to a single part of a partner's body until a limit is reached. He says, "This is not a massage."

I see people using their hands to make interesting choices about where to place or test weight on their partner's bodies. Then, I see hands, feet, knees, toes, elbows, heads, and forearms all used to apply direct pressure to a single place on a partner. This activity seems to be about finding limits: applying weight in order to discover stopping points. I hear occasional vocalizations of "Stop!" but not as much as I realize I expected to hear. I also discover that what I see is a bit deceiving, because there are moments that appear as if a "Stop!" should be used and is not, and there are other exchanges in which a "Stop!" is clearly articulated that comes as a surprise to me as a spectator.

Levi instructs that this activity is not about pain but rather about communicating limits. At any point, a "Stop!" can be communicated for any reason. The term has a universal meaning, and yet the context in which it is used or not used and the responses it elicits that contribute to its meaning are unique and ephemeral within each partnership.

Heteroglossia is a term coined by Bakhtin to suggest that there are many kinds of responses, all of which are particularly situated in space/time, with unstable meanings that are made from moment to moment within ongoing relationships. Heteroglossia is an arc or amalgam of potential responses from multiple voices that do not necessarily belong to the speaker; they reflect a polyphonic perspective.[12] Holquist describes it as follows:

> Heteroglossia is a way of conceiving the world as made up of a rolling mass of languages, each of which has its own distinct formal markers. These features are never purely formal, for each has associated with it a set of distinctive values and presuppositions. Heteroglossia governs the operation of meaning in the kind of utterance we call a literary text, as it does in any utterance. (69)

Holquist goes on to propose that heteroglossia is an idea that suggests a convergence between culture and individuation and one that makes a communicative moment meaningful within the moment of convergence. He says that heteroglossia "comes as close as possible to conceptualizing a locus where the great centripetal and centrifugal forces that shape discourse can meaningfully come together" (70). It is this concept of a locus where discourse can be shaped and made meaningful that is of import to this dissertation research.

Amidst the analysis of a literary aesthetic activity, wherein the author and the hero are creating a world together, Bakhtin expresses his thoughts about utterances and the event of being. In an essay entitled "The Soul's Surrounding World," Bakhtin suggests that the world as we experience it and possess knowledge of has already been spoken.

[12] The concept of *voice* will be more closely examined later in this chapter.

Our hope for new understandings, new discoveries, lies in what is yet to be uttered: the future still lingers in the unknown among the actors in the anticipated moment of exchange:

> . . . .[T]he *actual* world . . . is an already uttered, already pronounced meaning of the event of being; the world in its presently existing makeup is a world that *has* achieved expression—it is an already uttered word, a word that *has* already sounded . . . . So long as the word remained unsaid, it was possible to believe and to hope, for one could still look forward to the compelling fullness of meaning. But when the word *is* pronounced, it is completely *here* in all its ontically obstinate concreteness—*all* of it is here, and there is nothing else . . . . the uttered word is an embodiment of meaning in mortal flesh. (*Art and Answerability* 133)[13]

Once a meaning has been uttered—and this can be spoken or unspoken—it has already contributed to the world and become "mortal flesh" within the scope of the event of being. Bakhtin uses the term *event of being* because, for him (and for this research), being is an activity that is constantly reshaped and continually confirmed as an interactive moment in and through space/time as people engage with one another in a specific situation.

Her hand snaked under my arm and then she withdrew it again.

I could snake my hand under her arm, or mimic the direction of movement with my leg. I could answer with movement of the opposite quality: rather than slithery smooth, I could move my arm in staccato stutters or dabs. My whole body could become the action that she made with just her arm, or I simply could wiggle my little finger or

[13] All italicized words inside of quotes are emphasized with italics by the original author, not by this researcher.

blink my eyes in reply. In an instant, a hundred options go through my mind. Once I make a choice, I will have influenced the dance in a particular direction that cannot be undone. Is there a right or a wrong choice? Which should I choose? Does she want to go in a specific direction? Do I? I finally decide to pause in response. I wait and listen through my body with my eyes closed. Is this the ending or the beginning?

According to Holquist, both heteroglossia and utterances inform experiencing and being in that the "event" is never pure but always contextualized by time, environment, and other actors in the environment:

> As soon as co-being is recognized as an event's necessary mode of existence, we give up the right to anything that is immaculate, *in-itself*, for everything will depend on how the relation between what happens and its situation in time/space is mediated. (116)

Meaning is always being approximated between people and within situations and therefore there is no "immaculate," no pure meaning. Thus, within an utterance is an expectation of certain responses that can be called forth, both in terms of language and in terms of expression. The situation and/or the relationship can help to edit the options of meanings toward the most appropriate utterance. This process is made fresh and new in each unique utterance, but it encompasses the repetition of meanings made in moments past between speakers/listeners in dialogue.

Therefore, as stated earlier, for Bakhtin, the event of being is considered co-being. The self is relational within a specific space/time: you confirm my existence and I consummate yours within our shaped space/time. There is no being without each other; we are always co-being. Bakhtin describes this as follows:

> Being is no longer something that is thought of, but something that *is*, something that is being actually and inescapably accomplished through me and others . . . it is actually experience, affirmed in an emotional-volitional manner, and cognition constitutes merely a moment in this experiencing-affirming. (*Toward a Philosophy of the Act* 13)

Here Bakhtin is noting that experiencing-affirming is an action made among people together and that cognition is also an act of relation. For Bakhtin, my consciousness engages in being through "acts of thinking, acts of feeling, acts of speaking, acts of doing" (*Art and Answerability* 98). Because being is always ongoing, the event of being is never presently situated; although it is experienced in the present, the event of being is always moving to the future, the possibility of what might be as people move together. The present is a "being-already-realized," but the event of being is a hope, desire, or assumption of the relationships unfurling in particular directions, and the relationships are "tasks-to-be-accomplished" (*Art and Answerability* 98).

Bakhtin further describes the event of being through a breakdown of the terms *horizon* and *environment*. According to Bakhtin, *environment* is the combination of the outside world with myself from outside of myself, and *horizon* is the combination of the outside world and myself from within myself. I use my horizon to orient myself in the world. Bakhtin states:

> From within me myself, within the meaning-and-value context of my own life, an object *stands over against* me as the object of my own (cognitive, ethical, and practical) directedness in living my life, in this context, the object is a constituent of the unitary and unique open event of being, in which I partake as a participant who has an urgent interest in the outcome of that event. From within my actual

> participation in the event of being the outside world is the *horizon* of my active, act-performing consciousness. (*Art and Answerability* 97)

Within the horizon, objects are actions. They are relationships that I enact; I participate with the object. Bakhtin continues:

> The object's standing over against me, in space and in time, is what constitutes the principle of the *horizon*: objects do not *surround* me (my outer body) in their presently given makeup and their presently given value, but rather—*stand over against* me as the objects of my own cognitive-ethical directedness in living my life within the open, still risk-fraught event of being, whose unity, meaning, and value are not *given* but imposed as a *task* still to be accomplished. (*Art and Answerability* 98)

I understand Bakhtin to sense objects as relationships—akin to ideas—wherein I interact, merge, and am affected by their resonance just as I affect them through interpretation and perception. Objects, then, perform like personas or other beings of consciousness. They take on characteristics and even breathe insofar as I engage with them in co-creating the event of being.

At this point, I draw a clear connection between Bakhtin's event of being and the making of a dance within a group. I see this connection acting in two specific ways. First, the dialogue I engage in with the other dance makers to communicate and function together is a fluid co-creation of the event of being—that event of being is the unfolding, not-yet-made or realized dance. The dance is negotiated and navigated through the utterances that occur with the other dance makers in my environment. Second, the dance becomes personified, as if it is an entity revealing itself with its own epistemological and axiological presence. In this sense, the dance *stands over against* the dance makers as an object that they participate with in the continual event of being.

Holquist writes, "It cannot be stressed enough that for him [Bakhtin] 'self' is dialogic, a *relation*" (19). The self as relational became interesting to me in the context of dance making in light of Bakhtin's ideas of co-experiencing and co-creating the event of being. In the following research and discussions I present the process of dance making as offering clear examples for how people continually co-create through questions and challenges within a specific space/time: a dance/knowledge emerges within the act of creating the event of being together.

RELATIONAL BEING AND WITHNESS-THINKING

Psychologist and philosopher Kenneth Gergen writes about relational being in ways that, for this research, can also be applied to relationships within the creative processes of dance making. To understand what Gergen means by relational being, it is important to first examine his ideas about "bounded being." Gergen frames bounded being as a cultural construct built by social mores and traditions inviting us to believe that there exist boundaries between people and experiences. The self is seen as most important, and what happens internally—"in thoughts, feelings, desires, hopes, and so on"—is paramount to the ways in which we perceive our existence and understand our experiences (Gergen 4). Indeed, for centuries, philosophers have argued and taught many and varying ideas of the self as being in and of itself, if not solipsistic then as central and primary in focus, albeit acted upon by outside forces. The effects of bounded being include hypercritical views of oneself and others, artifice, the marketing and capitalization of the self, reciprocity for good deeds, and ultimately the loss of the intrinsic value of humanity, because "all values are abandoned save market value" (Gergen 23).

In this view, every action a person makes is calculated to manipulate and arrange the situation toward individual social or economic good fortune. Because the concept of bounded being focuses on the internal revelations of a so-called free and independent self, to understand someone else we must seek to understand his or her internal nature. Knowing that this is an impossible task, Gergen writes, "all we have are 'outward' expressions of an inner world, never access to this world itself" (14). This causes distrust, insincerity, and artifice in the process of relating, which in turn spurs the vicious cycle of further boundary creation by distancing oneself and other-ing more deeply.[14] Gergen describes this as follows:

> What, then, do we ever truly know about the other? When we presume boundaries of being, we are thrust into a condition of fundamental distrust. We want to believe the sincerity of others' appreciation; we try to convince ourselves that the love is authentic. Yet, at base we also know that we do not know. The bounded mind is forever elusive and opaque. (14)

We measure ourselves against each other by judging the actions of others and how they might contribute to our personal gain, relying on expectations and assumptions because we cannot know the feelings, thoughts, desires, and intentions of anyone else.

Inside bounded being, our interests in relationships are primarily for "personal use or satisfaction," and so "a committed relationship is a subtle mark of insufficiency. It

---

[14] I use the term *other-ing* to describe the creation of difference between people and people groups.

suggests that we lack something" (Gergen 17). Only inasmuch as the relationship remains useful and satisfying is it worthwhile; there is always a "threat of expendability" (Gergen 17). In our quest for independence and autonomy, we trick ourselves into believing that the individual bounded self can become more whole, more pure, more autonomous, and more free. It is at the pinnacle of this self-aggrandizing sense of bounded self that we discover "freedom contains an emptiness that only relationship can fill" (Gergen 20).

When we shift the primary importance and emphasis from the self to the relationship, we value the ongoing co-activities of experience, thought, and communication: we invite a rationale for the self as a separate entity only emerging from the process of relationship (Gergen 31). Relational being (as opposed to bounded being) is therefore discovered within the space between the self and others. For Gergen, all mental processes—reason, memory, motives and intentions, in addition to emotions and sensations of pleasure and pain—are relational processes (32).

For Gergen, all actions must be interwoven exchanges in order for them to be meaningful. No single action can be isolated and possess meaning. "There are no acts of love, altruism, prejudice, or aggression" that occur in a vacuum, concludes Gergen. These actions "require a supplement, an action by at least one other person that ratifies their existence as something" (Gergen 33). The idea of action ratified by supplemental action is akin to Bakhtin's notion of *consummation:* my existence is made real by your presence, despite the spatial or temporal distance of our co-action. Much like Bakhtin's idea of *utterance*, this idea of *co-action,* as Gergen suggests, is not simple cause and effect; rather, it is a complex experience weaving together communication, cultural context, history, and physical awareness. Gergen summarizes:

> Without co-action the noises emitted from the mouth are little more than sounds; these sounds come into meaning as people coordinate their actions around them. In this sense, all our terms for mental life are created within relationships. (Gergen 70)

Furthermore, Gergen continues to say that it is not merely the terms that are created through relationship but also the discourse that surrounds the terms. Even intention is a co-action in that it is not a process that takes place inside one's mind and determines the direction of actions; rather, "[t]o name my intentions is to name the performance in which I am engaged" (Gergen 81). This performance, of course, is relational.

The discourse of intention is a feature of a greater discussion of free will and agency given that Western culture puts great emphasis on intention and being able to account for or explain ourselves. Additionally, in dance making intention is often a notion that dance makers rely on to measure choices and to assess clarity in the creation and communication of the dance idea. Communications scholar John Shotter is a proponent of relational being and describes free will within a relational paradigm:

> So, how we find ourselves 'called upon' to act (if we are free to act as our circumstances demand) is not imposed on us by an outside authority, by a pre-existing set of rules or conventions, concerned merely with its objective characteristics, but is determined by our body's attempt to sustain its 'grip' or 'grasp,' its optimal focus on and contact with, the different detailed features of our circumstances as they unfold in time. And literally we do more or less justice to those features to the degree that we let ourselves be guided by them; the more we subordinate ourselves to them and allow ourselves to be immersed in them, the more we respect *their* nature in *our* actions in relation to them. (*Getting It* 32)

Shotter believes free will constitutes not only the absence of a governing outside force but also the use of and engagement with our experiences and circumstances as they are lived through. Allowing ourselves to be affected by our circumstances invites us to discover more ways in which we can be engaged within them. In this way, free will is a dialogue between our awareness of circumstances as they unfold and the ways in which we allow those circumstances to guide our responses.

A basic and general definition of dialogue is that it is a spoken or written conversation between two or more people. In developing my own working understanding of relational being, however, I began to understand that dialogue can also be seen as an unfolding event with no beginning or ending, an event that contextualizes not only a directed subject of conversation but also a sense of ongoing re-formation of language and personal identity for those people within the interaction. In this way, dialogue is not only a communicative tool but also a function of how thinking occurs. Dialogue, like relational being itself, emerges because of the presence of a person or experience with which one is conversing.[15] Furthermore, other people, circumstances, and experiences profoundly influence the potential responses and ultimately the choices of an individual within a dialogue.

---

[15] The interaction of dialogue can take place between a person and an idea. For example, within the creative process of writing fiction, Bakhtin puts the Author (Dostoyevsky) in conversation with the Hero (Raskolnikov); Dostoyevsky is a real person while Raskolnikov, as the protagonist of the book *Crime and Punishment*, is an imagined idea. Similarly, a dance maker is in conversation with the emerging dance. The idea of the emerging dance is an experience and an intention.

A large group of dancers was given a prompt and they then organized themselves into trios to generate movement material. Daniel found himself working with two other dancers who were not vocal in expressing their ideas about the movement generation or their opinions about what Daniel was offering. After working for a rather long period of time on his own ideas for the trio and without receiving any feedback, Daniel finally expressed his frustration with his two dance partners. He felt that he could just continue generating his own movement for them all but that the point was to be doing something together. Without their ideas or their opinions about his ideas, Daniel felt that he was generating movement material that was singular, thin, and without clear direction. He felt his partners were acting like dolls for him to arrange. Because Daniel felt that he had no one with whom to be in dialogue, to challenge his ideas or inspire him to create new ideas, the work had no depth and was not connected to the prompt.

Shotter continues to discuss his use of relational being as a "withness-thinking" philosophy, allocating for practitioners to adopt the stance of engaging in the world and reflecting on experiences "in a *relationally responsive manner* to events occurring around us" (*Getting It* 35). This means that people embrace an attitude of "readiness to respond" to events in ways that "draw on all our embodied knowledge of dialogical phenomena" (*Getting It* 35). Responses can be verbal and nonverbal. The behavior of responding within a relational framework like those Bakhtin, Shotter, and Gergen all describe is one way of conceptualizing co-action because a response is predicated on an initial prompt, which is also a response in some way to another prompt and so on. Therefore, according to Shotter, adopting the stance, embracing the attitude, and participating in the dialogue is engaging withness-thinking, which can then contribute powerfully to how that individual may continue or sustain the dialogue with others and with, in the case of this research, the dance making process.

According to Shotter, ". . . central to withness-thinking, is the crucial roles that people's *situated speech* can play in shaping not only their own and other people's actions, but also who people take themselves to be, their identity" (*Getting It* 42). For Shotter, the idea of situated speech is speech that, "in the moment-to-moment unfolding contours of its uttering, is responsive in its voicing to the unfolding contours of the events occurring out in the situation that both we as listeners and they as speakers share" (42). Listeners and speakers share events, and those events may continue to manifest outside of the real-time situation. For example, what a parent enforces to her child during childhood may continue to be a source of influence and a subject of conversation for that child well into adulthood. Like Bakhtin's idea of *hidden dialogicality*, Shotter says that "another's voice can enter into us and influence our own inner dialogues," like the child "hearing" his parent's reprimand or support long after he has matured into adulthood (*Getting It* 44). In this way, "invisible voices" can be present and influential within a dialogue.

The applications of relational being and withness-thinking are manifold. For dance making in group situations, negotiating and navigating the creation process together can be challenging. In addition to the work of safely generating movement that appeals aesthetically to the intention of the dance idea and that makes sense for the dancers who are charged with communicating ideas to an audience not privy to the extent of the creative process, dance makers engage in withness-thinking. The dance makers create a dialogue that both shapes the dance and transforms the dance makers themselves, thereby further reinforcing relational being and the emergence of shared knowledge creation.

VOICES, BODYING, AND DIALOGUE

I have mentioned the importance of nonverbal behavior in dialogue, and I have discussed the importance of what is not said as being evidence of relational connection and situatedness. Because people are bodies in activity, body language and spatial orientation are part of the event of being. Furthermore, for this research the process of dance making involves a dialogue that is emergent from relational bodies. Thus, it is important to discuss bodies in more depth: bodies are imperatives of dialogue and communication, and they are a medium of dance, which is the focus of this research.

Pragmatist and feminist philosopher Shannon Sullivan uses the term *bodying* to describe the deep ways in which human behavior, thought, and experience are revealed and discovered through the body. She argues against Merleau-Ponty’s ideas of projection and commonality through flesh by stating that Merleau-Ponty’s assertions falsely illustrate a way of reflecting unchanged thoughts back to the self, albeit from the standpoint of another. Sullivan finds Merleau-Ponty’s notion domineering and solipsistic. Instead, she aspires to “an account of the situated, habitual, lived experiences of human bodying, including how nondominating communication and meaning-creation might be possible” (87). To this end, she writes:

> I cannot assume that I understand another's bodying correctly, and if I attempt to do so without paying attention to the particularities of others' bodily activities, I am almost sure to misunderstand. Communication does not occur when others are only reflections of me back to myself. (74-75)

Sullivan suggests an idea that she calls *hypothetical construction,* a kind of transactional communication that invites an honoring of another's bodying as part of meaning-making and communication. Similar to Shotter's notion of *situated speech*, hypothetical construction asks that practitioners seek to see the perspective of each other and become changed by the empathetic process. According to Sullivan this act of empathy is not merely a reflective activity that involves me enacting my own self but from your standpoint. Instead, the effort of imagining myself in your place *as you* (and not me) perhaps allows me to see myself as you see me and make adjustments to my own bodying. I understand and interpret the empathic perspective put forth by Sullivan as stemming from listening in a very specific way to another person. This idea of listening includes a nuanced understanding of a whole person. Listening is not merely an activity that happens by hearing with ears, but an accounting also for history, mood, and present circumstances.

Sullivan continues to say that "[h]ypothetical construction, which makes bodily communication explicit, is crucial to prevent the assumption of the familiar in another and thus the misunderstanding of him or her" (82). For Sullivan, then, assuming and recognizing the familiar is a failing of communication because it is important to hold differences and unique particularities as central features of transactional communication. She suggests that, "[i]nstead of looking for a bodily core or structure unmarked by differences, one could hold that bodies are constituted by means of transactional bodyings of gender, race, class, age, sexuality, nationality, culture, experiences, and upbringing, and more" (74). With regard to the veneration of differences, she writes:

> Commonality is an active achievement. Similarities among people are something that must be created, cultivated, and nurtured so that a nondomineering form of coexistence is possible, not something to assume as a transcendental condition for the possibility of communication. (74)

Here, Sullivan acknowledges similarity, but she suggests that it is created instead of assumed.[16] Creating similarity within a dialogue seems perfectly natural as meaning is created and deepened through communication.

She stands hesitantly at the edge of the dance space. She is nervous about stepping onto the dance floor because she knows that her uncertainty about movement and touch will be noticeable to her potential dance partners. She watches the other dancers for a long time. She sees them finding connections, developing movements and relationships together, and moving on to new connections. She is a comfortable observer but she does not yet have the temerity to cross over the edge of the space to try the movement and trust a dance partner. So she stands.

He comes to stand with her. At first he thoughtfully positions himself next to her so that he is not blocking her view of the dance floor and so that she can see all of him. He introduces himself to her and they chat for a moment. She recognizes him as one of the dancers she has seen moving adeptly and connecting easily with other people. As they

[16] Like Sullivan, I am using the terms *similarity* and *commonality* interchangeably.

are chatting he moves, almost imperceptibly, so that they are standing with their shoulders touching. It is a moment before she notices. She looks at their connected shoulders and exhales. Then she looks at his face. He looks back at her and says, "I'll just stand here with you. Is that okay?" She nods and notices that they are beginning to breathe together. She leans into the shoulder connection and slowly their arms intertwine. They stand together watching.

Like Sullivan suggests, I am hoping, through an active listening to these ideas, to sense meaning as it is made, create similarities, and honor differences through the commencement of a dialogue among these theorists and the ideas of my interviewed and observed participants within this research. I am in the privileged position of arranging this dialogue while at the same time witnessing the unfolding of meaning that I sense. Another layer then, is the dialogue created between you, the reader, and me, the writer. I am purposely not using the term *author* because I feel that there are many voices in this conversation. Although I hope that meaning is created between you and me, I acknowledge that the understanding may be a result of others' voicings/bodyings.

The issue or idea of "having a voice" within relational being is worth discussing and resonates with similarities to the previous discussion of bodying. Judith Bradford and Crispin Sartwell point out that "having a voice" does not generally refer just to speaking; rather, it means having the power to be understood and heard. Furthermore, "having a voice" indicates that a person can situate herself within a particular context, which then implies an ability to be an active listener. Like bodying, voices are situated in particular contexts. They are gendered, raced, and sexualized in specific ways that impart individual characteristics into relationships. When writing about voices and bodies philosophically, Bradford and Sartwell offer:

> Voices are relations of articulation and reception in social contexts; what will get understood is not up to me, or my listeners, but is made out of the interactions between them. The meanings of these interactions are set up by the intersections of my history and theirs, of the ways we have come to be out of our different experiences in certain contexts. (195)

These ideas highlight and confirm previously mentioned notions about dialogue and relational being, but they particularly address voice.

The large group of dancers is divided into three smaller groups composed of about five or so dancers. Each small group is working on movement material, creating and editing as they go in order to have a section of movement to show the other groups and to use in the larger arc of the dance as a whole. I notice that every movement, pause, sustainment, or push-through is considered and that these three groups of dancers MUST *discuss everything. They meticulously put their ideas into context for their group members, constantly questioning their choices.*

I wonder about the content of the material. For the last hour, I have been watching these three small groups and the movement sections they are generating do not seem to mean anything or to be anything other than the result of their working together here and now. They talk about "what feels right," and one dancer stepping out to watch her group seems to see what is good or right and what is not about the developing *movement section. It remains unclear to me what the content of the movement is or how these three group sections might thread together.*

When all three groups are working on different projects like this, I notice that they have very in-depth discussions; they almost argue about the choices and possibilities they discover. They become frustrated with each other easily, but they also become celebratory and unified easily as well. At this point, I have seen enough to believe that these conversations are not only important and interesting to the individual dancers who are engaging in them together but they are also important to the process of creating the dance overall.

THE MANY BECOME ONE

Erin Manning uses process philosophy to understand a relational sense of being and, in particular, a relational sense of bodying. She writes, “A body is always more than one: it is a processual field of relation and the limit at which that field expresses itself as such” (*Always More Than One* 17). For Manning, the identifying aspects of a body’s form—race, gender, sexual preference, and so on—are important in that they contribute to the co-constitution of that body in particular ways, but to consider only physical form as the body itself is a failing. She writes, “A body is the *how* of its emergence, not the what of its form” (*Always More Than One* 17). Thus, Manning views bodies and bodying as complex processes of overlapping phases and ecologies, all of which are in constant movement and flux. She says, “There is never stability. And there can never be non-movement—even in what appears to be complete stillness there is quality of movement-moving, force of form" (*Always More Than One* 14). In this way, there is no beginning and no ending between bodies as the movement of ideas spills from one process into the next already-moving process.

In her book *Relationscapes,* Manning uses the experience of dancing the tango, which I will also expand on, to show the ways in which her concepts emerge. Manning sets about understanding dance and movement as ways in which people grow together and create something new: the group, or what she calls *the many*. Her example of growing together is rooted in two people dancing the tango becoming one novel and actual entity—the dance. The terms *novel* as well as *actual entity* are from her study of the work of process philosopher Alfred Whitehead; Manning uses these terms to mean "one/unique" and "existing in reality," respectively.

Concresence, another term borrowed from Whitehead's work, is the process by which a novel and actual entity emerges from the growing together of previous entities.[17] Manning writes:

> Concresence can be a political moment: the interval we are dancing is always more than the qualified "we." This "we" transfers any thought of subjectivity beyond the individual not simply to individuation but also to infra-individuation, to a thought of the collective that does not emerge from a group of individuals but precedes the very concept of individuality. (*Relationscapes* 22)

Therefore, for Manning, the many is not merely a group of individuals; instead, before an individual can even present itself, the collective must already exist. This notion is akin to

---

[17] Concrescence is a biological term that is mostly used to discuss the process whereby two teeth grow together to become one tooth. There are other biological examples including organs that fuse together and in embryology the term is used to indicate the growing together of cells.

the ideas of the self emerging from the group that Bakhtin, Gergen, and Shotter detail. My perception is that an aspect of the collective always exists for individuals in that even on the level of DNA, remnants of a collective culture and history are present within a singular person. Furthermore, each collective is novel, so the many is both collective and singular; it is one group that is comprised of more than one individual. Manning outlines this aspect of collectives by suggesting that they are "the many in the one and add one" indicating the process of change as constantly occurring. She continues:

> To locate the many in the one and add one is to suggest that every movement is first and foremost collective: collective and singular. It is collective in the sense that it is relational, that it has a profound effect on the composition of its intensive extensions. These intensities become movements of thought, where thought is never distinct from the movement itself. Movements of thought are potential articulations of the political. Such articulations propose that we are never alone in the world: movements of thought are worldings that recombine the potential for collective thought. (*Relationscapes* 22).

The term *collective* also indicates both the many as well as the thoughts of the many. Thoughts create the world, which folds back to influence the many in a continuous, fluid, yet directional loop. The tango is a world, which is created by the movements/thoughts of one couple dancing together. The world of the tango is a particular ecology expressing specific history, attitudes, and codes and also the dancing couple possesses their own histories and experiences. The dancers and the dance influence each other.

The politics that Manning refers to indicate "the force of the more-than where what is at stake is not simply the human but the ecologies of existence that coevolve in the realm of the more than human" (*Always More Than One* 148). The environment, the culture, the non-human living things, and the inanimate technologies co-evolve in the realm to contribute to the movement within and the constitution of the world. Manning also suggests that these are not politics that can be managed or choreographed; rather, they are the result of the many in concrescence. Because "many potential bodies exist in a singular body," the politics are the transitional state of the many-bodied collective (*Relationscapes* 27). The world is created in the collective movement (which is thinking) of the many, and it is experienced at a particular interval of space/time body intersection.

Another term that Manning presents is the idea of *interval*, which is interchangeable with the idea of relational movement. Manning writes:

> Relational movement means moving the relation. Moving the person will never result in grace. Intensity of movement can only be felt when the in-between—the interval—created by the movement-with takes hold. This interval is ephemeral, impossible to grasp as such, yet essential to the intensive passage from a step to a graceful movement. (*Relationscapes* 30).

The interval itself does not move, but it incites the movement; it is the body and that body's relational counterpart in creating the interval that moves. The tango dancers create a graceful dancing partnership not by pushing each other around but by transacting the dance experience together. Without speaking, they glide into and through the space in relation to and with reliance on one another. Each dancer in the partnership separately holds codes for the tango, but the dance itself only comes to life when the individuals grow together, creating an interval.

The movement occurs in repetition: "repetition is at the heart of the interval" (*Relationscapes* 25). The repetition is actual movement-with, between the body and its relation, both of which are changing entities. As such, repetition is always "with a difference." Manning describes it as follows:

> Repetition is the recomposing of the moving-with that is the relational body. This movement-with can be a spiral of preacceleration that incites a displacement, or it can be a movement of thought. It is always repetition with a difference. When this difference takes form, it becomes an actuality, an event in and of itself. This becoming-event creates a memory that feeds into future movement. Moving is repeating the future: dancing the not-yet. (*Relationscapes* 25)

The tango dancers use the same steps, patterns, and rhythms to dance. However, when two individuals dance at length together, they can recognize the nuances experienced when dancing the same steps over and over and may even endeavor to devise nuances. They may also recognize the nuances of dancing the same steps with different partners. Manning explains:

> Important: we cannot dance together alone. Repetition must remember relation while it actively forgets past combinations. Relation must be reinvented. To dance relationally is not to *represent* movement but to *create* it. (*Relationscapes* 26)

The preacceleration of the interval is a process of movement/thought that is actualized as a feeling of potential, of what might be possible to make real or known and not necessarily what is real or known already. Manning writes:

> Preacceleration is like the breath that releases speech, the gathering-toward that leaps our bodies into a future unknowable. It goes something like this: preacceleration—relation—interval—intensification—actualization—extension—displacement—preacceleration. Simultaneity of experience creates sensing bodies in movement creates shifting space-times of experience. . . . Bodies are never independent of the extensions of space and the matter of time: bodies are durational. The interval makes this duration manifest, virtually. (*Relationscapes* 25)

The interval then enacts a process that makes use of preacceleration as a kind of force of feeling that speaks to a potential in being, which is co-being. In this way, the tango becomes a collaborative dance-making moment wherein the concepts that Manning outlines are comprehensible. In particular, preacceleration as an experience of potential between two dancing partners seems to be a compelling force as the dancers seek movement-with and as they grow together as one entity.

When applying these concepts to language, Manning refers to the idea of *preacceleration* as *prearticulation.* She writes, “Prearticulation is the preacceleration of language: it is where language’s affective tonality comes to expression” (*Relationscapes* 216). Prearticulation is a notion of thought in motion before it becomes language of any kind. Manning indicates that thought is not merely word forming; it also includes sensations:

> Thought is more than a form-taking of words. It is an incipience that proposes articulation through sensation. Thought is a proposition for feeling-in-motion. It is experience’s complex instigator, a force that operates at the relational cusp of becoming-events. (*Relationscapes* 215)

Thinking and prearticulating are relational processes for Manning wherein relational movement propels experiences that lead to a concrescence within both thinking and language. Manning suggests that,

> [t]o articulate thinking-feeling is to activate the conceptual at work in the prearticulation of the experiential. To bring concepts to life rather than simply the contours of things is the first step in expressing the force of a relational environment. (*Relationscapes* 215)

In this way, Manning is suggesting that the world and prearticulation are in a continual dialogue through which they inform each other. Because the world is a porous process in relation with an individual, thinking is also a relational process that can become an action of the many.

The dancers have marked the space for themselves with pieces of clothing and they work hard to stay within the boundaries. I notice the dancers watching each other or having far-off, concentrated gazes. They trust that the others are moving as planned but sense when there might be variation from the plan. This is important in this small space since variation from the plan could quite definitely send them tripping over each other. Occasionally they whisper directions or apologies to each other as they move quickly, passing and interweaving with each other.

When they begin to edit this movement material, I notice a use of common language and physical gestures that takes the place of verbal language. The dancers inhabit the gestures and use the space to orient themselves inside the dance content. It seems that the dance exists as something that is intangible except as the collective effort and memory of the group. Ashley is absent from this rehearsal, and despite the presence of other bodies that step in for her, the dance becomes extremely difficult to recognize and edit. It seems that the particular dancers breathe a specific vibrancy into the dance. The other bodies "substituting" for Ashley do not recreate or reflect the actual Ashley-ness that her body provides the dance and the collective. Each of these dancers uniquely contributes to the existence of the dance and the group. The dance does not exist as a bounded entity but only as relational and resultant of co-being. Furthermore, the group does not exist as a bounded entity; it, too, is relational and novel in its concrescence. The dancers come together to understand, remember, create, and think the dance.

CHAPTER IV

CONNECTING: REVELATION THROUGH RELATIONSHIPS

SITE ONE CHARACTERIZATION

Company Rose is a project-based modern dance company in Nashville, Tennessee, that was founded in 2008 by Marsha Barsky, who is currently serving as the company's artistic director. The group members produce two events per year and occasionally participate as guest artists in outside projects. Company Rose does not operate by keeping a repertoire of dances performance-ready; rather, the company provides a platform for the dancers to create new work biannually.

Company Rose is a casually organized company with a roster of professional dancers who know and have worked with Marsha in the past and who work with the company on the basis of their interest in and availability for each project. Members of the group self-select their commitment level for each project. Nevertheless, the group is consistently about five members strong. All of the dancers are professionals who teach and create in the Nashville area. The group usually meets once a week for a three-hour rehearsal, with additional rehearsals added as needed. Marsha then pays the dancers for performances.

Marsha makes it a point to work specifically with women. In the group discussion that I held with Company Rose, Marsha reflected on how this focus was emphasized during the early days of the group:

> My drive as an artist was based in experiences that really mattered to me but that I thought were also universal experiences. And I'm really interested in being a female artist, and I'm really interested in working with female artists and having the same questions as women that we have and then having a space to really explore those questions via the body, which is so important to me. And then to make beautiful work that is poetic and powerful, and connects that physicality in a way that can hopefully inspire the public to understand the relationships that I feel we have as dancers—to our bodies, really. And that is where it started. (Company Rose)

Marsha met many of the women who dance with Company Rose by teaching a weekly community modern dance class at Vanderbilt University. The class started with just Marsha and one or two other people and then grew to five or six regular attending dancers. From that class, the dancers began to dance for each other and to create work together. Marsha reflects on the feelings she had when she founded Company Rose:

> And you know, for me, when I arrived to this town, it was quite honestly a wasteland. It was a dance desert. There was nothing here. And so this group, this Company Rose really like rose up from an idea: "I want to make dances with people that I want to hang out with! I want to be with my friends and I also want to make dances. And there's nothing; I have no other opportunities in this town, so I'm going to rise up and I'm going to make something." And then I did it—I rose. So that's why I named it Company Rose. (Company Rose)

When the dancers were asked about why they chose to be a part of Company Rose, their responses were overwhelmingly about the passion that they felt when working together. Erin had the following to say:

> I feel very passionately about dancing with these people, and I understand how Marsha works after being with her for a couple years—watching her process

> unfold and then being a part of her process, and figuring out our process together. And honestly, I really like to perform, a lot. (Company Rose)

In fact, all of the dancers possess this kind of awareness with Marsha and with each other, to some degree. Marsha as a person—not only as a choreographer and director—seems to influence the creativity of the dancers. The dancers are not there just to dance or to make a dance: they are also there to work with Marsha. During the group discussion, Ashley affirmed this:

> I come because I love Marsha *and* I respect her work. Loving Marsha is the number one reason I come. *And* she makes great work, and I like doing her work, and I like dancing with the people that she chooses to dance with. *[To Marsha]* If you had someone in the company that I just didn't feel like I connected to, I don't know if I could be here every Friday. But you are a good people reader, and you bring the right people in at the right time. (Company Rose)

Janelle shared this emotional reveal, even after having some difficulty finding her role in the particular creative process observed for this dissertation research and admitting that she is leaving the company for other pursuits:

> I feel like we take care of each other in multiple ways. We really do. And going back to why I come, I've been thinking about it, and I come because I want to be with these women. That is the driving force. Just being here in this space with these really beautiful people and taking care of each other. Not a family, not even somebody you've chosen to spend your life with, but choosing to spend 3 or 4 hours on a Friday night for these 8 months. And that's why I come, because I love everybody, and it's just really, really wonderful to be taken care of by somebody. (Company Rose)

From the preceding comments and my experiences observing and talking with the dancers, it is clear that the group is a very loving and open community. Their respect and admiration for each other is tangible. They talk and laugh and ask about each other's lives like old friends over a glass of wine. In fact, one of the dancer's husbands brought and served wine and snacks before the group discussion began. The group clearly developed a bond during the creative process observed for this dissertation research. For the dancers, the content of the dance that was being created during my observation period fundamentally became about how to care for each other and how to demonstrate compassionate openness for and with each other. I will continue to explore these ideas as the research unfolds.

THE FRIST AND FRUSTRATIONS

The dance work that was being created while I observed Company Rose for this research is entitled *Pools of Glass,* and it was commissioned by The Frist Art Museum in Nashville (The Frist) to coincide with the opening of a new exhibit based on twentieth-century Japanese-influenced artwork, also known as Japonisme.[18] The piece included a quartet of dancers (Erin, Janelle, Ashley, and Jenna) who were responsible for the majority of the dancing and the dance creation. In addition, there were three soloists (Rebecca, Audra, and Marsha), and Marsha directed and choreographed the piece as a whole. This structure emerged from the life circumstances that befell the group during the development of the dance work. Illness and injuries experienced by Rebecca and Audra at the beginning of the process forced them to remove themselves from rehearsal for several months, which left a quartet of dancers remaining. Marsha did not initially intend to dance, but she inserted solo material three times to provide needed breaks for the

[18] The term *Japonisme* is used to describe the influence of Japanese culture—fashion, art, and aesthetics—on European impressionist art during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

quartet of dancers who were performing the evening-length dance. When Rebecca and Audra returned, Marsha was grateful and eager to pass along the solo material to them. This is one example of how the needs of the dancers shape the work of Company Rose.

Company Rose's relationship with The Frist is continuous. Every year, the museum commissions a dance work from the company that will be performed in conjunction with a feature exhibit; *Pools of Glass* was the fourth such piece. The museum provides funds and opportunities for Company Rose to perform in the community while also challenging the company's movement vocabulary, habits, and style preferences by eliciting themes that often move beyond issues the company has previously explored.[19] However, the company members assured me that The Frist does not encroach on their autonomy as they create commissioned work. Marsha comments on the process:

> I feel this strange responsibility in terms of serving the needs of The Frist, and serving the needs of the public, and serving the needs of my—not *my* dancers—but *us* as dancers, and then myself as an artist. I feel like my brain goes all over the place because it's not necessarily my goal as an artist to comment on early twentieth-century art through dance. I have multiple responsibilities—to myself really—like my self-preservation and making choices that I feel comfortable with and that I feel confident in, and that I feel proud of, like being proud of the work that I make. But then also feeling like I'm offering something meaningful to these ladies [the dancers] who devote every Friday night to me, which is crazy. And if they are willing to share the space with me, I want to represent them well, and I want them to feel proud, and then also The Frist to feel proud, and the people to leave happy. And then I go and see a fan [from the audience] and hear them say, "Oh, WOW! I saw air!" or whatever. Movement made that person connect to something on a wall. It's a lot of responsibility. It overwhelms me. (Company Rose)

[19] The relationship between Company Rose and The Frist Art Museum is certainly an interesting one. The references to the depth of that partnership are included here only insofar as the details pertain to the making of the dance and the creative process.

Company Rose receives very little guidance from The Frist, and there is no creative intervention whatsoever from the museum beyond providing sheets of digital images of the art and artifacts to be shown in the exhibit to provide inspiration for the dancers, if they choose to use them. In this case, Company Rose was given digital images of the massive collection that would comprise The Frist's exhibit, but the group's members did not view the actual artworks until the opening of the exhibit, after the dance work had already been created and performed. This was a challenging task for the group, and they discussed with me how they stumbled over the content of the collection. Because the dancers were unfamiliar with the artwork and the issues that the artwork raised, they were only able to find connections to the artwork through generating movement material and fostering relationships with each other within the creative process for *Pools of Glass*. Marsha describes the beginning:

> The first phase [of the creative process] was an understanding of the material—of the content—an exploration of what the dance was actually going to represent. Not that it was a representational dance, but we had a project. This was a commissioned work, and there was a clear objective of what was required: a 40-minute dance that addressed Japonisme. I didn't know what that was, so the first phase of rehearsal was spent having discussions with everybody [the dancers in the company]. That was very, very collaborative, very open, and many ideas were shared. I felt that there was really no one central leader, for lack of a better word. Very articulate intelligent women were coming together to try and make sense of a particular moment in art—that was really exciting. (Barsky)

Although the discussions were compelling, the group grappled with finding authenticity inside the visual art movement of Japonisme, which felt quite removed from their own experiences. The dancers are all white American women between twenty-eight and forty years old who have college degrees in dance. In addition to trying to comprehend certain aspects of Japonisme, the dancers faced struggles that impeded the process and their excitement about making *Pools of Glass*.

After sharing and reviewing the images that The Frist provided, the group began to generate movement by using different tactics and techniques for researching and improvising movement. Marsha commented on this process:

> I feel that everybody that I work with is quite open to just jumping in to improvisation. In fact, I feel like they are more comfortable with that than me saying, "Okay 5, 6, 7, 8—go." They are much more comfortable, they are much more independent women. They all make their own dances, they all make their own art—and that's what they really love. So those improvisations were really enjoyable and were really cohesive; there was a lot of cohesion when we worked in that way. But then there is a point where you've got to step out and get the work done. The clock is ticking. There was a deadline. (Barsky)

The group worked well in improvisation, and the dancers seemed to stay in or return to that place as comfortable and confidence building. The group worked for five months and yet—because of injuries, dancers missing rehearsals, and Marsha herself needing to be out of town—the deadline seemed to cause insecurity and pressure. Improvising in rehearsals and building improvisation into the score for *Pools of Glass* paradoxically provided structure for the dancers and allowed them to build trust in and community with each other.

During the group discussion and interviews conducted for this research, the dancers repeatedly alluded to the frustrations they experienced during the creation of this piece, which included a wide range of circumstantial events that complicated the process. Beyond the group's general bewilderment with Japonisme, there were also injuries and issues with rehearsal space and attendance. Audra and Rebecca became seriously ill and injured within the first weeks of the process. Later, Ashley had a cracked rib that prevented her from being able to contribute physically or dance the material full out for a period of time. The issue of how injuries affected the group will be explored further in the section of this chapter entitled “Becoming a Group.”

The rehearsal space was problematic because the space donated for the company to use was small, and the floor was not sprung.[20] This made rehearsal strenuous for the dancers, who were attempting physically demanding movement and complex spatial patterns. Furthermore, there were periods of inclement weather that resulted in two instances of rehearsal being canceled. These issues were compounded by the dancers’ inconsistent attendance, despite their commitment to the work and to each other. The details of this struggle—how both the individuals and the group managed their emotions and creative energies as they attempted to understand Japonisme, make *Pools of Glass* together, and endure repeated rehearsal administration obstacles—comprise the subject matter of the subsequent portions of this chapter.

———————Interlude———————

The walls of the gallery studio are hung with grotesque cartoons and comic book–like artwork. The open space of the studio is small but adequate for dance practice, and there are several desks with computers off to the side. The room is divided—the office from the studio—by tall shelves with books, CDs, figurines, and magazines. I am the first to arrive, and I am surprised but delighted to find the space open and welcoming, with lights on and heaters going. There is a long wooden bench against one wall, and I make a little home for myself there.

---

[20] A sprung floor is a special type of floor that is used for dancing. Sprung floors are built to absorb shock and to give a soft feel for dancers who are jumping, running, and so on.

The dancers arrive one by one. They are wrapped in scarves and wearing hats and boots. Three of them come dressed in their rehearsal clothes and begin to move around, removing their outwear piece by piece as they warm up, all the while chatting about the events of the day. Another dancer arrives and, after hugging and greeting the others, takes a moment alone to breathe and lie into the floor in front of the heater. One dancer arrives in a flurry. Her hair is a huge pile exploding out of a tiny hat, and she is wearing high heels and tapestry-like pants. She removes her sunglasses and expresses concern about being late. The group pauses silently, and then one dancer says to her, "Can we just talk about how fabulous you look right now?" The room erupts with giggles. It is obvious that any room with these people in it is often filled with laughter.

After a quick group discussion in a circle, the dancers continue to warm up. The warm up is not a formal, coordinated event. Some dancers are privately improvising or reviewing material for the piece. Other dancers interact to help each other remember different sections of the piece while using these memory triggers for a physical warm up. Dancers seamlessly drop in and out of helping each other and working alone, and the conversation drops in and out as well. Verbal interactions range from "Can you help me with this one part?" to "Do you know what I heard at the coffee shop this morning?" The dancers move and talk this way for at least 30 minutes, which is a good chunk of the 3-hour rehearsal. Because the rehearsal begins this way, the dancers clearly have a precedent for interacting. The personal and the professional coalesce.

ROLES AND RELATIONSHIPS

The members of Company Rose gather together with the deliberate purpose of making a dance within a certain time frame and for a specific audience. How the dance is made is not predetermined. Planned procedures rarely exist for these dance makers, although there are many movement-generating tasks or operational techniques that the group has developed over time to get to the dances that they are making. These "assignments" are interesting, but they are not the focus of this research. Rather, the focus of this description of Site One is the shifting roles of the dancers and the impact that those shifts have on the ownership of the dance, the creative process, and the company as a whole.

The roles of the different members of the company are not always clearly defined or understood, even if they are given formal names like *Choreographer* or *Dancer*. Furthermore, in Company Rose, such categories seem to be fluid, with members easily moving between being dancers and friends, contributors and receivers, and listeners and critics. All three Site One interviewees confirmed that the roles they had at the beginning of the creation of *Pools of Glass* evolved over time.

In reflection, Marsha reveals that she changed her mind about what she was interested in as well as what the group needed during the process of making *Pools of Glass*. She describes the beginning of the process in the following way:

> There were little bumps along the way, because I wasn't clear within my own intentions of what I wanted. I thought at first that I really wanted to have this work be completely collaborative and not this upside-down pyramid structure, but something that was more of a circle. (Barsky)

Her hope in establishing a circular infrastructure for this creative process was to circumnavigate the issues of power that could arise with one named choreographer for the piece. Marsha believed that she was offering the group members equal directorial representation. Because Company Rose is projected-based, with a unique creative process for each project, and because the group is composed of professional dancers who all make work on their own, it did not at first seem confounding for Marsha to desire or offer this initial scenario.

Still, Marsha acknowledges that there were times when she felt the group needed more clear and direct leadership to feel like progress was being made in developing the piece as well as in discovering her desire to sculpt the material within her own aesthetic. She continues to describe the process, alluding to the tension between her desire to share the vision of the work and her desire to sculpt the work as her own:

> I wanted everyone to be equally contributing to the whole experience—I think that is what I thought that I wanted. I had even given permission to craft their own structured dances that could live inside the whole. But again, I wasn't clear in my own intentions, and so what was produced was not, in my opinion, representative of the actual work as a whole that needed to be presented for The Frist. (Barsky)

Marsha shifts her tactics from engaging the dancers as co-choreographers and directors in the piece to reclaiming those roles for herself. However, during my observation I saw the dancers continue to share in movement generation. They also provided powerful critique and feedback that Marsha repeatedly solicited from them regarding what movement material was working and what was not cohesive for the piece.

The discussions with the dancers corroborated this shift in the conception of the work and the dancers' perception of the process. Erin is easygoing about the shift, and she suggests that a distinction between making work that is part of a shared vision and the desire to express a singular personal aesthetic is a choice Marsha often faces when making dances with Company Rose:

> It always goes through that process of "I want this to be a collective," and it *is*—in some ways it is. We all do contribute various things, but ultimately it will go back to being really clearly her work and her aesthetic. (Law)

That Marsha reclaims the role of choreographer is neither unexpected nor unappreciated by the dancers. Because the group faced scheduling issues and conflicts for a significant period of the creative process, having one person to look to for direction was in some ways a relief. Still, Janelle took Marsha's initial intention for the work to be collaborative as an invitation.

Janelle's interest in and perspective on the subject matter of *Pools of Glass* took her to a different place in movement as compared with the other dancers because she has extensive knowledge of Butoh.[21] Janelle took hold of Marsha's desire to make the work collaborative and created what for her was the beginning of a vignette for *Pools of Glass*. Janelle remembers the event:

> I misunderstood what she [Marsha] was wanting. So one rehearsal, when she was out of town, Erin and Ashley came in to rehearsal and I made up this, it was probably about a 7-minute piece. I don't work in phrases, and so it was the beginning of a piece for me. And next time in rehearsal, we showed it, and again, it's completely different than what her aesthetic is, she said that, but then she wanted to splice it and put it throughout the dance. I wasn't okay with that for my choreography, because I made it thinking it would be like this 7-minute piece. So I think at that point, I realized that our visions were not in alignment. That was the moment when I was like, "I'm not going to be able to give anything really constructive or that she would need to hear in this process." So I think that's when I relegated myself to just being a dancer rather than another eye or collaborator. (Bonifer-Mikes)

---

[21] Butoh is a twentieth-century post-World War II Japanese movement form that combines elements of Kabuki and Noh Theatre with German Tanztheater and early American Modern Dance.

This reflection may seem to conjure negative feelings between Janelle and Marsha or perhaps from Erin and Ashley given that they helped to create and rehearse something substantial that would then not be included in the final piece. However, when she was asked how this experience made her feel, Janelle had the following to say:

> I think it feels fine. I want to know exactly what my role is in a group or in the process, and so it felt really good to not think about the dance—just to go in and try my best to do these turns and jumps and things. And that was the end of it, which I think also helped me to not get frustrated with the dance as a whole. If I am just a dancer, I am not worried about what it ends up looking like. I'm just worried about getting the steps correct for Marsha. I think it took a lot of weight off of my shoulders to be like that. (Bonifer-Mikes)

Erin remembers the situation as well:

> I don't think that that incident changed the whole tone or anything. Honestly, every rehearsal was so different. There was literally a different amount of people each time we would meet at first. Material that was there and then gone—we would do something different each rehearsal. So it didn't actually feel that weird. I feel like everything was so different until basically the end of December and beginning of January, when we started to go, "Okay, what is this thing?" So no, I don't know that it did change things all that much, but I don't know the undertones—the psychological undertones or the political undertones. Yes, that could have shifted, but it wasn't out in the open, it wasn't blatant or something that I could perceive. (Law)

The language that both Janelle and Erin used to describe this rehearsal period suggests that the experience was a bit deflating in the moment. Terms like *relegated* and *incident* clearly set up a power dynamic as Janelle demotes herself from a "collaborator" to "just a dancer" within the imagined parameters of an unfortunate vigilante effort that was worthy of punishment. Even the language Marsha uses when reflecting on the tension between her desire for everyone to be equally contributing and her desire to sculpt the work as her own puts her in a position of "giving permission" to others to craft material for this piece, which is a nod to a particular power structure. Still, in the larger context of the entire experience of creating *Pools of Glass*, the group encountered one frustration after another, and this particular experience was merely one example of many.

In fact, this particular creative interaction had positive resonance in the process, despite Janelle's choreography going unused in the final draft of *Pools of Glass*. Erin remembers the creative moment working with Janelle and Ashley as a landmark moment in the making of the dance:

> Janelle's movement was so different and demanding in a way that I enjoy, and it was so fulfilling for me in that. And we didn't end up doing it, so it was like whatever, but also because it was just the three of us, we weren't necessarily trying to push through and pump something out. We could laugh and be silly and just enjoy each other—we were talking about crumping half the time and just being ridiculous. (Law)

It seems that the work that Janelle did with Erin and Ashley had an impact on those dancers and in the end meant something important for their relationships inside of *Pools of Glass*, despite the material not being included.

The relationships of the dancers are important within the context of the dance, as we will discuss throughout this chapter. The dancers purposefully exchange their thoughts about the dance and about how they are working together within the process. Not all of the dancers had creative interactions or revelations with Marsha or the work, and yet each of them had different strengths to offer the group as a whole. For example, I observed that Ashley was boisterous and outgoing; she offered a kind of honesty about what fit for the choreography and about what needed more work. Erin seemed to have a creative authority that helped Marsha to ground her choices back into their collective understanding of Japonisme and to attend to the aesthetics and shaping of the choreography in a particular way.

Speaking specifically about her own relationship with Marsha and its role in the creative process for *Pools of Glass*, Erin continues:

> We didn't really discuss it. I think it's just that we had collaborated in the past, and so that was already the way our relationship was set up, so it was easy for us to just go there when it was necessary and then for me to step back when I simply perceived it was time for me to step back. (Law)

Erin and Marsha seemed to have a connection that allowed them both to access shared creative energy while simultaneously allowing for individual expressive freedom. That Erin was able to perceive when to step up and when to step back as a leader in the process demonstrates her understanding of her relationship with Marsha. Similarly, Marsha describes her perspective regarding her relationship with Erin:

> I feel that Erin and I have a really good working relationship. I think it is because we have been in so many different relationships together, from being dancers in the same company together to being collaborators to being where she danced with me as the choreographer and I danced with her—so our experiences together have been quite fluid. Whereas the other dancers, I have only been the choreographer to them, so our dynamic was quite different. And I can trust Erin, because I feel like we have evolved together. (Barsky)

At one point several months into the process of creating *Pools of Glass,* Erin and Marsha rehearsed alone together, and they playfully generated movement. This creative moment between them seems to be a highlight of the process for both of them. Erin describes the residue left by the creative interaction with Marsha:

> We made some really interesting movement together. I've hinted at this before, but I really like generating movement, and Marsha is really amazing at shaping it in space. I will always love that relationship that we have. That was why it was so fun and the movement felt so good to me, because I owned half of it. It felt really

> good in my body, and I was able to really give it my all—because sometimes I don't feel like I can give it my all when it is just her movement. (Law)

It seems that the creative process itself was, at least for Erin, a way of feeling present and connecting with the other dancers. Spending time together being creative, even when it is sporadic or frustrating, seems to have had an emotional effect on the dancers. For *Pools of Glass* specifically—a piece in which there are moments designed for the dancers to make eye contact with each other in purposeful and meaningful ways, to support each other's weight, or to race each other through space—the relationships and community-building aspects of the process of creating the dance seem to have left an impression on the dancers. Erin reflects on this:

> I think the dance taught me that it takes time to get to the level of connection and intimacy that I think is necessary in this particular case to pull off the content of this dance. It took more time than I expected, I guess. It taught me to be patient with myself and with the whole dynamic of the group and to be sensitive to that. I consider myself to be a fairly compassionate person, but I think it taught me even more about compassion and the differences between how different people approach something like this. This is tricky, I'm trying to get the words around this; it is very nonverbal. I guess I could say that it taught me that there is something nonverbal about the group that is powerful. (Law)

Personalities, relationships, and the commitment the dancers had for each other while creating *Pools of Glass* all seemed to contribute to the fluidity of roles within the group. The dancers seemed to have developed a way of being together in which they sensed when and in what ways they could contribute to keep the creative process feeling full and rich for themselves. The dancers seemed particularly sensitive to Marsha, trusting in her direction and rising to meet ideas and making connections, even beyond what I observed Marsha asking of them. Although the dancers discussed the dance while it was emerging as well as the process of working together along the way, much of how I observed the dancers honoring each other and the work shone through via their commitment to it and not necessarily through the words that they exchanged. I observed them taking care of each other while dancing the choreography, learning and reviewing it, offering feedback, and engaging in the more social aspects of rehearsal.

RESPONSIBILITIES

Spending time together even while frustrated allowed the dancers to create a bond. This type of bond was necessary for *Pools of Glass* in terms of content, and it deepened with the more time the group spent together and the more the dance unfolded. During the group discussion, Jenna was reluctant to share her thoughts until near the end, when she asserted quiet authority:

> I feel like there are moments where I have a certain responsibility, most likely when I'm doing something by myself, it's that simple. But as we continue to work, the more I'm noticing [the] connections between everybody during that time, and I feel as though there is sort of a shared responsibility between myself and others. (Company Rose)

Responsibility lies within the dance in that the dancers depend on each other for weight sharing, timing, and presence; responsibility is also important during the creative process, especially with regard to rehearsal practices.

Listening to each other and contributing ideas were important aspects of the creative process for *Pools of Glass*. Because Marsha was a soloist but not part of the quartet for *Pools of Glass,* she relied on the dancers to communicate their feelings about the movement and content from the experiences that they had inside the emerging quartet dance work. This speaks to a kind of aesthetic that goes beyond the visual pleasure of

Marsha as the choreographer to include the experiences of the dancers. It is also an important strategy for building the dance because the group as a collective was continually bewildered when seeking meaning and connection to the Japonisme included in The Frist's exhibit.

The dancers' feedback was essential to the editing of *Pools of Glass* and to continuing to coax the piece into existence. During some parts of the process, the dancers were responsible for movement generation or improvisation. Other sections were composed of phrase-based movement material that had been generated by Marsha, although some movement came from creative interactions (like the one described earlier between Marsha and Erin). Ultimately, Marsha shaped *Pools of Glass* as the primary choreographer and director. Still, Marsha relied on the dancers to reassure her that the movement as she generated and shaped it was connecting them to the difficult content material provided by The Frist.

Marsha admitted in her interview with me that she was feeling extremely vulnerable during this creative process: the content was difficult, the administration of the rehearsal period was frustrating, and she was struggling with a new high-pressure position as the Chair of the Dance Department at her university. Janelle recounts one particular moment in rehearsal where Marsha became upset. In this moment, Janelle recognized that she needed to make a change in order to better support Marsha and to shift her own responses to make room for Marsha's sensitivity. Janelle remembers:

> There was one rehearsal—I learn by watching first and then doing rather than just doing, and so I was watching Marsha do this one phrase. It looked really tricky to my eye, and I couldn't quite figure out the pattern just by looking at it, which is

> weird for me. When she got done, she saw my face, and she started crying because she thought that I was physically reacting and repulsed by the movement, and I wasn't—I was just trying to figure it out. From that mood shift that she had, I also had to change my personality, and I was aware of that for the rest of the process, because I didn't want to hurt her or for her to think poorly of herself. I think anytime that somebody in a group is in a bad mood—giving out negative energy, not that they're meaning to give out that negative energy—it just makes everybody else tense and tight and just isn't a super fun place to be in that moment. (Bonifer-Mikes)

Clearly the dancers feel responsible for supporting and upholding each other during the creative process. This is one example of a dancer giving priority to another member of the group despite what she might believe is important for the dance. The dancers made room for each other both physically and emotionally during the creation of *Pools of Glass.* Given that the piece was in process for nearly six months, there is no doubt that each dancer had a chance to be sensitive and also to accommodate the sensitivity of others.

The need for the dancers to get to know and trust each other was part of the work of the dance because the score of *Pools of Glass* includes large sections during which the dancers improvise. The dancers had danced together before and often, working together and for each other for different projects over the course of many years. Nevertheless, the group dynamic included the group members' present situations as well as the things that affected them each day and influenced them as individuals. During the group discussion, Ashley remarked on this idea:

> [The creative process] is still learning bodies and learning how to move with someone and how to breathe, and so I think that's just being a human being. It has everything to do with this space and the dance and what's going on but also just as a human: "Who are you? Can I trust you enough to do improvisation with you?" I mean, that's a lot. Improvisation specifically is all about trust, and so I

> feel like it was just going to take time to get to know each other, as a group. (Company Rose)

Although the dancers did have previous relationships with each other, Ashley describes her desire for the group members to continue developing trust in and knowledge of each other so that the improvisation sections of *Pools of Glass* would feel comfortable and right.

As the process continued, the dancers began to feel a connection to each other that became—for them—the content of *Pools of Glass*. The dancers shared confusion regarding the artwork that The Frist offered as inspiration, and they were also frustrated with administrative rehearsal issues. The combination of these shared emotions with communal creative time allowed the dancers to develop a very specific understanding of movement as a language to use when working with each other. During the group discussion, Ashley talks about being able to feel the connection with the other dancers and how that affects her own role in the process:

> I am such a people person. When I don't feel connected to my group, I'm a bad dancer. I get a bad attitude and I just check out when I don't feel connected to everyone. That has only happened a couple of times. I feel like we're pretty good. We are normally open and honest in here, but when someone—myself included—when someone doesn't commit 100%, not in terms of movement but in just being present, it doesn't feel like a group to me. So that's hard. Because it's time that we come here, and you have to check everything at the door and just own your group and be present. And if you're not, I feel it. I feel it! (Company Rose)

Connecting to each other requires the dancers to demonstrate the openness and sensitivity that Ashley describes and that the other dancers agree is very noticeable. At the same time, being compassionate is not a requirement or even necessarily an expectation for dance making in general. However, for Company Rose and the process of making *Pools of Glass*, there was power in treating each other graciously and in taking responsibility for oneself. This was not an authoritative power. Rather, the strength of shared vulnerability seemed to tie the members of the group together.

POWER

As described previously, Marsha works specifically with women and she generally seeks to share a creative vision with them when making dances under the auspices of Company Rose. For Marsha, training as well as practicing dancing and dance making inherently enact power and strength that she feels are within the dancers. During an interview, Marsha described her general feelings about personal empowerment:

> Just as someone who volunteers and commits and decides to commit and engage and work on a project, you take your own personal power and empowerment and you allow that to inform the choices that you make in the work . . . . So there is a personal empowerment I feel that, as dancers, we have. It is part of our training—I feel like it is part of our culture. I feel that I am certainly interested in working with people who have access to that within themselves, that sense of power and strength. (Barsky)

Marsha's understanding of these characteristics of power and strength extend into her professionalism. She trusts that everyone is being responsible for themselves in such a way that communication is clear, humility is evident, and the group is able to feel whole. Marsha emphasizes that she purposefully seeks to create an environment in which the dancers are both assertive with their honesty but conscientious in the ways that they contribute to a shared positive energy.

Marsha questions the difference between power and responsibility as she reflects on her own choices and interactions within the creative process for *Pools of Glass:*

> All of those women [Company Rose] would agree that they have been in situations where power was abused, especially in the dance world—and we are all very sensitive to that. And I certainly am incredibly sensitive to that, and I don't want to come across as that type of power—I don't want that type of power in the studio because we are *really* sensitive to that. But then sometimes it's like, what is responsibility versus power? You know? When do you just have to be responsible? These are all really important questions. (Barsky)

Marsha clearly grapples with power and she is heartfelt and deliberate when making choices with Company Rose. To this end, the group spent a great deal of the creation and rehearsal period for *Pools of Glass* improvising in movement together. Marsha remembers it like this:

> I really loved—I'm just a process junkie—I would have loved to improvise with those women, like every Friday night from now until eternity. That gave me so much energy. It was just like we would get in this zone where we sort of lost all track of time and then I would look at the clock and see that it was time to go. We just did such great work that way and it was quite magical. I feel like when that creative moment happens and it is palpable and everyone feels it and it is real and it is special, that is when I was energized. (Barsky)

Movement improvisation was a way of being together in a creative spirit without Marsha needing to assert any overt authority or to impose a singular aesthetic over the work. Within improvisation, the group shared creative experiences and deepened their bonds of trust with one another.

Erin relates to Marsha with regard to wrestling with issues of power in her own work. She also appreciates the ways that Marsha used improvisation in the final version of *Pools of Glass.* Erin reflects:

> Well, I talk a lot about autonomy for dancers. That is something that for me as a choreographer is really important—that my dancers feel like they have power and that they are coming from a place of power. . . . I feel like we were given that opportunity from Marsha in this instance. First of all, she trusts us. In many moments, three that I can think of—yes, three more extended moments that were improvisation and with pretty few guidelines—she gave us feedback about our improvisation, shaping it to be something that she wanted. But I felt just that choice as a choreographer was giving us a lot of power and ownership of the work. I think she was relinquishing her own power as choreographer in some ways, because we really did open the whole piece with a 6-minute improvisation. We had pretty specific things we were working with but I think that takes a lot of trust to do that. In that way, I felt powerful. I am actually setting up this space with choices I'm making and not choices that are very specifically set by the choreographer. (Law)

Erin alludes to the trust that Marsha shows her and the other quartet dancers by making the choreographic choice to open the piece with a substantial improvisation section. Erin is able to feel a kind of power and ownership over the ideas. However, not all of the dancers felt this way.

Janelle admits that she did not actively seek ownership of the ideas within *Pools of Glass*. Although she does not mention her experiences with the improvisation sections, Janelle distinctly speaks about ownership and how she feels about her choices in the creation of *Pools of Glass:*

> I don't think I ever took ownership of any of the parts of the work. And I think maybe that personally is where some of my unhappiness lies maybe, in that I never did that for myself. I think I sort of gave up power towards what I would consider the middle of the process but really the beginning of the crafting of the work. (Bonifer-Mikes)

Janelle connects her lack of ownership with "giving up power" and with the potential happiness she could have felt when dancing the piece. It seems that Janelle is referring to the ownership of the actual movement material because she is diligent about expressing her feelings of connection and energetic sharing with the other dancers of the quartet.

The quartet holds a power position in the creative aspect of the piece because those four dancers were the primary contributors of both movement material and feedback for the piece as a whole. The quartet dancers spent more time dancing and creating together and thus developed a particular bond. This phenomenon is explored more fully later in this chapter in the "Becoming a Group" section. Erin speaks to this connection:

> I think I found power in the community of four that we formed. By relinquishing some of my own sense of power and importance, I was able to be really sensitive to what everybody was bringing all at once. So in a way, opening my awareness even further than I had in the past allowed me to feel powerful as a group. That was really important to me—to feel that connection—because as the process got clearer, we realized we really are this quartet driving the piece for half an hour. And that takes a lot of stamina, among other things—physical power! We could just talk about that! But it also takes a willingness to be connected as a group, and so I felt power in that connection that we had. (Law)

For Company Rose during the creative process of *Pools of Glass*, the emanation of power is evident in several ways. The ownership of the material and taking responsibility for oneself are aspects of professionalism that stem from accessing a kind of personal empowerment that these dancers seem to understand. The practice of improvising allowed Marsha to deliberately diverge from authoritarian choreographic traditions to generate material and to honor a sensitivity to power abuses that the group holds in its collective knowledge. Improvising was also important for the dancers in that it allowed them to create a connection that brought the group together as a whole. This connection resonates in the way the dancers treat each other within the piece and the creative process as well as the way they treat each other personally.

———————***Interlude***———————

I definitely feel that I can name the things that I learn about individuals when I watch them dancing together, but it is harder to know or understand what I learn about a group when watching a dance. In some ways, I am referring to a particular group, but I also sense that I want a deeper understanding of "group-ness." What is learned about any group when watching its members perform?

There is an assumption that the dancers on the stage are a group because I feel that they are. Do they know that I feel they are a group? Do they feel they are a group? What are the criteria for group-ness? There is a layer of the performance of the group that they want me to see. This has to do with the content of the dance rather than the dance experience. Do I see more than what is overtly intended? What is it that I see? As the dancers attempt a full run of the piece, here is what I see:

- *Women nuzzling each other*
- *Breaking away and dragging others*
- *Pouring and catching, support*
- *Being together apart from each other*
- *Pushing energy out and away*
- *Head swirling and leading movement*
- *Running away*
- *Reaching back*
- *Circling an individual body as well as with all bodies in space*
- *Breathlessness*
- *Waiting and pacing*
- *Changing places*
- *Following*
- *Hands to the shoulders of others*
- *Spinning*
- *Flexing hands and feet*
- *Arms up as if carrying a milk pail yoke*
- *Arms over the top like carving a mountain*

- *Leaning and falling*
- *Pressing chests open*
- *Thumbs pointing inside to body*
- *Shaking feet*
- *Leg rotation*
- *Heads whipping*
- *Grabbing the foot of another person*
- *Unison bodies*
- *Running bodies on interweaving pathways*
- *Individual jump passes*
- *Arm gestures that dissolve quickly*
- *Separateness that grows*
- *Returning to each other*
- *Laying down then rising up*
- *Slow motion then falling into momentum*
- *Struggling with each other and then resolving*

I also see that each dancer has a softness and subtlety. Awareness and intention are obvious. The work is not precious, but there is a kind of delicacy, an almost liquid touch from each dancer. I see breathing and gazing in very specific and choreographed ways. I see that Marsha has a bloody toe and that Ashley helps her with a bandage but there is no stop of the run of the piece for this interaction. I see Rebecca and Audra off of the dance space, marking through the solo material while Marsha does it full out within the run of the piece.

When the run of the piece has ended, I observe the group being self-motivated to review, rework, and remember lost moments to amend. The dancers work out issues in the movement without the governance of being asked to; they do this in silence, both as individuals working something out personally and as the group as a whole returning to sections of the work together. I observe them begin to discuss in such a way that there is fluidity between talking and movement. They use the movement of the dance to speak to each other. They also verbalize their experiences:

"I feel like I am breathing. I can tell the dance is craving it."

"I felt connection."

"There is pleasure in the fatigue."

When the exchange evolves into a discussion about the run, I notice that Marsha says "please" quite a few times, which is nice to hear. All of the dancers use such nice language with each other. They are polite as well as familiar. I have not heard a moment of confusion from these people that is handled with annoyance or a desire to reject or simplify. They are kind and supportive while being silly and teasing at the same time. They are a group.

BECOMING A GROUP

During the group discussion, Company Rose considered what "being a group" means and whether or not they felt like one. The discussion reflected the troubles that the group experienced during the initial stages of the creative process for *Pools of Glass*, particularly given the ups and downs of the administration of rehearsals. Marsha is assertive when she gives the following statement during the group discussion. She expresses the frustration that she felt along the way and the vulnerability that this process has revealed for her:

> I feel like we are becoming a group. I feel like this process has been very much challenged because, in the initial stages of the process, what constituted a group was always shifting. And so, first we had six dancers, and then we had five dancers, and then we had four dancers, and then the other two decided to come back at the last minute. And then we would have rehearsals where there were only two dancers or only three dancers, and it wasn't really until January that for me it started to actually feel like a group. Which was really interesting because the beginning phase of the process in terms of just the actual material generation was spent kind of ruthlessly. And I think, for me, it was deeply frustrating. I would leave very insecure about my role. But it's changing now. (Company Rose)

Timid Jenna speaks up during this conversation about groupness, saying the following:

> I'll jump in. I think for me, because I am newer to the company, and I'm really shy, so it's hard for me to step out and be with the group and feel like I can connect, because I just like to respect what the group is. So I think for a while I felt sort of separate from feeling like I'm really a part of it, even though everybody's been more than inviting and it's just my own sort of barrier that I have. Eventually it starts to break down and I feel like within the last couple of weeks I've felt more connected. Perhaps that also correlates to what Marsha was saying as far as the creative process with the actual material coming together as well. (Company Rose)

Like Marsha, Jenna senses a developing group-ness. She attributes her feelings to the ways in which the movement material has begun to feel more complete. Jenna suggests that, for her, perhaps the trajectory of the emerging dance is also the trajectory of her feelings about feeling like a group. The more cohesive the dance appears for her, the more connected she feels with the other dancers.

Janelle feels differently about the group-ness. She suggests that the dance itself is responsible for the shifting roles and for changing the group's dynamic. Nevertheless, she felt like she was part of a group from the beginning of the process, and she believed that the company's members were ready to encounter challenges together. It is clear that Janelle feels close with these dancers and is committed to the group despite the continuum of emotions and experiences that they faced during this particular dance-making process:

> I feel very much the dance is part of the group, but it also constantly changes the group dynamic . . . I have felt like a group since the beginning of our rehearsals in September or October, even though we weren't all together mentally [or] physically every rehearsal. These are the only dancers I hang out with in Nashville, and so immediately I feel a kinship with them and whether or not we're

> getting along physically, mentally, or emotionally. And you know where everybody is. I think that is all part of being a group. (Company Rose)

Erin acknowledges and agrees with Janelle about experiencing camaraderie with the other members of the company. She also recognizes the feelings revealed by Jenna and Marsha about the frustrations of the process and the emergence of the dance occurring alongside feelings of groupness as a new development in the process. Erin invokes a joke among the company to express herself:

> And so like Jenna and like Marsha was saying too, I feel like this month after the winter break and settling and letting go of this past year that we were able to come to this work and yield into each other and be like Janelle: "I feel like a human!" (Company Rose)

For so long, the dancers felt removed from and unattached to the Japonisme exhibit materials that The Frist provided. The dancers did not find a connection with the artwork, but they did discover grounding and direction in their movement choices in their appreciation of each other. This discovery was a catalyst for the dancers out of what had seemed robotic, pawn-like, or contrived intention; to acknowledge this change, they declared: "I feel like a human!" The term *human* suggests organic and warm sensations. Erin uses this joke in two ways. First, it causes everyone to laugh and remember their shared experiences. Second, it allows the dancers to reference each other and not merely the artwork that they struggled with together, which originated the joke. Erin seems to actively crave and contribute to the building of the community within Company Rose. Indeed, each of the members of the company seems to want to contribute in ways that support a good experience for all.

In the hope of being supportive of Marsha and in an environment of shared love for the vision of Company Rose in general, the dancers took initiative during the process for *Pools of Glass*. Erin describes this in the following way:

> There were times when Marsha would have to go out of town, especially last semester, in the fall. And during those times, I feel like it would give the dancers a chance to just talk and discuss how the process was going, because we could sense in the rehearsals that she was feeling really stressed out and like, "Oh my gosh. How are we going to get through this?" . . . So she had so much going on and then this Japanese art was terribly confusing . . . so we would discuss. What can we do to help her? How can we support her through this process? How can we take on more of the creative part? (Law)

The dancers took turns being self-appointed rehearsal directors and coming up with inventive ways to create and contribute as they could. The vignette that Janelle made with Ashley and Erin, which was discussed earlier, and Erin's leadership as an extemporaneous rehearsal director are examples of the varying successes the dancers had with supporting Marsha when she was absent from rehearsal.

Beyond the rehearsals that Marsha missed and the illnesses and injuries of Rebecca and Audra, which occurred at the very beginning of the creative process for *Pools of Glass*, the group also struggled with absent and injured dancers along the way. Janelle remembered a particular issue and how she had to counterbalance for Ashley at one point. She reflected on the general nature of these kinds of obstacles for the group and how she managed one specific example:

> I think that with the being ill or injured, it doesn't necessarily rock the boat but I think that it requires us to all to figure out how to work within those constraints. Ashley had a cracked rib for a few months, and so I had to perform my part differently because I needed to take care of her. I was doing a lot of things that would be physically hard on her back and that had to change. But in terms of somebody being gone, I mean, that completely rocks the boat. Everything within

> the whole piece gets thrown up or thrown about, just in terms of timing and musicality and space. It felt like something was missing personally in the group when somebody wasn't there but it never was a problem, I don't think. (Bonifer-Mikes)

Although Ashley's injury did not prevent her from attending rehearsal or from creating with the group, Janelle points out the ways in which she had to adjust and accommodate. It was not until late in the process that Ashley was healed enough for the dancers to begin seeing the choreographic choices that had been made and offering honest feedback for the movement created. Still, Janelle points out (and Ashley alluded to this in an earlier section) that being present and committed is what is significant for the group to work and bond.

Knowing that feedback is important, Janelle came to a personal decision midway through the process for *Pools of Glass* wherein she chose to edit and filter her feelings about the work. Like all of the dancers, she was confused about Japonisme, and she struggled with finding inspiration and connection to the digital artwork. Ultimately, she decided that her opinions about those potential connections were not as important as discovering relationships with the other dancers, executing the movement that for her required great concentration, and trusting Marsha to care for the visual aspects of the piece as a whole.

Janelle described her physical understanding of *Pools of Glass* as a finished product and her place in it by illuminating what she thought an audience might see:

> I think we [the dancers] depend on each other in very physical terms. There was a bit of weight sharing and lifting, and we really care about one another. Each touch was really important and about really, really touching someone. And then also, if I were to watch it, I would see that each person is one facet of the whole being. The

> quartet, you know, we are all wearing the same costume and doing a lot of the same movement but since we are all so different, we do it differently. I feel like it would be about the parts of the whole and how they are supportive of each other. (Bonifer-Mikes)

When asked if her description of the dance is different from the process, Janelle responded in the following way:

> I don't think it is completely different than the process. I think to make this work, we each needed to be a different part of the whole. And thinking of the group as the whole being, each personality sort of helps to achieve the final product. I think that if I had not just been a movement vessel, if I were to have been steadfast and given my opinion about everything, I don't think that would have been productive to the piece, and I don't think that it would have been helpful to the group, either. It probably would have just caused a lot of dissonance. (Bonifer-Mikes)

Despite feeling like she had to curb her dry and blunt approach to giving feedback and despite her regrets at not seizing a deeper ownership of the material, Janelle nevertheless can see that she had an important place within the dance and its creation as well as within the group. She admits that she had to suppress her feelings about the movement often and that she had to pull back from giving creatively. Nevertheless, she feels these were easy tasks that clarified things for her and that allowed her to focus more attentively on what she came to realize mattered more to her than contributing in specific ways:

> Other people could be saying, "Oh, well, Janelle hated the whole process." But it didn't feel hard to me because I care about everybody so much that it stopped being about trying to make Marsha believe that I loved the dance, every single facet of it. It just started to be about me caring about this person and not wanting them to have a bad experience that in turn makes them feel even more insecure than they already are about what they are making. So I think it was pretty easy because it stopped being about convincing and more just about loving. (Bonifer-Mikes)

It is clear that the sensitivity and support that Erin described previously and the loving that Janelle mentions here are both being deliberately directed toward Marsha and yet also inherently toward all of the members of the group.

Marsha singles out *Pools of Glass* as being a particularly difficult creative process for her. The group began to bend in the direction of those difficult creative needs, as it bends in the direction of other needs as they arise. Marsha describes it like this:

> This had a very particular logic to it, and that is what is also cool about having a company that is more project based as opposed to a company that works all of the time, does repertoire maybe. If you have a company in which you are creating, you have a consistent rehearsal schedule, and you have a season, and you go through the season creating, that group dynamic is really going to be clarified. You would have this time to develop a group dynamic. I think that would be really interesting, but we [Company Rose] are always picking back up again. We make this thing and we go through this experience, and then I haven't seen these dancers since the show. And I probably won't see them again until the next project comes around and we have to start working again. So we are always renegotiating. And who knows if the same dancers will want to pick up with me again? I think that is really interesting too, that the group is always changing. What constitutes a group? What makes a group? Is it Company Rose? I don't know if that's a group. Is it *Pools of Glass*? Maybe that's the group. What makes this company a company? (Barsky)

Marsha points out that the members of Company Rose are always reconsidering what being a group means for them. She highlights the pick-up nature of the company as a reason that this reconstitution occurs. Within each project is a new version of Company Rose. During the group discussion, Erin pointed this out as well:

> I also think that each piece that Marsha is taking on demands something different in terms of the community or the nature of the community environment. Depending on what work we are responding to or if it is *her* work she wants to make versus something that's being commissioned. (Company Rose)

Thus, there are a myriad of factors that contribute to how the group establishes itself and evolves in response to each project.

As mentioned earlier, the members of the group are all professional dancers in some way, and they self-select their participation with Company Rose on the basis of each project that arises. Erin emphasized the versatile nature of the members of the company:

> I feel like my relationship with each of them is different, but generally I would characterize them as friends, dancers, and also as choreographers. In that way, there is a lot of room for collaboration—not autonomy, but contribution to the whole. I have different personal relationships with each of them outside of our company, and there are some that I hang out with socially more than others; some that I will collaborate with on other things outside of that group as well. I keep thinking about what Janelle was saying when we were in our group [discussion] and just how she comes there as a dancer and she's like, "I am going to do exactly what you want me to do," and all of that. In that way, I do kind of think of all of us like dancers: we're there to do what Marsha wants. But we can offer these other aspects of ourselves if needed. (Law)

Because the dancers are all choreographers on their own outside of Company Rose, they have the ability to empathize with Marsha, and they can step in when they see that they have a personal strength that may be helpful. For *Pools of Glass*, Marsha admitted that she needed the dancers' support, and it seems as though each dancer offered her that support in many different ways. The dancers also trusted her and each other, which helped to bolster confidence for all of them.

Janelle mentions the supportive nature of the community and how all of the dancers needed sensitivity and love at one point or another during the creative process. When discussing *Pools of Glass* specifically—but also connecting her thoughts out into the making of dance in general—Janelle had this to say:

> I think that this past process was really therapeutic for everybody involved, for really different reasons. It felt like everybody had this same role at one point or another of being a support system for the one person who needed it at that time. To me, it was much less about the dance and more about the people, being and making with people. And how to navigate making a dance—collaboratively making a dance—when you're not all best friends. I mean, we all have really good relationships with each other, but I know that I can't give my unfiltered opinion, whereas to another person [outside of Company Rose] I might be able to. And that was a huge growing experience for me: to have to think before I said anything. Out of love—thinking out of love and not necessarily my own agenda. It was a wonderful, wonderful learning experience. (Bonifer-Mikes)

Learning to think "out of love" and changing her perspective from one that services a personal aesthetic to one that is focused on compassion were both significant experiences for Janelle.

Through their reflections on the process of making *Pools of Glass*, the company members highlighted the ways that they felt their group-ness and camaraderie growing in tandem with the emerging dance. They shared the common hopes of supporting Marsha, Company Rose, and dance work in general in their area. Creating *Pools of Glass* tested their resolve regarding these hopes, but it also revealed the sensitive and loving natures that they were able to embrace.

Although the creative process for *Pools of Glass* was a struggle, it was also a learning experience for the members of Company Rose. Marsha was proud of and pleased with what she ultimately deemed a "quite beautiful" dance (Barsky), and she revealed what *Pools of Glass* taught her about Company Rose and about herself:

> I think what it teaches me about the group is: that is just the nature of a group. It is not without its challenges; it is not without its limitations; it is not without the realities of time . . . . Some days we are tired, and some days we are full of energy; some days we are giddy, and some we are cranky. This process really revealed it all—nothing was hidden. I think that is what is beautiful about

working with real people—real people who are not there to please me, people who are not there because they want to please the public. People who are there because they really genuinely love dance, and that comes with their realness. But we are nonetheless able to produce something that is quite beautiful in the end. It teaches me to be more receptive, to be more open, to not take things so seriously, to be lighter and not be so hard on myself and not be afraid to voice my own opinion at the expense of hurting someone else's feelings. Because I have chosen to put myself in the role of "leader," to become confortable with those choices. It teaches me to be clear with what it is that I really want and to be able to convey that to the people that I work with—to really communicate those ideas, to communicate what it is that I want. And then they can assess it and decide, "Yes, this is what I want," and then we can all do it together. Open communication so we all know what it is that we are doing. So I guess that is what it could teach *you* about the group. Open communication, responsiveness, integrity, humility. It becomes like a family. (Barsky)

CHAPTER V

COLLIDING: BECOMING A GROUP

SITE TWO CHARACTERIZATION

Site Two offered the unique opportunity to observe two dance companies, Margaret Jenkins Dance Company (MJDC) from California and Kolben Dance Company (KDC) from Israel, which were working together to create one dance. Several months before my observation time at Site Two, MJDC traveled to Israel and worked in residency for two weeks with KDC to create movement exploration and to ground the movement research in a cultural context. During the observation period for my research, KDC was in residency in the United States for eight weeks to continue the movement exploration begun in Israel and to create work with MJDC. The culminating dance piece, *The Gate of Winds*, premiered in April 2014 at the conclusion of the US residency.

Margaret Jenkins founded MJDC in 1973 in San Francisco, California. After working with Merce Cunningham, John Cage, and other post-modern period artists in New York during the 1960s and 1970s, Margaret Jenkins—who prefers to be called Margie—established MJDC to revolutionize the ways in which dances, and the expectations of how dances, are created, particularly in her home city of San Francisco. From speaking with MJDC dancers, they clearly sensed Margie's goal to be about facilitating dance creation in ways that empower dancers to voice experiences connected with the emerging dance work as well as to teach and encourage dancers to offer opinions and feedback about both the dance and the creative process. Thus, one aim of MJDC is to build an environment in which participants have a safe forum for contributing to the dances being created.

Over the years, dancers have come and gone from the company, thereby causing casts and roles to shift within the company's work environment. During the timeframe of this research, in addition to Margie, there were seven dancers and the company's costume and set designers. The dancers for this research period were Ryan, Megan, Risa, Margaret, Chinchin, Brendan, and Kelly. These dancers are diverse with regard to race and educational interests, although they all have received college educations and have extensive professional dance experience.[22] The dancers range in age from twenty-three to forty years old. They are all employed by MJDC full time, although many of them spend time dancing for other people in the community, making their own work, or teaching outside of MJDC.

In addition, MJDC employs a rehearsal and production director, Michelle, who calls roll, records time spent on activities, dictates breaks, operates the stereo equipment, and acts as a confidante or sounding board for others in the room; thus, her role during rehearsal is part stage manager and part supportive friend. Michelle provides feedback about how the rehearsal process is functioning in order to facilitate a sense of progress. However, she does not often make artistic comments or critique the dance. For the company's current collaboration with KDC, Michelle has been organizing the dancers

[22] Professional dance experiences include workshops, performances, and choreographic and teaching opportunities. Each dancer has a different background that contains a variety of such professional experiences.

and collaborators of the two companies to keep them accountable to personal assignments and on task. During the group discussion, Michelle commented on her role:

> My role is primarily as an administrator and as a support system also. I feel I am in this place where I can sort of be neutral and navigate different ways because I am not inputting creatively so much; I'm more on the outside. I also see my role in this process as that of a therapist. Because of that neutrality, I am that person that people go to in order to be heard without judgment. (MJDC/KDC)

Michelle also manages the online communications between the two companies, sending out email reminders, distributing written accounts from rehearsal, and generally keeping everyone on the same page. Because MJDC and KDC together make up a rather large community of creative workers, Michelle's role is integral to things moving smoothly in the rehearsal space.

Amir Kolben founded KDC in 1995 in Jerusalem, Israel. He was formerly an artistic director for Tamar Dance Company, which was the first contemporary dance company in Jerusalem. He continued his vision to create provocative, athletic, and theatrical dance commentary on society and culture by establishing KDC. Like Margie, Amir explores the empowerment of the dancers within the creative process. Still, his leadership style during the observed time for this research seems to be much more direct than Margie's. Amir's dancers openly refer to him as "The Boss," because, as KDC dancer Daniel says, "When he knows what he wants, he really wants to go with that as much as possible, and, as we would say in Hebrew, 'to really dig on' something" (Maser).

KDC had eight dancers in addition to Amir during the observation period for my research. They were Daniel, Nitzan, Ron, Inbar, Harel, Irit, Aviv, and Erin, all of whom are Israeli living in either Jerusalem or Tel Aviv. At the time I was observing this site, these dancers were living in a shared apartment space all together in San Francisco.[23] The dancers are professionals working exclusively for KDC. Many of them have college or professional certifications, and all of them have extensive professional dance experience. The dancers are between twenty-three and thirty years old. They all speak both English and Hebrew, and many of their side conversations during rehearsal take place in Hebrew or a mix of Hebrew and English.

The combined MJDC/KDC group as a whole is difficult to characterize. Much of the rehearsal time is spent with small groups working on creation assignments. An assignment is generally dispersed by Margie or Amir and discussed with the whole group together. The dancers then self-select into working groups. Sometimes the groups include members of both dance companies mixed together; other times, the space is divided in half and each company chooses a side of the room to use.

Margie and Amir wander alone from small group to small group. They check in and talk with the groups, see the work, and offer direction. The sounds in the studio are a cacophony of confusion. There are voices filled with breath and laughter and the sound of movement echoes throughout the space. The voices of Margie and Amir are not

---

[23] This is an interesting challenge in that the KDC dancers spend all of their time together, whereas the MJDC dancers go home or elsewhere when they are not in rehearsal. This issue is only alluded to in one interview. The way the KDC dancers arrive and depart rehearsal demonstrates the psychological and relational effects that extended periods of living and working together have had on these dancers, and this amount of togetherness also perhaps explains some of the behavior of the dancers in rehearsal as well.

prominent or distinguishable at these moments during rehearsal. However, there are other moments when the two choreographers do assert themselves and their own choices more directly, but the autonomy and ingenuity of the dancers in the creation and building of the dance are clearly evident.

ROLES

Leadership positions emerge and shift among the dancers. Margie and Amir appoint three rehearsal directors from the group of dancers to publicly establish a few leadership positions. Still, other leaders are appointed either organically or accidentally, and they may even be unacknowledged as the dancers build upon a natural social order emerging from personality traits and familiarity within relationships. Because the group often divides itself to work in small subsets, I observe that it is important for the dancers to show initiative and self-motivation, to be good listeners, and to communicate sensitively whether they are deemed leaders or not. Further, since the dancers are very familiar with each other, often having friendships or working relationships outside of this particular rehearsal context, there are certain interpersonal dynamics and expectations that are evident during this dance making process. During the group discussion, KDC dancer Daniel remarks on this:

> I know for myself that Kolben Dance is a relatively intimate company, and we, most of us, are good friends. And you work with them all of the time and you hang out with them all of the time. And then you come into this brand new environment and you see that people aren't behaving in the way that you expected them to, not even in a negative way, just in a different way. That really raises some questions: "How do I behave? What is my role? What is their role? Are there any roles that are very clearly defined?" I feel like a big part of that is very unknown. And you really can't know even through the end, because I think that is

> part of the collaboration: the roles can't be 100% defined for any one person. (MJDC/KDC)

During the process of making *The Gate of Winds,* the group as a whole held the objective that the dancers would create together in a way in which all could offer suggestions and attempt to embody each other's suggestions. Because of this objective, leading became synonymous with each dancer presenting his or her own idea and actively listening to the ideas of others. In these circumstances, then, leadership was constantly shifting, and the roles that the dancers took on during the creation of the piece shifted as well. Each dancer improvisationally played the roles of choreographer, dancing body for the choreographer, and critic while extemporaneously devising movement suggestions for the dance. The dancers continually questioned not just what was being artistically developed for the dance but also the motivation and delivery of how options were offered by others.

To work together in this way, the dancers acknowledged that they relied on their expectations of each other for support and direction as they sorted through and refined the movement material. In the group discussion, MJDC dancer Megan recognized that the shifting roles were sometimes disorienting:

> We all have expectations for individuals, for each person in the room. When you come together, like the two groups, the chemical reaction makes you alter your expectations of individuals. When MJDC is working alone, I rely on Ryan to be practical, Risa to be theatrical, and Kelly to be a certain way, and Margaret to be a certain way, and Chinchin to be a certain way. But when you double the number of personalities in the room suddenly, Ryan can't just be practical, he has to also be sort of demanding, and Risa can't just be theatrical, she also has to have a different role in relationship to other people. So I feel like my expectations of my coworkers have changed in this new environment. And I feel like I don't know what my expectations for myself are. (MJDC/KDC)

Megan further lamented that the size of the group is a contributing factor to the ways in which her expectations function. She indicated that she has an established understanding of how her MJDC coworkers behave when it is just MJDC, but with the addition of the KDC dancers, she feels overwhelmed and misses the infrastructure that helps her to know her own role at any given moment.

KDC dancer Nitzan substantiates Megan's sense of disorientation by describing her own. There is a section of *The Gate of Winds* that is referred to as "The Sitting Walls" in which there are two walls of bodies created, and one by one the dancers try to break through the walls. Nitzan uses this moment in the dance as a metaphor for understanding her role in the creative process:

> I just have to say that one day I had this idea from the outside when I looked at the sitting walls: that I'm stuck between these two companies. Maybe I can connect between them also, but sometimes I feel like I am in between. I'm not here, and I'm not here. I'm in both companies at the same time. (MJDC/KDC)

Nitzan describes being stuck between two companies both in terms of working and in terms of the actual choreography for *The Gate of Winds*. In an interview, KDC dancer Daniel also used the choreography of the piece to describe the separation of the two companies and feeling stuck in between them:

> It wasn't necessarily intentional, but especially performing it, there were these moments when I am on stage and I am with Kolben Dance and I see MJDC and we are not connected at all. We are on the same stage, but we are not relating to each other whatsoever. Maybe there are some timing things that seem a bit connected, but in our intention, in what we are actually doing, we are very much separate. It feels a little bit strange to have this disconnect, but in a way it feels a bit like I have two television screens right next to each other and you are trying to watch both but you are only getting a little bit of information from each one. At the same time, another section that we are all together doing the exact same thing,

> it feels very much for me, like an intense physical moment to be very connected with each one of these dancers even if I can't see them—knowing that we are all doing the same thing and we are coming together in this moment through the same step with the same intention. It is something about this piece that is a bit confusing, because there are so many different connections between us that happen. So it is a journey doing this piece with them [MJDC], because you feel connected and then you don't, then you feel like you are fighting them, and then you're not. It is a bit confusing to go through it. (Maser)

When asked if this description of the actual choreography was reflective of the process of creating *The Gate of Winds*, Daniel replied:

> Oh, *definitely*. These moments were almost constant in creating this work and trying to understand: "Are we trying to be with them? Are we trying to be against them? Are we trying to show our differences? Are we trying to hide them?" Regardless of what was told to us, because maybe in one moment we were told to work with someone, but we're so obviously different that it doesn't make sense to try to hide the differences. So you try not to hide the difference, and then you end up hiding the difference! It is like one of these brain-fuck moments when you don't know what to do and you just end up making a mess and figuring out what to do after. (Maser)

Despite the confusion the dancers feel in determining their roles and ultimately their direction within the creative process, when watching the dancers during rehearsal, I perceived the movement quality of *The Gate of Winds* as strong, confident, and powerful. During the creative process, I observed the dancers continuing to generate movement with laughter and gusto; nevertheless, at the same time I sensed a slightly combative and frenzied energy that seemed to then resonate within the developing choreography. I felt that there was an undercurrent that motivated the dancers to create, despite their obvious and very vocal grievances about working together. Perhaps inherent in this tension was the hope that resolution or reconciliation could be found within the act of creating. During the group discussion, KDC dancer Daniel reminded the others that there is a working social order in place, despite the immense amount of freedom and frustration the dancers experienced creatively:

> So I think that, at the end of the day, the two directors have the bigger say, and this is like the clearest thing that we have, that there are two people that are leading it. And then, I think in a way there is actually a hierarchy that is quite clear between the companies and with each other. But I think the amount of ideas are spread in this huge pool, and at the top of the hierarchy they get to look at everything and see what makes the most sense for them and then spit out the product. (MJDC/KDC)

At the same time, I observe Margie making an effort to speak with every dancer individually during breaks. She walks right up to them or sits with them on the floor for check-in moments. MJDC dancer Ryan also uses this strategy in his role as rehearsal director. MJDC dancer Margaret is also a named rehearsal director, along with Irit from KDC. Margaret, unlike Margie, does not speak one-on-one with other dancers; instead, she leads the group through their designing of a large group movement section. Irit does neither of these things; at one point in the rehearsal, she argues in Hebrew with Amir after he requests a change in the ordering of a section of movement that was already edited. She defends the dancers and the work, conveying that she cannot satisfy his request. Amir and Margie also meet privately for long periods of time while the dancers work on movement. Amir occasionally boisterously addresses the large group, and he at one point leads a large group section in a militaristic movement design that includes chanting by the dancers. When Margie and Amir are not meeting privately or directing small groups, Amir leaves the space.

Throughout the rehearsal process, I observe a significant amount of arguing among the dancers, and this often causes the creation process for *The Gate of Winds* to be very emotional. The dancers offer ideas to try, and the balance of ideas that are heard or attempted versus the ideas that are left out or discarded is a great source of contention. In some cases, the dancers easily laugh off their disagreements and build alternatives together. In other instances, the dancers assist each other in honestly working through the arguments. With fifteen dancers in the space all having creative authority—plus the two choreographers who are working to sculpt this large-scale artistic moment—communicating with sensitivity and compassion for each other is paramount to being able to continue working. KDC dancer Inbar comments on her expectations related to this process: “Give a chance. Make a decision to not make a decision. This is how I see collaboration. I want honesty in the space, otherwise it is like toxic and graceless” (MJDC/KDC). Indeed, during the group discussion, the dancers all seem ready to argue, but they still walk out of rehearsal as people who respect each other and willingly work together.

———————*Interlude*———————

A tall mature woman with long curly white and gray hair folds herself gracefully down on the floor of the dance studio and leans back against the mirror. Her dancers collect around her like children around a storyteller. The dancers sprawl out in different shapes; some cuddle together, massaging out tension from their shoulders and feet, and others stretch their legs.

The woman speaks softly and the dancers also whisper indecipherable words. There is a spark that makes the group erupt with laughter. They all shift positions on the floor as the woman clears her throat and says, “What is a good way to start this conversation?”

The dancers simply begin to share their feelings about how the movement sections have come together and the ways in which they feel the movement could be arranged or rearranged to feel more balanced. At one point, one dancer shares a memory of an experience she had that connects to a particular moment in the movement.

Meanwhile, across the studio, another group of dancers gather around a middle-aged man with shock of gray hair. He is perched deftly atop a tall stool. The dancers are lounging on a collection of mismatched couches with their legs tucked underneath their bodies. A few dancers lounge on the floor in front of the couches and receive shoulder massages or head rubs from the dancers seated behind them. This group is also in the midst of a discussion that includes occasional fits of laughter and whispered responses.

In both groups, the dancers clearly lead the conversations as the woman and the man actively listen, offering only occasional prompts for more information or clarity from the speakers. The dancers are giving feedback to their choreographers.

One group of dancers discusses the placement of a quartet, the addition of a solo to a trio section, and how each section should impact the next. The other group suggests the shortening of some of the sections, the rearranging a specific section, and the differences between a section and its variation. The conversation shifts to supporting and socializing with each other. There is little to discuss as the dancers nod heads in agreement while offering feedback to each other and conscientiously searching for moments of connection.

Why are the groups separated?

VOICE

It is very clear that, for this process, everyone is expected to contribute, not just with their physicality and presence but also in terms of offering movement ideas to try and commenting on the ideas shared by others. Although the whole group often divides into small groups to work, thus giving individuals a chance to exchange and share ideas more fluently, there are also large group movement sections and conversations. These conversations are held as the group walks through a section or begins to piece new movement together. The conversation often begins with Margie or Amir asking a question and different people chiming in with suggestions or opinions. I observe fairly productive moments when ideas and commentary are surfacing and the group is active, engaged, and effective in working together. But then there is confusion or misunderstanding: too many ideas are in play or there is an argument about a lost moment, and creation is stalled to allow the emotional frenzy to subside or the disagreement to resolve.

During these large conversations, the dancers/rehearsal directors Ryan, Margaret, and Irit intentionally migrate among empowering others to voice ideas, interpreting the ideas of Margie and Amir into the work that the dancers are doing, and reminding or defending previous decisions made to avoid too much backtracking. The large group can be an intimidating situation for dancers to share their ideas; there are so many voices competing, and there are more bodies involved in judging and giving feedback on ideas shared. The rehearsal directors, who are the more seasoned dancers and leaders in the group, can hear something offered in a small group and then encourage that dancer to share in the big group. This seems to help shape how individuals find their confidence and responsibility in contributing overall. Because Margie and Amir are not dancing themselves, the rehearsal directors are a kind of bridge between the vision for the dance and how the dance is actually emerging during the rehearsal process.

I observe Ryan, Margaret, and Irit thoughtfully considering what is offered by Margie, Amir, and the other dancers. They remind the choreographers about what has been tried and discarded and why certain decisions were made. The rehearsal directors pull together offerings that are saved and keep them on the table of choices, thereby pointing out possible connections or holes that might become further challenges. Margaret specifically uses her role to sculpt together movement sections with the large group. Ryan often intercedes verbally with questions that drive the choreographers to reveal aspects of the content and mission of the work to the dancers. Irit fiercely defends and protects decisions that the group has already made, pushing back when she can feel something is being executed hastily. However, these three rehearsal directors do not actually work together at all; they never meet alone to talk about their roles or the needs of the group. They simply work independently, and, as I observe, I feel that they each possess an intrinsic understanding of the group and a sense of how and when to give input or step back. It seems that they each do a particular job for the group as a whole that is driven by each of their personal strengths.

In an interview, Ryan is not shy about sharing the nickname his MJDC coworkers have given him after getting to know him over the years: Captain Practicality. He says this name (and the image of a superhero flying into the room) comes from the confident way he has developed of offering ideas and filtering the contributions of others. This confidence stems from his experience. He remembers getting to a point when working with MJDC where there would be so many ideas offered that what invariably occurred was an amalgamation of ideas rather than an in-depth exploration of an original, undiluted idea. He says, “You have to sometimes keep a check on yourselves when you have so many voices” (Smith). To this end, Ryan discusses the difficulties of working with MJDC and KDC together, when large group conversations involving 17 or more voices are at play:

> When you have a conversation with the large group, there is a moment when you feel like it switches . . . where it is productive, people are sharing things, voicing things, and expressing and then it just goes like, now everyone is ranting about the process. Or there is a point when there are so many ideas on the table and people are constantly bouncing off of each other, because we’ve lost track of whatever original purpose we were looking for. (Smith)

Indeed, I also notice that often the large conversations during the creative process related to *The Gate of Winds* do drop off into disorder and that this is mitigated by the dancers all taking a break. During these breaks, Ryan often checks in with the other dancers in the room and gives them a chance to voice their frustrations. In the following quote, Ryan describes how he collects information that can help guide the group when the break is over and they return to the work:

> It is interesting because so much of a collaboration is about maintaining and working within a dynamic. I feel like the dynamic is such a huge part of the process and balancing that dynamic, making it productive and functional, is a really large part of keeping it going forward, keeping the work progressing. That is often my role, and I feel like in many ways that became my role in more private conversations in collaboration with the Kolben Company. Being really real, like, “This is what this person is feeling,” or “This is what I’m getting from the Kolben dancers,” or “This is what I’m getting from MJDC.” How do we factor that all in and keep it moving along? (Smith)

Thus, Ryan perceives his role as ensuring that everyone has an opportunity to be heard. He attempts to maintain a neutral stance, even saying to others, “Say what you want to say, even if I don’t like it” (Smith). During our interview, Ryan described how the importance he places on neutrality is a result of needing to listen to so many voices in the room while further honoring the fact that not everyone is equally good at listening or expressing themselves. Ryan further asserted that neutrality is also an active choice that both he and the others consciously make to maintain a balance of power within the process. For Ryan, this balance of power is expected of and by the members of this community.

The opportunity to contribute is considered to be such a significant feature of the process of creating *The Gate of Winds* that Margie goes to great lengths to ensure the dancers are heard—if not by her or Amir, then by Ryan, Margaret, or Irit. If people do not feel heard verbally, they can email Michelle, the production director, and she is then responsible for filtering that information into the process. There are many avenues for finding a voice in this collaborative process, and they have been set up to support the number of people working and to dissipate any frustrations that may arise in the heat of the moment. Ryan concludes that the more voices and ideas present, the more possibilities exist for finding movement and transitions that can be explored. Ryan further describes the importance of listening to all voices:

> I think everyone has kind of understood that part of the hearing of all the voices and giving all of the voices equal weight is also making sure that you give everyone's ideas trials, little workshops, or studies equal weight—even if it's for 2 minutes at a time, you do it because there is a benefit of learning from them—nothing goes well when you spit ideas out without trying them. (Smith)

Within this process, there is an expectation for physically realizing each idea that is voiced. However, since all ideas are not useful for the dance, the dancers must try to develop a way of letting go of ideas that do not seem to connect with how the dance is emerging during rehearsal. This process of letting go can be problematic at times, especially given the personal nature of the dance being created together.

Knowing when to speak and when to listen or let go of an idea seems to be an active practice for the members of this group. *The Gate of Winds* is heavy with emotional content, including conflict, militaristic power, disconnection, and pain. The dancers have movement material designed to push each other away, to stop each other, and to disregard each other. There is also solo work that shows a kind of vulnerability and softness emerging from within the dancer. The juxtaposition of the content and the investment that the dancers develop in each other when exploring the movement seem to call for heightened sensitivity when dealing with creation and editing. The dancers do not want to actually get hurt, either physically or emotionally.

The challenges the dancers face when creating this dance are also complicated by their living arrangements. The KDC dancers mention briefly in the group discussion how living together in temporary housing for the residency provides little time for them to spend alone. KDC dancer Daniel goes into more depth during an interview and suggests that personal feelings for and about each other arising from the living situation may seep into rehearsal. Daniel reflects on this issue of often being unable to separate the closeness of living together from the closeness of dancing together:

> Especially like it was with Kolben Dance, there were many personal elements that affect our professional work. So it was like, "If I say this, it might not just be read as I don't like what you are doing here at the studio." It might also seem like, "I don't like how you are doing something else that happened last night." (Maser)

This issue of how to separate personal and professional relationships overall is certainly a hot topic during the group discussion as the KDC dancers describe the struggles related to their relationships within their own company and their desire to connect with the MJDC dancers. The vulnerability called for by the content of *The Gate of Winds* as a dance work, in combination with the additional vulnerability and professionalism of creating movement that requires emotional and psychological investment, can become a tricky process when it cannot be separated from the personal vulnerability the dancers experienced as part of their group living arrangements.

The dancers discussed what they had to do to navigate through this tricky process when, after a heated moment in the group discussion, there is a dispute about whether being honest all of the time is a guiding principal for how to speak to each other, KDC dancer Nitzan makes the following statement:

> I think you can say everything. You need to pick the right words and learn how to say some stuff. I feel like it's easier for me to understand the other side if I know, "This is what he thinks." And not to start thinking, "He thinks this way? Or the other way?" Or trying to figure out body language and all of this stuff. It's too much for me. I feel like you can say whatever, I'll prefer the truth instead of, like, being polite. And you can also be polite and still be honest. (MJDC/KDC)

In fact, politeness and honesty have been pivotal to the productivity of this dance making process. I observe that making *The Gate of Winds* is not simply about offering and critiquing movement options objectively; rather, it is about being able to find, negotiate, and communicate personal experiences and feelings in the service of creating a shared, agreeable, and sustainable product. However, as an observer of the process, it is often difficult to understand what is working and not working as the dance emerges, because the dancers are often not clear or in agreement about the direction for the dance.

During an interview, KDC dancer Daniel described further how he needs to sense clear and honest communication in order to develop creative interactions within a group. The dancers were asked to work in small groups to explore an assignment with Daniel working in a trio. In the following, his reflections touch on the need for active feedback to create diverse input and playful interactions between each member's movement ideas:

> For me, it is interesting to make a lot of material and play with things. But when it is a collaboration, you have to have someone to bounce off of, to put ideas out, or to say, "No, I don't like that," or "Yea! Let's try that again!" But in this trio specifically, I felt I was the only one with any kind of idea of what to do, so after even 20 minutes, I could just keep making material and saying what we should do. But that's not so interesting, because that's just me trying to do anything when I want to have something come back to me. I want to have someone else's voice. My voice is only one, there's nothing else there to go forward with. So after a little while, it started to really shut me down, because there was nothing to play with besides my own ideas. That started to be really limiting [pause] for me. (Maser)

As he thought more deeply about this particular creative interaction, Daniel expressed his irritation with working with two people who refused to make offerings or give feedback:

> I was actually quite confused. It seemed like there was quite a strong ambivalence towards what to do. Anything I said was like, "Okay!" And that made it hard to even read what they might be going through or what they might be thinking. So I started to try and ask questions: "What DO you want to do? Do you like this? Do you not like this?" And not having a response from them made it hard to sense any comprehension of where they were at with what we were doing. That was another element that just shut me down to what we were doing, too. It would have been better for me if they had just said, "No. I really hate this!" Maybe it wouldn't have been nice to hear, but at least I could have been, "Okay! That's a direction! Let's shift gears instead of staying on this line that is going in the same direction and going nowhere." (Maser)

This example demonstrates both the importance of feedback to the process and the difficulties the group was having communicating overall. Daniel is the newest and youngest member of KDC, and he does not generally take a very vocal role in rehearsal. However, when he found himself in this moment, he realized that he needs to practice verbally articulating his ideas and to continue to make physical suggestions overall so that the morale of the group would stay high and the work would continue to develop. He recognized what withholding feedback can do to collaboration.

Ultimately, Margie and Amir, as the outside eyes, made decisions about the organization of the movement sections for the piece. During my observation of the creation of *The Gate of Winds,* there was an in-studio showing of movement material for a small audience of about ten people. The spectators included friends and donors of MJDC as well as costume and set designers for the piece.[24] Margie and Amir had individual conversations with these spectators before and after the showing of the movement material. The dancers did not interact with the spectators. However, in conversations that occurred during subsequent rehearsals, Margie and Amir offered details of the audience members' feedback.

———————***Interlude***———————

In a second story walk-up dance studio, there is a wall of windows that allows the sunlight to pour into the large open space. The light warms the room on a chilly spring afternoon as people roll, tumble, push, and pull over, under, around, and

[24] I was instructed not to interact with or film the spectators so they do not appear as participants in this research. One avenue of pursuit that might take the ideas of this research further is an inquiry into the role of the audience in dance creation.

through each other's bodies. The group looks like a clowder of playful kittens entangled up in each other's limbs.

Suddenly, a tall man with a shock of platinum hair says, "What comes next?" His question is directed at six people who have fallen away from each other in a breathless heap and one curvy woman with long, thick, dark hair. This woman resets her hair into a tighter ponytail while she prances and then opens her legs to create a bridge. "From this part," she says, "You could come up over my back, and she could slide through to catch his other hand." The dancers fall into a discussion of her suggestion. Without discussion, those yet unassigned dancers find supportive places for themselves, thereby extending the suggestion and further enhancing the original idea with physically connective designs.

The ideas are offered, organized, and arranged like tiny delicate glass statues. Each idea is placed onto a shelf after being dusted and cleaned with a cotton swab by gloved hands. Each one is examined and turned softly into and out of the light to catch the sparkles and see the flaws. The dancers offer new ideas, and the collection of statues grows and is then rearranged yet again. Sometimes the ideas are discarded; other times, two ideas are melted together into an entirely new option: a new glass piece to be cleaned, arranged, and examined.

Another person arrives in the space. She leans her back against the mirrored wall and allows her weight to succumb to gravity, sliding down the mirror into a squat. She watches the others as they offer and work through ideas. She sees the color and texture of the tiny glass statues, the jewels present in each movement idea suggested. She watches them for a long time, silent.

EXPECTATIONS

MJDC has set up a way of working in which each dance is a new and unique process and each of the dancers is expected to contribute. The MJDC dancers are accustomed to having choreographic authority, with artistic director Margie serving as a facilitator or guide. Her role appears to be less about movement creation and more about emotional shaping. She does this by providing inspiring and challenging content for the dancers to use in movement generation. She is often asking provocative questions that allow the dancers to dive further into the dance for answers.

Throughout the interviews conducted for this research, the MJDC dancers described themselves as collaborators with shared power. However, at this specific research site, the presence of Amir Kolben seemed to tip the balance of that power in ways that shifted how the MJDC dancers viewed their roles. During an interview, MJDC dancer Megan described her feeling about this:

> Collaboration only works if everybody works, if the balance of power in the room is really carefully negotiated. He [Amir] was a bull in a china shop, and I think a china shop is a very good metaphor for a collaboration. Because it is fragile like tiny glass, and there are a lot of things that could go wrong and fall apart. In terms of the MJDC/Kolben piece, I found myself reacting really strongly to his personality and his desires, and I think I became pretty perverse about how I was contributing: to willfully generate material that I knew he wouldn't like and trying to push back, altering that power balance as much as I could. It wasn't about pissing him off, but it was about reminding him that I really believed that this was a collaborative process and therefore I wasn't going to take everything he said as law. (Wright)

Clearly, Megan was empowered to make choices against what she felt was perhaps unfair behavior on Amir's part in an effort to maintain the balance of power she sensed as an MJDC dancer within the larger group.

In addition to creating movement material and offering feedback, some of the dancers also consciously endeavored to equalize the power imbalance that they perceived to be at play between Margie and Amir during the creative process for *The Gate of Winds*. The personalities of Margie and Amir were presented by the dancers (and confirmed by my observations) as contrasting: Amir was seen as loud and bold, whereas Margie was considered gentle and quiet. The dancers also discussed the confusion brought about by the differences in their leadership styles. The dancers, as contributors, acknowledge the difficulty of balancing the power dynamic. The MJDC dancers were particularly sensitive to Margie's ideas being heard. In an interview, MJDC dancer Ryan described this sensitivity:

> We were all kind of like, "Okay, she [Margie] likes this more, but Amir doesn't like it as much. How can we support her and get it to happen?" We wanted to make sure that her voice was heard within their [Amir's and Margie's] specific duality, because his voice was so strong. Literally, he is a talker and just a strong man. She is much more subtle in her approach, so we were kind of trying to embolden Margie up sometimes to make sure that they were matched more equally. That was definitely a collaborative power structure that was apparent in this process. (Smith)

Although the power dynamic between the two directors created tension, the reality of the struggle was acknowledged by the dancers as an important feature in the outcome of the dance that was created. Ryan noted the paradoxical benefits of this dissonance to the creative process:

> This process was more bizarre in a way that I think created a work that was vastly different, which is great. It demonstrates what we do collaboration for, because it changes your aesthetic and helps you make things you would never make on your own. And I do think working with Amir created that dynamic in the environment. We made a work that we would have never made with just MJDC. Though, it was an interesting struggle of power dynamics, because we were making the work for two different people who didn't necessarily agree, so you have your own questions of what you were making and call on others to make it and then you still don't know what the end result might be. It was a hard thing to negotiate and navigate. (Smith)

Ryan attested to the fact that the power dynamics that the dancers felt when creating the piece contributed to what the piece was able to become. It seems reasonable and poetic that the creative process would mirror the content of *The Gate of Winds*. In an interview, KDC dancer Daniel, who is the youngest member of the group, reflected on this:

> The process was very difficult and not what I think it could have been if I had already gone through this. But the piece itself, for me, I enjoy it, and I think it is what it should be. In a way, it is a bit narrative to what the process was and what the process meant for me. (Maser)

To navigate the creative process with understanding, the dancers relied on their social expectations of each other. These expectations are largely unnamed ahead of time, but they seemed to be clear and present upon reflection for the dancers with whom I spoke during both interviews and the group discussion. Overall, every person in the creative environment was expected to act professionally and to approach the work with integrity, honesty, and a full commitment to the process. Expectations became more individual and nuanced as the dancers dug into their personal experiences and creative interactions. MJDC dancer Megan described this:

> I expect certain people in my company to let me know when something isn't going to be practically, technically feasible, when something could be more emotionally interesting, or when something visually could be more detailed or less detailed. And within the Kolben company, I think that I did not get to know them as well, so I think I relied on them less for that kind of structural input and more for the emotional tenor of the room—that's when I relied on them. If Amir is being an asshole, I know that this particular Kolben dancer will call him out, or if he is teaching a phrase and nobody can pick it up, I know I can go to this other Kolben dancer who will help me pick it up. (Wright)

These expectations of the other dancers also helped Megan temper her frustrations and reactive impulses to the imbalance of power. In this way, for Megan, expectations became relational strategies for encouraging and, in some cases, activating the dance making.

The KDC dancers seem to have experienced something much more intense and heightened emotionally than the MJDC dancers and even than Margie and Amir. Because they were living together temporarily and far from home, they felt that there was more at stake when offering feedback or ideas to try as part of the creative process. KDC dancer Daniel outlined his feelings:

> I definitely had some expectations, especially for Kolben Dance. I didn't expect it to be quite so intense as it was. It definitely surpassed what I expected—not in a good or bad way but just in the intensity of how close we became and how dramatic things became very quickly among the Kolben dancers in general. (Maser)

Daniel goes on to suggest that the living situation offered deeper and broader cues for the KDC dancers to use when communicating with each other. Their relationships with each other differed from their relationships with the MJDC dancers as well as from the MJDC dancers' relationships with each other. He describes this communication:

> But with MJDC, there was much more disconnect, because we weren't with them constantly. We worked with them everyday, so there was a sense of camaraderie with the MJDC dancers, but there was a disconnect between the companies. How we work is so different. How we think about dance is so different. It was very interesting to see what happened. I really didn't have any expectations of the MJDC dancers, except for a few things that I was told by the Kolben dancers, which were not particularly nice things. I didn't really think too much about it—the MJDC dancers—because I'd never met them and I didn't want to form opinions having not met them or really experienced how they work, or who they are as people. For me it was pleasant to learn how they work, learn how they think, and see where it went from there. (Maser)

Daniel alludes to the fact that other KDC dancers were somewhat familiar with the MJDC dancers and the MJDC creative process methods after KDC hosted MJDC in Israel the year before. Daniel concluded that perhaps some of these people had expectations based on their previous experiences. These expectations then may have actually been obstacles when trying to develop this collaboration for *The Gate of Winds* with an honest relational exchange.[25]

During the group discussion, when asked about her expectations of others, KDC dancer Inbar had this to say:

> Just to be themselves, respect the work, and to do what they need to do. Not expecting them to be like Baryshnikov (laughter). Even just in our own company, each of us is so different and brings something to the dance. They need to listen and care for each other. Maybe don't let information hide, be free and not judge. (MJDC/KDC)

Therefore, being non-judgmental and open while also tempering personal indulgences, and learning how to practice non-attachment are all aspects discussed by the research participants as being embedded into the creative process of *The Gate of Winds*. These are expectations that are wrapped up in both how individuals define ownership within the dance as well as how the group sustains itself relationally within the creative process. However, these expectations lead to complex and very complicated methods for negotiating what each dancer values in the act of collaboration.

OWNERSHIP

Ownership or authorship was an important element when creating *The Gate of Winds* because it suggested an authority over created dance material as well as a personal investment with what was developed and used in the dance as a whole. During the process of creating *The Gate of Winds,* in which so many people were expected to make contributions, the voices of the contributors took on an authority that governed certain

---

[25] The concept of *honesty* here encompasses both truth telling within verbal exchanges and somatic authenticity as evidenced by being present, aware, and open.

moments of the dance.[26] There is a sense of ownership when a dancer voices an idea that is used in the final piece. Still, the dancers also needed to be good listeners and to support the ideas of others. During the group discussion, KDC dancer Nitzan suggested a "picking-your-battles" approach to the creative process that both allows for an openness with others while ensuring that your own contribution is made. She described it as follows:

> We need to know that through the way, you need to compromise—a *lot.* You need to choose one war that it is worth the fight. It's like there is one thing that maybe makes you feel happy and satisfying and you have a signature in this piece. (MJDC/KDC)

KDC dancer Daniel agreed with Nitzan's assessment. During the group discussion, he described a creative interaction in which he invested his effort and how that one moment felt satisfying for him:

> I think, for me, it goes to a point where it's because we have so many little chunks of so many things that I really have to choose what I'm interested in or what I want to invest myself in. Because we can't really invest ourselves 100% in every part that is done in the process. It just doesn't really work that way . . . . So, I think, there's one thing that we did today that I decided, like, "This is what I'm invested in, and this is what I want to really put my voice out to be heard." And I think it paid off. I think that when you choose—there's no correct—but when you choose what opportunity you want to take and you feel really strongly about it and you approach it the right way, this is when collaboration moments can really come together. For me, it was in the trio that I said, "I just don't think most of this is working, and I think we should try going to a different place." And it did, and now it's a lot more interesting both to do and, from what I've heard, visually. (MJDC/KDC)

[26] I am using the term *authority* here to suggest the holding of power. Having power or authority over dance material means that the creator is able to make the final decisions about if and how his or her work is used within the context of the dance. He or she is also free to take the work off the table for use altogether.

Compromise occurs not only with other members of the community but also within the dance itself. MJDC dancer Megan acknowledged that her own aesthetics and desires were at play during the creative process, and she suggested that she must temper those feelings to objectively observe what the dance is calling for as it emerges:

> I feel like I do a lot of work to mitigate my own tendencies towards what I enjoy doing as a performer and be really un-indulgent with myself. I just sort of eliminate that personal tendency and try to be really objective about what the piece needs. I think at this point in the process, there's so much information to deal with that I can't even feel what I like or I don't like. I am just looking at things right now and, nothing is fitting together, and it's all super chaotic, and I can't land on anything like "That's what I want!" You know? Right now, there's a lot of "I don't think that's working but I can't explain why." So I feel like you have to get to the point where you can explain why something isn't working, and then you can move on to the next moment to find something that does work. But I feel like I'm trying to stay, especially right now, I'm trying to stay really far away from just ebbing: "I like this!" or "This is what I like in dance in general" or "This is what I want to do" or "I wanna have a solo." You can't let any of that come in, especially right now, when it [the dance] feels so fragile and chaotic. (MJDC/KDC)

In this sense, Megan is attempting to compromise with the dance by measuring the contributions objectively with her understanding of the emotional content and direction of *The Gate of Winds* as well as her personal preferences. She is struggling with finding her own understanding of the dance as it emerges as well as her place in it.

Ryan considers the idea of non-attachment to be an aspect of making contributions and ultimately (paradoxically) of ownership. In an interview, Ryan admits to the following:

> Margie's process—but I think collaboration in general—is a process of letting go. It is a process of non-attachment. And I think that is what everyone needs to remember: we are there to create a work together. If you are going to be that attached to something, go make it for yourself. Find your own people, do your

> own company. Everyone needs to come in willing to share physically and really intimately. (Smith)

Ryan's suggestion that everyone be willing to share intimately and also be willing to let go is somewhat of a paradox. He is really getting at the idea that working together is about working together. Dancers must commit to that endeavor first before committing to the creation of a specific dance. Practicing non-attachment is about struggling through problems together and creating solutions that are the best fit for both the dance and the group.

Ryan continues to outline his idea of a collaborative dance making environment stating:

> You can't come into this kind of atmosphere and environment expecting to be told what to do. You have to be really eager. You have to be a problem solver. And you have to be accepting that that is part of the process and that is tedious and challenging. You are not coming in with solutions already set; you have to confront the problems and struggle through the problems and eventually come up with solutions. And that is where I think a lot of people don't necessarily have the patience for it, but I think that is what everyone has to bring to it: acceptance. It is going to be a challenge, and we will eventually get to solutions, but the process is a process! It is a challenge. (Smith)

I deduce from Ryan's descriptions that his ideas regarding the success of the group and the claim of ownership in the process lie with the ability of the group to solve problems—choreographic and otherwise—together. The challenge, as Ryan says, is each individual having the patience to listen to each other and contribute in ways that benefit the emerging dance, which is the evidence of the decisions that the group makes together. During the creative process for *The Gate of Winds*, I observed the dancers take on this challenge and dig deeply into what it meant to become a group.

BECOMING A GROUP

From the dancers' perspectives, the two companies seemed to be separate entities, lacking in emotional or social cohesion even as *The Gate of Winds* became a dance product. In their interviews, Megan, Ryan, and Daniel all disclosed their confusion about whether or not they were "supposed to connect" with the dancers across the company lines. It would seem that in some aspects *The Gate of Winds* called them to connect, while at other times they were definitely intended to be in discord. All three dancers also outlined their pleasure with the outcome of the dance as a performed work, citing ways in which the dance was successful and fulfilling for them and for the group.

For Megan, the prospect and inevitability of performing the piece on stage with an audience seemed to spark cohesion between the two separate dance companies. She remembered:

> MJDC and Kolben definitely feel like separate tribes. Our methods of working are so different, we come from such different cultural backgrounds; even the age range was different . . . . And within each group there are a lot of differences again. But a lot of stuff coheres on stage. I think the full groupness of MJDC and Kolben really came together on stage . . . . The opening is the curtain goes up and everybody is on stage jumping with the sound of wind in the background and there was this huge white square of Marley [flooring] put down on the stage and we were in very beautiful blue costumes . . . so there is this very stark image of all of these people just jumping up and down on this white stage. And I think that set up the rest of the piece. But that did not come until quite late in the process. And the whole piece did not cohere until quite late in the process. Sometimes it takes that adrenaline of performance, being under the stage lights, and knowing that you are being observed and seen as a group by people outside—by an audience. That contributes to feeling like a group. (Wright)

Megan clearly attributed a sense of cohesion to the inevitability of the performance in front of an audience, even though she continued to maintain her feelings about the distinctiveness of the two “tribes.” She continues with the analogy of tribes to discuss her feelings and ideas about the separateness of the two dance companies and the performance of *The Gate of Winds:*

> When you are in the rehearsal studio, there are so many little tiny factions and individuals and everything is kind of cloudy and murky. But when the stage setting is put in place, you just kind of glue together . . . . One of the best ways to ensure cohesiveness in your own community is to have it be put into contrast with another community. So when you get on stage, there is the tribe of people on stage, and there is the tribe of people who are the audience. And that division is enough to let go of any fissures in your own tribe. (Wright)

Like both Megan and Ryan, Daniel also affirms that *The Gate of Winds* is a solid and interesting piece for him. He recounts moments in the piece during which he disregarded the MJDC dancers altogether as well as also moments during which he felt in connection. Even with what he perceives as a struggle between the two companies, Daniel is grateful for the process of creating this piece:

> I know that what I could have hoped for, I got more than that at this moment . . . . I’m really happy that this much even came out in the process and that I had a decent amount of opportunity, showing me that I can take more—I don’t have to just step back and watch what is happening, to actually jump forward and say things that maybe won’t be liked or will be disagreed with but that it’s important for me to say it either way. A lot of times, this is the only way to collaborate, to be honest. (Maser)

Daniel’s reflection on the piece and the group brings him to a philosophical understanding of the process and his role in it. He seems to have made a self-discovery as he unpacks his feelings about the group dynamics. Daniel seems to demonstrate in this reflection that he sees his choices from the standpoints of others, and he is learning the ways he can benefit the dance and the group throughout the next process.

Megan's reflections on the piece post-performance also philosophically addressed her feelings about the process of creating *The Gate of Winds* and about the creative process of making a dance in general. Her thoughts here also bring together the ideas discussed in this chapter and ground them purposefully and connectively to the other Sites as well as to the theoretical framework I am exploring in this research overall. Because the contributions of the dancers at this site are emphasized in such a deliberate way, it seems fitting to conclude this chapter with the thoughts of one of the dancers:

> I'm really enamored of the collaborative creative process. I'm really looking forward to doing it in some form for the rest of my life. For me, it feels like the most valuable and impactful way that you could make anything—dance in particular, because it is so intangible. . . . And while I am making a dance, that dance is going to register as a centering experience on the eyes, and ears, and minds of the audience, then it is going to go away again. So that's not really what I'm making. The thing that I'm making that is going to last the longest is going to be the crafting of the people in the room around me and the crafting of myself as a person. The little con is the making of the dances, but we're playing a much longer game, which is about being a citizen. (Wright)

CHAPTER VI

COALESCING: CREATIVITY THROUGH CONTACT IMPROVISATION

SITE THREE CHARACTERIZATION

The next site encompasses a contrast to the previous two dance company sites in that it represents an organization that focuses on the practice of the practice Contact Improvisation (CI). CI is an improvisational dance form wherein movement is developed spontaneously between/among the dancers. An energetic connection is sought between partners and this is facilitated by a kind of touch that moves, shifts, and changes as the dancers move. This rolling point of contact creates the visual of dancers tumbling and sliding over and under one another. CI can also include elements of lift and weight sharing, which allow dancers to become suspended off the ground with the support of partners. CI is practiced (like jazz music) at a jam where people gather together specifically to engage with each other. Duets, trios, quartets, and even larger group dances emerge, and the ebb and flow of partners interchanging, sharing weight, and relying on each other for support are constant and constantly evolving. Generally, a jam is a forum for dancers to create, engage, play, and experience together.

The East Coast Contact Jam (ECCJ) is a retreat-style Contact Improvisation (CI) event that has occurred during the fall and spring of each year and that has been held for more than thirty years. The Claymont Society of Continuous Education near Charleston, West Virginia hosts the ECCJ, and “jammers” stay on site in the historic Claymont mansion or camp in tents on the lawn. The location is ideal for its proximity to Washington, DC, a city that hosts its own popular monthly jam. The ECCJ draws many people from the DC Jam, but participants from all over the country also attend the ECCJ event. There are generally between forty and fifty participants during this jam with many attending year after year.

Many and varying perspectives swirl and collide during the jam, including: insights into different forms of bodywork; an interest in how certain somatic practices inform a perspective on CI; curiosity about how meditative, shamanistic, and energy practices influence CI; and a desire to challenge personal movement instincts, tempos, and habits.[27] Therefore, there is no one governing philosophy or agenda that establishes the ECCJ as a teaching/learning space or addresses one particular set of ideals. In my experience, however, the community seems to gather very intentionally to create an environment of peace with a clear set of values. These values include taking care of oneself and treating others and the environment with kindness. The ECCJ is a place to enhance these values in personal dance practice, and to continue to explore them as lifestyles choices beyond the jam.

Participants at the ECCJ volunteer to attend and pay a registration fee to the ECCJ organization. Attendees come from many walks of life and represent different races, ages, genders, and occupations. Some people come to the ECCJ because it is a place to practice

[27] Bodywork includes massage therapy, Alexander Technique lessons, energy work, Rolfing sessions, and other methodologies that generally require a certification.

CI with old friends; some people come because they want to dance in an environment that promotes peaceful and quiet living. Participants sign up for two work shifts during the event. They choose from the tasks of meal preparation or clean up, sauna startup or shut down, and maintenance in the dance barn (e.g., turning on lights and heaters, sweeping). In this way, the ECCJ relies on participants to contribute to both the living and creative environments needed for the event's activities.

A team of Organizers leads each of the two yearly events at ECCJ. The Organizers are generally two or three people who act as administrators and leaders of the jam. They advertise, collect money and registration information, communicate and enforce the code of conduct, remind participants about their work shifts, and spearhead a daily Town Hall Meeting.[28] Ken is a long time ECCJ participant as well as an Organizer. In a personal interview, he had the following to say about his role in the event's structure:

> I have a formal role in the Spring Jam because I am one of the Organizers, but the reason I have the role is because of particular desires. I want to dance, and I want the dance container to be strong. I want the opportunities to dance, and I take that role insofar as it helps to foster a happening. So my role is #1 as a participant in jamming, which is a dancer. Sometimes it doesn't feel like dance, and sometimes it does. I believe it is dancing and I love it. I love doing it so I want opportunities to do it. And so #2 is someone who tends to the organization, to the facilities, to the structure to help cultivate the dancing. I help cultivate the opportunity to dance—which is called an "Organizer" for the formal jam. (Manheimer)

The Organizers do not teach or act as special guests or authority figures in any way; however they, as well as all participants, may make an offering to do so.

[28] See Appendix A for the ECCJ code of conduct entitled *Respecting Boundaries*.

A participant can offer to teach a class or facilitate a session simply by indicating an interest in offering the session and negotiating with the group to schedule the session. All ideas about performances, workshops, or group activities are brought up during the Town Hall Meetings, where participants make space and time daily for offered activities. All participants in the group are empowered and independent, making their own schedules and attending to their own needs. While mealtimes are set and participants are expected to complete their two work shifts, there really are no requirements or obligations for participants beyond this structure. Participants who are certified often exchange or offer bodywork, in addition to taking time to walk the property, nap, or visit the sauna.

Occasionally there are workshops offered on topics such as Authentic Movement,[29] learning and dancing Nancy Stark Smith's *Underscore*,[30] or teaching CI skills. A teaching mixer might include ways of teaching CI fundamentals, or it may offer a more formal method of building advanced skills. Beyond the few activities that may be scheduled, the main attraction of the ECCJ is the jam sessions. These jams take place for a few hours in the morning, for a couple of hours in the afternoon, and then from after dinner until the dancers are too tired to continue. This is roughly ten hours of jamming

---

[29] Authentic Movement is a contemplative movement practice, which began as movement infused with Jungian psychology, and now has developed and is used in a variety of ways.

[30] *Underscore* by Nancy Stark Smith is a score developed in 1990, and it continues to evolve over time as a set of cues to introduce and incorporate Contact Improvisation within a dance improvisation meant for a large group setting.

per day. The ECCJ event begins after dinner on a Wednesday and ends after lunch on a Sunday. Participants come and go based on what they have registered for and how much or how little dancing they desire. In a personal interview, Rebecca outlines her feelings about participating in the ECCJ:

> I guess that's one of the things I really love about the jam [ECCJ] environment is that there is a certain kind of responsibility to show up and take care of yourself, you know, but beyond that there is kind of not too much. You show up for your work shift but I didn't have to be anything for anybody—I just have to make sure that I am taken care of and keep myself pretty organized. (Lisak)

Taking care of oneself might seem easy but it can be very difficult for some people. I will address more deeply what "taking care of oneself" means for ECCJ participants throughout this chapter, but generally it means making informed choices based on personal needs and desires and communicating with others in ways that support ease and flexibility for the group. Ken reflects on the jam that was observed for this research:

> I do feel like people stepped forward and took responsibility for things, including themselves, but also they participated in the meetings and in deciding things. Sometimes I have had people get carried away or somebody is too forceful about participating and precludes others from participating. And while I feel like there was some of that, I did not feel like it got overdone. The way I frame it, it felt like people weren't there trying to prove anything. They were there to find decent dancing and find opportunities to dance and play. (Manheimer)

There is a calming quality about the jam that, coupled with the inherent autonomy expected of and for attendees, often allows participants to develop relationships in unique ways both on and off of the dance floor.

These unique relationships seem to emerge as participants practice learning to take care of themselves and others, a practice embedded within ECCJ's values. In the following, Althea describes the values clearly while also questioning whether they can be moved outside of the ECCJ community:

> There is a sense of each person being an individual and that idea being embraced. There is encouragement and celebration of unique-ness, self-care, and caring for others. And I sometimes wonder about that community that comes together for a weekend with such ease. I mean, it can be challenging to be authentic, but everyone is really there, and that's so unusual. You are around these people in this community with these values, and you are aspiring to live them out. So if you have those values and aspire to live them out, then you *do,* because it is possible to do that in a couple of days. But if we all moved to wherever to have an intentional community, would it continue to be like that? . . . Those values facilitate connecting with people more deeply, and you add to that the sauna and the dancing and the service that is part of it. And so many talented people bring talents to bear . . . just so generous without too much expectation of reciprocation, and yet people rise to that. Pretty powerful stuff, you know. (Skinner)

The values of the ECCJ community are obvious in the ways that the group cultivates living and dancing for the event.

Rarely is there a participant who is introduced to CI as a form for the first time at the ECCJ. Generally, first time participants to the ECCJ have some understanding and experience with CI. Nevertheless, at the event observed for this research period a participant with the pseudonym Barb had very little experience with CI before attending the ECCJ for the first time. Given her unique perspective, Barb's characterization of the group seems especially pertinent. Her assessment is that there is a cohesion that invites openness and warmth despite the nebulous nature of the group and the comings and goings of participants. Barb summarizes:

> If something needed to be done, people jumped in to do it, just to help to get it done so that everybody could get to the dance a little quicker or have a little bit more time before going to the next dance or something. People were always talking to each other and learning new things about each other. So I guess they are a curious group (pauses and laughs). Yes, they are a curious group! (Longbow)

Because of her inexperience with the form and her newness with the group, Barb referenced the group using "they" as if it did not include her. Still, it is clear that she was able to immediately sense the underlying community values that ECCJ creates for all participants, whether experienced or inexperienced: there is a sense of curiosity and a desire to learn new things.

TEACHING/LEARNING

As mentioned, Barb is an unusual ECCJ participant because most participants are seasoned CI practitioners or at least familiar enough with the form to understand a bit about the technique. Barb's presence highlights a significant characteristic of the ECCJ: it is a safe place to explore and try new ways of communicating about one's own comfort within dances. Boundaries are important to discover, test, and honor within CI, but they can be very difficult to notice or talk about within the context of a dance or jam. In an interview, participant Benjamin had this to say on the topic:

> . . . We've been noticing that although a lot of people talk about this fundamental rule of Contact Improv—that everybody takes care of themselves and are responsible for clarifying their own boundaries when necessary, and using words and other means to maintain their own safety and comfort—we don't actually give beginners any tools for doing that, we just expect that they can. And actually, there is a lot of evidence that not only beginners but also everybody can have trouble with that. So, I think in some sense, we have expectations that aren't really justified. (Lisak)

Benjamin is pointing out that the ECCJ may expect participants to be able to articulate and clarify the boundaries needed for their safety and comfort when dancing without specifically offering the tools needed to do those things. During my research observation period at the ECCJ, Benjamin offered a teaching mixer to address this issue.

The mixer followed a particular score that included a set time limit for dancing with a partner, then a set time limit for discussing the practice with that partner before moving on to another partner to start fresh. Within a jam context, the opportunity to speak about the experience with your partner is always possible, but it does not always occur. The teaching mixer was purposely designed as an opportunity to practice talking about experiences, boundaries, and challenges with each other. There were no identified roles of teacher or student; it was communicated that, in every partnership, each individual inhabits both of those roles. This notion is meant to displace the idea that one dancer has more power in a partnership. Rebecca reflected on the teaching mixer process and how it helped her to balance her feelings of intimidation about dancing with specific people:

> The teacher-student mixer, one of the things that I really liked about that was that it kind of set up the framework that there were a couple of women that I have seen at other jams and am totally intimidated by, because they seem like so together and such good dancers and just totally wonderful. [I was] totally intimidated by the thought of dancing with them. So one of them I grabbed at the mixer, and I said, "Okay, I need to dance with you, because I am terrified to dance with you." And another one I didn't, but I said to her afterwards, "I was stalking you a little bit because I wanted to dance with you, because I would be too afraid to dance with you any other time." And then we ended up having a dance at the Saturday night jam that was so lovely and easy, and I think partly the reason why it was so lovely and easy was because I was able to express the stuff that was in the way of it before we had the dance. (Lisak)

The mixer provided a forum to verbally express an issue that Rebecca was facing. Because she was able to talk it out, she learned how to dance with some new people. Therefore, for both Benjamin and Rebecca, verbal communication is noted as very important and can lead to a deeper understanding of the dance experience with partners.

In Rebecca's case, she was able to communicate her fears and hesitations with her partner, and expressing herself led her to have a dance experience that she may have not had. Interestingly, Benjamin further recounted in an interview that he had an awkward dance experience during which he felt his partner had crossed a boundary. Although he did not go into detail about the experience, he did say that he was able to debrief with that particular partner, and they both learned something new about their shared experience from that conversation.

Teaching and learning are observable behaviors at ECCJ, and they could be considered embedded aspects of CI. It seems like CI is always a teaching/learning opportunity because the form can only be learned through the practice of the form. At the same time, the learning experience can be easily derailed in response to power dynamics and other interpersonal traits of a partnership. Ken remembered the teaching mixer and reflected on his hesitation (and eventual delight) with the score, and his experience as he moved between teacher and learner:

> I feel like the interpersonal power dynamics of teaching can cause a lot of inhibition that can really get in the way of growth and learning. So I'm alert to that, but what's really interesting is that I didn't feel like it was a problem at the same time. I felt like it worked pretty well. And at the same time, in the midst of that, there are various dance relationships I have with people over time. In this context, some of the underlying dynamics just get put on the table of "Who is teaching? Who is informing whom?" and "What's going on there?" I feel like it went pretty well, like it didn't become, "Well, I know better than you," at least in *my* interactions. I don't like that in either direction. I don't think that works well for learning this form, in either direction. I like questions and I feel like questions were kept in the fore. (Manheimer)

Through his reflection, Ken established that he was able to sidestep the trap of an imbalanced power dynamic between partners allowing the teaching/learning roles to flow back and forth.

Asking questions about the dance experience creates an experiment of trial and error to help partners hone in on a deeper understanding. Ken went on to reflect on the use of questions to communicate and override authority when teaching and learning CI:

> . . . It is easy to fall back on tried and true—but not-so-true—modes like, "Well, this is how I know to do it, so this is how you should do it." Or "This is how I should do it." My sense is that only works well for things to not do! Ultimately in doing this form, you need to be continuing to ask, "What's here? What do I need to discover? Find again or find for the first time?" It's that listening thing again. Times that you use old answers, find tricks that work, or even not so pejoratively, methods that work—that those things, more often than not, tend to get in the way. Authority and expertise often get in the way of finding the answers that need to be found for the moment. (Manheimer)

For Ken, power inside of a relationship with a dance partner can be equalized by deepening listening skills and receptivity to fresh ideas. A balance can also occur by adding verbal communication and questions into the dance.

Still, within the ECCJ context, verbal communication about the dance experience before or after dancing is always an option; however, it is never a requirement. Dancers often enter into or depart from dances with no verbal cues or even introductions. This behavior of entering into dances without speaking is acknowledged by newcomer Barb as she described her experience of figuring out how to find dance partners and feeling rejected because she was not asked to dance. She recalls, "There were a couple of times where the opportunity was there and I didn't feel any animosity or negativity, it was just like 'Oh! Nope. I'm not going to dance with Barb.'" (Longbow). Barb sensed the potential for a dance exchange but felt spurned by her would-be partners. She believed this rejection occurred because the other dancers may have wanted to dance with partners who had more experience with CI. Yet, over the course of the jam, Barb did successfully seek out several dancers that she wished to partner with, and she participated in several spontaneous partnerships in which the communication to begin dancing together was nonverbal and simply emerged from the jam context.

One instance that Barb recalls where verbal communication was particularly important for her comfort and emotional safety occurred through an interaction with John. During the opening jam of the ECCJ event that I observed, Barb was very nervous about dancing and overwhelmed at meeting the other participants for the first time. She was on the edge of the dance space and John approached her. Barb describes this encounter:

> I wasn't dancing and John came over and he just talked to me, stood next to me with shoulder-to-shoulder contact and was *being* there, just chatting and talking about different things. Not making me feel uncomfortable but he was more like, "I'm just going to come over and talk. And by the way, being shoulder-to-shoulder is contact too." But it didn't seem like he was, "Oh! I must go talk to the new person." It was more like, "She is over there by herself and she is not yet dancing. Let's see if she will come in [to dance] or where she is at." That was very warm of him. (Longbow)

From Barb's perspective, John was clearly being warm and friendly and that emotional connection helped to open the space for Barb to feel comfortable enough to enter the jam with other dancers. The verbal chatting with John was a familiar activity that allowed

Barb to feel more confident about the still-unfamiliar activity of entering/beginning a dance at the jam.[31]

Barb described herself as taking on the role of “learner” for another dance experience from the jam in which communicating and learning through movement are illuminated. She partnered with Elliot, and she practiced allowing herself to bump into others safely and to begin to develop trust with her partner. In order to do this, Barb and Elliot took turns leading each other through the space with eyes closed. She remembered the experience in the following way:

> And that was really hard actually, to let go enough to let somebody else move you around and to have that level of trust . . . and let go to be in the moment with a person, trusting and yet still knowing like, “Wow! I could end up heavily falling on the floor . . . .” Because sometimes I think you know you do have a role *and* you do have things going on around you. You are taking care of yourself when you know those other things are also there, but you are more focused on what you are working on with a partner. (Longbow)

There was a great deal going on in this interaction for Barb in terms of communicating and learning. She was attending to both herself and her partner as they took turns closing their eyes. She was also aware of the other partnerships and dancers in the room and so became concerned about bumping into other people and potentially hurting herself or someone else. However, through the activity of being led and then leading her partner, she discovered that she was developing trust with her partner as well as trust with the process of the activity. In short, she was learning that it is okay to bump into others and that *doing* the dance is helpful in finding understanding about the dance. During this

[31] Entering and Beginning can be two different activities or one and the same activity within a jam context. In this instance, it is one activity.

interaction, Barb also began to develop what she called *focus*, a term and idea that she continued to investigate and define for herself throughout the jam.[32]

In her dance with Elliot, Barb discovers that actually doing the activity, dancing in the dance, is a deep way of understanding the form. Seeking the contact point as well as listening to oneself and one's partner can be a growing experience. Whether or not dancers intentionally engage in CI as a means of learning, certainly for the dancers at ECCJ there is an expectation of deepening and growing inside the dance experience. Ken described this depth and growth as becoming cooperative. Cooperation is a byproduct of all of the other features of practicing CI, and getting better at cooperating with your dance partner is a teaching/learning practice that is embedded in CI itself, as Ken describes:

> In this particular form, the nice thing is that we lose sight of who is the leader and who is the follower. In fact, it is not an aim in the first place, whereas in other partner [dance] forms you have those roles, which I think is a red herring because the way of moving in any form is really the thing that you do once you are in proximity with someone else. The form itself is just a way to get you attuned: give you an activity that you can do together that you both are able to understand well enough so that you can go through the motions together and then get smooth and clear and crisp about really doing it cooperatively. I think any partner form is designed to teach you to cooperate well. As you get good at the form you can improvise, you can change the form, you can vary it, but your sensibility is attuned enough, you both are able to understand well enough so that you can stretch it together and still be connected. So cooperation is a kind of action but it is mutuality. I think really the beautiful thing about this form [CI] is that mutuality is organized without having roles that are very limiting. (Manheimer)

With this perspective, a dancer of CI is always both a teacher and a learner.

[32] We will return to Barb's idea of *focus* in subsequent sections of this chapter. I will italicize the word focus when it is being used from Barb's perspective.

CI is an activity in which *doing* the activity can expand notions about how to do it, as well as how to cooperate more deeply and fluidly. Many EECJ participants view CI as a forum for personal growth, and the teaching mixer offered opportunities to deliberately practice verbal articulation about the experience so that dancers could recognize moments where learning happens in the movement. Issues of power are embedded both in communication and in expectations of each other within the dance context. Seeking to equalize the power dynamics can be accomplished through questioning and creating an open dialogue where every dancer is both a teacher and a student.

———————***Interlude***———————

33 min: *There is a clear "breathing" sound score coming from the group. I cannot pinpoint if it is one person or many. Sometimes it sounds like one person from one part of the room, and then I hear it somewhere on the other side of the room. The sounds are thick and full, like waves crashing on a shore. Interspersed among the breath waves are occasional sighs, laughs, and the vibrations of movement in the space.*

35 min: *Idelle slides down Aaron's back and then, as she rises back up, he pushes into her, and she is able to rise further because of the resistance. Idelle and Aaron roll away from each other, and Idelle finds a contact point with Peter. Jamie and John have been dancing together for a little while, and now they stand together embracing and talking.*

38 min: *Similarly, Jonathon and Ken have an embrace before they both move on from each other - Ken to a water bottle and the dance floor by himself, and Jonathon to his pile of things off of the dance floor.*

40 min: *Jamie and John are still embracing and swaying and talking together. Roy and Cheryl have been duet-ing together playfully, with bouncing, tipping, and* *reaching movements. Lenai and Ash have a tip over flop, and Lenai places her hands on Ash's face as if to steady both of them before returning to rolling and diving together.*

45 min: *Jamie and John are still pressed together, chatting quietly. He puts his arms around her shoulders. They hug tightly then move on from one another.*

50 min: *Jarrett is improvising an interesting solo, investigating his joints.*

59 min: *Justin and Lenai have a lift that seems scary, then they pause to chat and exchange. They return to moving together, with a slower and more deliberate momentum.*

1 hr 4min: *Jarrett continues his solo work, stretching open his chest and heart while lifting his chin upward.*

1 hr 11min: *Idelle and Ken have a witch's spell gesture between their hands, and then she is startled. "Geez! Are you okay?" They continue dancing. Jarrett and Michael embrace and move together.*

1 hr 14 min: *Barb and Rick dance and then rest, roll and then rest. Cullen joins them, and then Rick disengages and encounters Peter.*

1 hr 21 min: *The sounds shift to what could be road noise. There is laughing and occasionally the murmur of conversation, but I hear no words outright, and I see no private conversations happening.*

1 hr 36 min: *The group totally coalesces for a moment and then begins to split off into smaller groups again.*

EXPECTATIONS AND PERCEPTIONS

When ruminating on expectations, the research participants at this site allowed their ideas to fluidly travel between this particular ECCJ event, CI as a practice, and their lives in general. Thinking about the ECCJ and about CI specifically, Dayna pointed out a realization she had made that others in the group discussion agreed they had similarly experienced. Dayna realized that:

> I find it's easier to have a first-time dance with someone than a second-time dance because the first time I don't know what to expect and the second time, I might remember what—especially if we have a really good dance the first time—then I have a certain expectation that we're going to go there and then it is usually just a clumsy awkwardness. (ECCJ)

For these dancers, expectations often preclude or guide their dances, but this may be manifested differently for each dancer. Althea addressed the notion that she seems to intimidate other people, and Ken discussed the ideas of *failure* and *success* resulting from expectations. Barb also recognized the expectations that she had of herself, which flows into the revelations the dancers had about how self-imposed pressure can get in the way of the dance.

During an interview, Althea pointed out the attachment of expectations to the roles we perceive in a group. She also addressed the attachment of expectations to power and intimidation:

> I try not to inhabit a particular role but I think that people's perceptions or expectations can shade the mutual experience, the relationship that is built—the relationship that exists, the power relations that already exist in it without either of us seeking to exert power or being dominating or something. I had several people at this jam [ECCJ], for example, say to me: "I was really intimidated to dance with you." And I say something to the effect of, "Oh! I'm sorry. I really don't mean to be intimidating! And I hope we can dance together." (Skinner)

Even without attempting to inhabit roles within a group, it seems that certain aspects of personality, ability, and perceived willingness to dance and contribute can lead to assumptions about individuals within the jam. Althea identifies herself as a professional dancer and a young woman. Her understanding of herself with these particular characteristics within the jam sparked her continued reflection:

> I think people want to lift me more for both reasons. And when I feel safe, when the person is being a secure base, I am happy to oblige. It's when I don't feel as if they are as present as they need to be in order to have my whole trust to hold my whole weight [that I am uncomfortable]. (Skinner)

Being present, which is discussed in detail later in this chapter, is a kind of listening with the whole body to one's partner as well as to oneself. Here, Althea cites being present as her own way of monitoring her expectation of others. She must regularly respond to her dance partners who frequently want to lift her given her size, agility, and experience. She notes a safety issue that is embedded within her personal movement experience and her need to feel present with her partner in order to fulfill the expectation.

Ken also mentions a breakdown in safety when expectations are relied upon too hastily, specifically as it applies to people expecting to be "taken care of" without also attending to themselves. He describes these expectations by defining them as failure within the dance:

> Well, there are two kinds of failure. One is that you end up being disappointed because you expect everything to be served to you, then what you get—even if it is served to you—won't quite fit you, so you'll be disappointed. The other is a breakdown in safety: where you think you can just do anything and people will take care of you, then you end up getting hurt. (Manheimer)

To avoid failure, Ken defines expectations as hopes:

> I think it depends what you mean by expectations. I have hopes. I have things I want to see happen and want to see not happen. I like when people are not trying to force other people to do things—when people are listening and present. That is what I do as an Organizer, I try to make opportunity instead of force things to happen. (Manheimer)

It is with hope, listening, and being present that success—as Ken sees it—is found when looking for growth. Ken longs for and expects growth in his practice of CI and throughout the jam.

Growth, as alluded to earlier, is an important aspect of CI for participants at the ECCJ event and it shows up in many ways in the group discussion and in the interviews. Ken described growth as a "moving target" for both CI and the jam as well as for life beyond the dance floor:

> The dance context, the form [CI], is a microcosm of the larger picture of how we navigate the world. How we find what we are looking for and how we grow and develop. Improvisation in general is like that, but you could also say that collaboration with other people is like that. I mean, we are doing collaborative improv, which requires us to be receptive to ourselves and others. And it's in that combination that growth happens, or at least growth in terms of how we cooperate and how we learn to cooperate. (Manheimer)

For Ken, expectations manifest in the form of hopes and success in the form of growth; he arranges these ideas into a model of cooperation. His hope is that there is personal growth within the landscape of the dance in the direction of learning to cooperate.

Other participants experience expectations differently than Althea or Ken, and some participants do not experience expectations at all. Benjamin believes that he may sense expectations from dance partners only occasionally, saying, "I think [it] is mostly my projection, but I think I feel it sometimes and other times I don't" (Lisak). His thought is that when he senses expectations from others, most of the time they are his own ideas. He assumes that his partners have certain expectations, but he is able to recognize this as his own notion and not actually the result of the behaviors of his partners. Meanwhile, Barb is very clear that she does not sense expectations from her dance partners at all. When asked if she experienced feeling like her dance partners had expectations of her, she responded as follows:

> No. Not from other people. I have deep expectations of myself, I come with that. I did not experience expectations imposed by somebody else. It is all the conversation rolling in my head. [It is] the focus. I think a better way to phrase it could be a lack of focus, in some ways. (Longbow)

Barb does not feel expectations placed upon her from her partners, and she does not even sense herself projecting others' expectations onto herself as Benjamin does. Nevertheless, she feels expectations of herself from herself. Barb works out her ideas about the concept of *focus* throughout the entirety of the ECCJ, and her reflections on her experiences came to light specifically discussing expectations during our interview.

Barb recognizes her own habit of constantly questioning within herself as she dances with various partners. When recalling her dance exchange with Elliot (described earlier in this chapter) and then expounding on *focus*, Barb had the following to say:

> I liked how I could let go of everything else and just be in that dance. I think of it as focus because I constantly had the [thoughts of] "Is this person enjoying this? Am I doing this right? Am I going to screw up? Am I going to lose that person?" You know, all of these conversations happening in my head—or even judgments or worry or anxieties. But in a few of my dances at the jam, I let that go by being more in tune with the other person and really sort of sensing what they were looking to do or wanting to do or trying to do and my response, and I felt like the other person was doing the same thing! Feeling or focusing on the conversation is a two-way acknowledgment. . . . (Longbow)

Describing a dance with a partner in terms of a conversation with a friend helped Barb to flesh out her ideas about *focus* and to address her hopes of "getting out of her head" and asking herself so many questions as the dance experience unfolds. Her desire is to be present and to attend to her partner and the conversation. To do this, she must take the attention away from her own questions. Thus, Barb's practice is to lessen the focus on her own cerebral processing of the experience and to instead attend to the moment:

> And that it really is a conversation and you are trying to see where it goes. It's sort of like when you invite someone to dance, you have this deep conversation where you are there for hours and suddenly it's 3 o'clock in the morning, and you are like, "Wow! Where did the time go? That was awesome. That was a great conversation." . . . And that's kind of how I see it. In contact, you may have a lot of conversations with people but there are certain ones where you are like, "Wow. Where did the time go?" . . . That's the flow aspect that comes into it. And really that lack of focus—I'm really going to go with that, getting out of my head. It's a style of focus, my own term to describe what is really happening. (Longbow)

The *focus* within the conversation, as Barb describes it, ideally allows her to break the habit of internally questioning herself.

Barb is not alone in describing an internal litany of questions that distract her from focusing on the moment, nor is Benjamin alone in perceiving his own projection of expectations from his dance partners. During the group discussion, Ken admitted that he is occasionally worried that his partner is bored causing him to seek to keep things interesting for the sake of his partner. Michaela voices her own similar concern:

> I have that fear, too, but I would expand it: I am afraid that thing that I'm enjoying is not enjoyable to them [my partner]. Oftentimes, if I am on top, like they are my shelf, and I'm backwards on top of them—that just feels SO nice, that open arch position, and I just want to lay there for several long deep breaths. But I feel like my partner underneath is being my shelf and holding me up. They are having to work for me to have this moment of relaxation and, in that moment, I start to worry. (ECCJ)

Michaela, in a shared movement that feels good to her, questions whether or not her partner is also enjoying the movement. And yet when the roles are reversed, Michaela feels engaged, and feels that she is part of the experience her partner might be having:

> I mean, when I'm somebody else's shelf, I never get bored, so I know up here (touches head), but I don't know down in my heart. I'll have dances where I just want to go really, really slowly. . . . [But I am] worried my partners are going to be bored. (ECCJ).

These dancers find themselves internally questioning outcomes and connections in the midst of their dancing. This is a common behavior among the dancers at ECCJ and it seems to stem from expectations or specific desired results. It seems that letting go of expectations can be difficult. Barb made her own informal inquiry on the subject of dancers internally questioning themselves while dancing at the ECCJ, and she shared the following results:

> And people were very good about telling me that all of those voices in the head—that "Is this other person having fun?" or "Did that work?" or "Was I good?"—every person, *every single person* that I shared that with said that the questioning never stops. You might get used to it or it might calm down a little, but it never stops. (Longbow)

It seems that internal questions—whether they stem from specific expectations, are the result of general insecurities, or are simple wonderings about the experience—are an ever-present factor in the dancing of many of the ECCJ participants.

The group discussion of expectations included references to internal questioning, recognizing "unique identifiers" or habits and expectations of and for others, as well as hoping or wishing to listen to oneself and to one's partner. Rick brings the discussion around to the power of defying expectations and the trust he places in CI as a practice to expand his energy:

> I've not found any other place [than the ECCJ] where you have the freedom to show up and defy expectations. I can engage with Jarrett and softly entwine, and I can engage with Emily like two bulls. He may think I'm coming into the dance a certain way, I may expect that she has a certain range. What astounds me is how

> much willingness there is on the part of this community to accept what is coming out of you. It is not abusive, it is reasonably safe, and you're able to work with it in context. There are some extraordinarily powerful people here that allow you to reach in directions emotionally and energetically—who can balance that? People who have been doing this for a while can balance you in ways that allow you to emotionally express. . . . For me, every dance that I've had, that I'm a part of, that I observe, that I've felt (pause)—if I was Robby in Richmond, I'd still be feeling what's coming from us here [ECCJ]—he's got a place here, he's got a connection to us. And that's extraordinary. There's an energy, nonphysical but very tangible if you tune to it. I love that CI tunes us to the otherwise non-tangible, what we are evoking and how we are moving and expressing on an energetic level impacts everything that we come in contact with for the rest of our lives. (ECCJ)

For Rick, the ECCJ provides a forum for practicing CI in ways that allow him to move beyond what he initially feels he is capable of as he then begins to trust deeply in the connections and partnerships he builds to shape his understanding of the world. Meeting people where they are, both emotionally and energetically, is part of the ongoing development of listening, being present, and cultivating sensitivity, all major aspects of the work of CI.[33] Because CI is a practice, creating and defying expectations happen in an arc over many dances, not necessarily inside of one dance alone. The ECCJ itself and the dancers who make up the event I observed seem to have faith in the arc and the journey of dancing to allow them to live their lives more sensitively.

There are many thoughts, questions, assumptions, and insecurities that can get in the way of the dance. Finding a feeling of openness and a sense of being present, which I will discuss in the next section, are keys to side stepping the traps of intimidation,

---

[33] I will discuss this idea of "meeting people where they are" in more depth in the "Relationships" section of this chapter.

projection, and judgment when engaged in CI. Thinking of success as personal growth can bolster the dance experience and keep dancers engaged and practicing the form.

LISTENING AND BEING PRESENT

Connecting with others and listening are undercurrents of CI as a form. As I have mentioned, many of the ECCJ participants use language like "being present," which refers to using the body as an ear to listen for nuances and subtleties in movement as well as to thoughtfully respond without reacting impetuously.[34] In an interview, Rebecca suggested that one of the social challenges of dancing is being present with a particular partner. She clarifies: "I have to trust that this person is taking care of herself and having to let go of that so that I can just dance, you know, listen and respond" (Lisak). Presence is an aspect of CI that is both cultivated and produced inside the dance experience.

When partners are open and present with one another in movement, the participants seem to agree that the experience can be quite profound. John describes it as follows:

> And in our connection, something emerges and sometimes just sparkles, and often there's experiences like I am being danced: "Oh my God! I'm so lucky to be here while this is happening to me!" (ECCJ)

John is not alone in invoking the divine to describe this kind of connection. The emergence of the mystical dance as a third entity acting and present within the experience is clearly part of the vernacular of ECCJ. Ken explains it in this way:

---

[34] This definition of "being present" emerged from the ways the phrase is used by the participants at the ECCJ. It is not a formal definition adopted by the larger CI community.

> When it's really happening, I am a part of something with somebody else, and it is not me or the other person who is doing it. And in fact, it's really not clear how either of us are doing it because it feels like a third party that we are a part of. And I have to say, I sort of crave it. I love doing that. (ECCJ).

This kind of connection is not something that the dancers have to seek or enact, rather it spontaneously emerges from the dance as each dancer continues to listen and be present with her partner. In fact, doing less can often open the ability to be present more.

The participants discussed the need to shed certain aspects of themselves in order to be present, as shown in this passage from the group discussion:

> JUSTIN: The term *creation* is really weird; I feel like it's a stripping away of things. Dances that I feel don't work, it's because either I or the other person—or both of us—got in the way of something. It wasn't that we created a good dance, it's that we got out of the way.
>
> KEN: And let the good dance happen.
>
> JUSTIN: Yup! We made room for a good dance.
>
> MICHAELA: Yeah, maybe that's why I don't really use the word *make*, because *make* to me feels as though . . .
>
> PAGE: We *do* . . .
>
> MICHAELA: Yeah. Like I am intentionally imposing my goals on what this will be, and I'm going to make it into something. Whereas Contact is all about *not*—not having an intention, per se.
>
> PAGE: Being enough.
>
> JUSTIN: Which is kind of fantastic, because when it's not working, we tend to try and *make* it work and that's completely the wrong thing. "It's not working, so I should do less" is the reality of it. (ECCJ)

During this discussion, the dancers shared this sense of letting go of assumptions and expectations in order to invite or allow the dance to unfold. This is not to suggest a diminishing of the self so that the dance can be seen or felt; rather, there is a deeper listening occurring that involves tuning in to oneself and one's partner and having faith that something will happen.

For the ECCJ participants the experience of being present is certainly palpable for dancers engaging in CI. It seems that observers or non-moving spectators to the experience can also call upon the ideas of presence and get a sense of the moment for the dancers. Joe described this idea in more depth:

> For me, it sort of builds to this point where I can't tell if my eyes are open anymore, and there's a brief instance where I know where everyone in the room is . . . then it just sort of fades from there. That's why I like to sit and watch sometimes. If everyone else is really into it, I can sort of feel it. (ECCJ)

For Joe, being "really into it" is his way of describing the connective power he feels as a spectator to dance moments as they unfold. He is able to experience not just what is danced but also the creation of the dance and the connection that is happening. As an observer to the jam, I concur with Joe that it is possible to sense the manifestation of presence along a continuum among the partnerships and within the dances. Being present has discernable characteristics although they are ephemeral and variant for each partnership and dance. Nevertheless, being present is something that is felt.

Listening and being present are ideas that can be felt by observers but are produced very deliberately within the dance experience. For some participants, the emergence of a connection discovered by being present can feel like a third persona within a CI duet. Figuratively letting go, or getting out the way, can enhance the dance experience as each dancer attends to herself and her partner. Connections and relationships are fostered by the willingness of participants to listen and be present with one another.

RELATIONSHIPS

Moving in and out of dances at the ECCJ can be a dance in itself. I observed the passing of connections and contact points as dances went from duets to trios to quartets, quintets, and sextets and then back to duets with ease and in relatively quick succession. As an observer, dance partnerships seem to emerge in two ways: two people have a verbal exchange on dancing together or partnerships are created without verbal cues by the passing of connection within the dance space. In discussion with the ECCJ participants, however, there may be more intention and desire for particular partnerships than what is observable.

Althea describes coming to the ECCJ knowing that she wanted to dance with certain people. At the same time, she wanted to be open to dancing with new people:

> You're predisposed to be more open to some relationships than to others. And I try to keep myself really open and dance with as many people as possible but I know there are some people who I want to make sure that I dance with, and I know there are some people who I would like to dance more than once with. So having the sense of both of those priorities as well as openness. Either way it is about existing relationships or exploring another relationship, and mostly I am not closed to exploring a relationship with anyone at the jam, but I am more interested in doing so with some people. . . . (Skinner)

Here, Althea uses the term *relationships* when she reflects upon seeking or initiating dance partnerships at the ECCJ. Her sense is that there is an obvious pull toward certain people because of her own characteristics as a dancer or because of the qualities that she values. She makes it a point to dance with certain individuals and she honors the draw that she feels towards these individuals.

Despite earning her living outside of the dance field, Althea is a professional dancer. She engages in highly technical and structured choreographic projects on her own time. Because she is an extensively trained dancer beyond CI, she searches for particular qualities in her dance partners at the jam. She wants to be met and challenged by the movement experiences she has while attending the ECCJ. To this end, she described dancing with Ken at the jam:

> Like Ken for example, because he has spent so much time with the art form [CI] and just because of his way of being, which is extremely present, he and I have the ability to meet one another. It's funny, right, because this is all about relationships so to use the word *meet* seems, to some extent . . . I mean that in the way of, "Hi, nice to meet you." But more than that I mean "being matched" or "on par" or "eye to eye" in respect and exploration and present-ness. And that's great. (Skinner)

Althea is clearly enthusiastic about "meeting" Ken and their mutual and matched abilities to engage in dances together at the jam. Her two-fold assessment of "meeting" is a way for her to discern the success or feelings of gratification that result from the dance experience. Althea admits that she never refuses anyone who asks her to dance but her desire for a "meeting" within the relationship with her partner is part of what draws her to dance with certain people.

When asked if she ever declined the offers of anyone who asked her to dance at the ECCJ event, Barb responded, "No. I didn't say 'No.' Because I thought, 'Why not?'" (Longbow). Unlike Althea, Barb is not an experienced dancer although she is a certified yoga instructor. She is new to CI and she alludes to seeking partners with an openness to new experiences, considering a sense of openness to be an ideal characteristic for all dancers to have in the jam settings. She went on to describe the ECCJ environment and its potential for connection within dance experiences:

> It really comes down to the people in a lot of ways because if you can sense that they are not open—whether you've been dancing forever or are new to it—you are not going to want to engage. You have to create that space that allows this to happen; that is accomplished by the organizers and the participants, too. It's about everybody being there and being just who they are. Like I described of the [ECCJ] group: open, innovative, playful, creative, all of these things that allow it to happen. Similarly, I'll go back to yoga again. Because of my teacher training [I believe] you have to make the space comfortable so that people are willing to explore with you. And I think it is the same for contact: the space is inviting, comfortable, and people feel safe. It is not only the teacher in the case of yoga, and it is not only the organizer in the case of contact. It is about the people coming in *wanting* to be there, *wanting* to dance, *wanting* contact. And not as much about having an agenda, although like we learned from your group discussion, there are people who come in like "I really want to dance with this particular person if he or she is there." (Longbow)

The environment that Barb describes is one in which there is an invitation to show up and exercise the values of taking care of oneself and of each other, which are formative characteristics of the ECCJ. The twist for Barb is being able to balance the agenda—or what Althea calls a "priority"—of wanting to dance with specific individuals. In addition, Barb's comments make evident how the ways people treat themselves and others can directly affect the comfort, safety, and openness that people feel as part of the jam environment.

Ken also describes how dances evolve, and how dancers connect with one another in the ECCJ environment. He talks about the particular event that I observed as it relates to his ideal image of what could be possible:

> There are particular characteristics that I key on, that I care about. I feel pretty good about the character of the group for this jam. My underlying concern is that the opportunity be there for everybody to participate as fully themselves as they can. That is a somewhat complicated demand. How do you do that? I don't have a single rule or way for me to do that, but the measure of success for me is whether it seemed to be that way. And I got a very gratifying sense that it was. Part of that is that it seemed like people tended to show up as themselves, in decent ways, without doing it in a way that needed to dominate, which feels manic or neurotic to me. This jam didn't feel neurotic to me. (Manheimer)

Furthermore, Ken described the closing of the event—the ending of the last jam on the last day—as an example of the mood of the environment and the success of the event as he mentions above. During previous ECCJ events, the Organizers generally took it upon themselves to round up all of the dancers and to channel the dancing in a closing circle, which can accidentally feel contrived at the close of the event. For this particular ECCJ event, however, once word got out that the event needed to come to close, the dancers took it upon themselves to organically honor the closing. Ken reflected on this moment to emphasize his feelings about the character of the participants of this ECCJ and the ease of creating connections and a social atmosphere:

> In the closing, we were approaching the time, and we as Organizers just started circulating word, and I was basically the person who initiated this, that we needed to start gathering to close. So a bunch of people coagulated and started a little sweep, swept up, and then people stood and started humming and then to sing a round—I think it was *Row, Row, Row Your Boat*. And it wasn't manic at all, it was actually really pretty, and the task of gathering got done. And with a little bit of cueing, we settled and found a space for ourselves without having to really work hard at it or force anyone to do anything. Everyone seemed receptive, you know? And also active. That I just love. I keep an eye to see if someone is feeling a little oppressed or like "Everybody's having fun but I'm not." I think everyone goes through that at some point, but it didn't seem like there was a whole lot of that here. I noticed a lot of people were body tired—from getting bodywork from other people—and some of that seemed intense, and in part I attribute to the long winter and a kind of recuperative time that I also see as not bad but good. (Manheimer)

Ken was pleased with the way the ECCJ event ended, and he felt that other people also seemed ready and grateful for closing, even if, as Ken says, they were body tired.

The environment and mood of the group can contribute to how connections are made in CI. All participants contribute to the flow of the jam as dancers begin, end, and begin again with connections, partners, and dancing. Being able to "meet" another person in movement and find a spirit of willingness to share and experience is a hope for dancers, whether partners are sought specifically or encountered spontaneously.

———————*Interlude*———————

Two people sat down next to each other. They were side-by-side, shoulder-to-shoulder, with their legs extended in front of them. One said, "Let's make a dance together." As she said this, she gently pressed the outer edge of her inside arm against the outer edge of the inside arm of the other person. He responded, "Let's not make *anything. Let's* share *a dance together." His arm was warm with the tone of a very slight, almost imperceptible pressure he thought he felt from her. She noticed this tone as her own—a gift from him, but within herself. Soon the two inside arms were rising and falling simultaneously. Fingers from both hands intertwined and released as the arms slid, wrapped, pressed, folded, and unfolded. Which arm was hers? Which was his? Did it matter?*

The arm movement amplified to include shoulders, then spines and skulls, then legs and feet. Gradually, the people were rolling, standing, perching, and falling seamlessly across the floor, through the air, and over, under, and with *each other. The momentum ebbed gently and flowed wildly. When the waves subsided and the people came to a rest, they paused. The sensation of breath and heat and heartbeats were perceptible; it took a moment to settle, to disentangle themselves, to recover. Once each had inhabited his or her own familiar body again, he said, "Thank you for* *sharing a dance with me." She responded, "Anytime. We make lovely dances together."*

"I do not think that we are making *anything," he said softly, feeling a debate on the horizon. "To make something is to have something to show off, a product. In our capitalistic world, it is easy to apply commodification, even onto our experiences. We have just lived through a beautiful dance together that we could never begin to recreate. There is no product to show, because we did not* make *a product. Furthermore, a ballerina does not say, 'I must* make *ballet now.' No! When going to class, or rehearsal, or even to a performance, she says, 'I am going to* do *ballet.' She is indicating that she is going to have an experience. And that is what you and I have done together—we have experienced something together; we* shared *a dance."*

She took a deep breath to fill the pause while she contemplated his idea. She replied, "I agree with you that we have shared an experience. We have also made something. I felt there was something present that was me-and-not-me as well as you-and-not-you; let us call this "The Dance." It seems to me that we made The Dance together, even though it no longer exists. What is left of The Dance is the growth it has inspired in me and perhaps the growth in you as well. Besides, one ballerina will dance the same choreography differently than another ballerina. In this way, she does make the ballet as it also makes her, by asking her to adhere to its parameters as best she is able."

He agreed that there was growth, and he felt the residual effects and reverberations of The Dance. They sat together once more in silence, thinking, each on their own.

MAKING DANCE

The ECCJ group discussion did not reveal whether participants believe that they are *dancing*; instead, the participants debated whether they are *making dance*. There is no opinion offered that suggests someone does not believe that they are dancing. In fact, the group uses the word *dance* interchangeably with *CI*, as I have in this chapter. It is the concept of *making dance* that sets the critical distinction among ideas emerging during the discussion. This is an important concept to note, given that this research as a whole is about groups making dances together. The ECCJ group discussion revealed that many participants do not feel that they are *making* at all; rather, they sense themselves primarily to be *sharing* in an experience or *engaging* in a meditation with another person. Sharing or engaging in a dance can result in the creative act of personal growth through enjoyment and challenge of connecting with another person.

The idea that the experience revolves around personal growth is a popular opinion for jammers at the ECCJ. Participants feel that within a given dance with a given partner, they are confronted or challenged with various physical and emotional problems that the dance—as both a technique and as an individual unique experience—provides tools for resolving or for deepening understanding. Growth may be considered a feature of artistic creation in that a dance grows into existence; however, for many of the ECCJ participants the growth is applied to the dancer rather than the dance. The dance is an entity that comes alive to challenge and motivate its own dancers. According to ECCJ participant Dayna, “I often feel like I am being created” (ECCJ). Participant Page adds, “I think of it [the dance] as always there and we just make it visible” (ECCJ). These responses seem to directly contradict the idea of the dancer/creator making the dance and instead shift those roles to the dance/creator making the dancer.

When viewing the dance experience as one of personal growth, the question arises: What is it that is growing? The participants of ECCJ agree that the growth is subjective and not measureable. In some cases, the participants discuss the growth as not being consciously understood; whether they are conscious of it or not, to them the growth is nevertheless occurring. During an interview, ECCJ participant Ken suggested that growth is a "cosmic word for learning and developing ability. This is not a product that you can package" (Manheimer). He is deliberately speaking about the development of ability within the form of CI. Interviewee Althea suggested that the growth is also emotional in nature. After dancing several times with one specific partner within a short amount of time, Althea declared, "It is amazing that you can meet someone and develop a relationship that feels so heart-felt and authentic" (Skinner). For her, dancing with this one particular partner allowed her to grapple with issues in her personal life, thus, reminding her of some emotional qualities that are "really important to me in romantic relationships that I have been craving, that I have not been receiving in my own partnership" (Skinner).[35]

Personal growth is seen by these participants as information obtained through the senses that serves to fundamentally shift their perceptions of being. Ken described his understanding of this growth more in depth:

> So, yes it [CI] is a creative process. I believe that we develop our ability to do it in doing it. It is not a foregone conclusion that we develop it. It takes some doing. That's actually an inherent part of growth and learning that there is always change and further to go. (Manheimer)

---

[35] It is important to note here that in context Althea is decidedly talking about a physical dance with a dance partner that evoked emotions she recognized as issues with her personal romantic life-partner; she is not alluding to a physical dance evoking emotions of romance with her dance partner.

Ken also talks about growth as including feelings of enjoyment: "I'm learning how to do this because I enjoy how that works. And *we* are enjoying it, ideally" (Manheimer). His emphasis on "we" is a nod to CI's intrinsic reliance on partnering. The idea of *we* is an important part of how the creative action is occurring. During the group discussion, Ken stated, "I feel like I am growing myself. But I am growing myself with other people" (ECCJ). There is a clear social aspect of CI during the ECCJ that enlivens the experience and perpetuates understanding. That the growth is enjoyable and—as Althea mentioned—"heart-felt and authentic" is an important feature of improvisation as a creative process as well.

It is natural and important that there be some level of enjoyment when participating in CI, even during the challenging or difficult moments; otherwise, the form would be abandoned by practitioners. Still, enjoyment cannot qualify improvisational practices as congruent with the practices of engaging in a creative process. Yet, the ECCJ participants seem to subscribe to CI as a creative practice, despite whether they believe they are making anything memorable. As a practitioner myself, I identify "*enjoyment*" as feeling that the experience of dancing is deepening my understanding of myself in some way, and that this deepening of personal understanding is what is created residually when I dance CI.

At the end of ECCJ's group discussion, Rebecca referred back to the initial question: "Are you making dance?" She and John shared this conversation:

> REBECCA: I have to say that I found the first question really interesting about creating because I feel like it's all I can do to listen to another person and listen to myself; that is the limit of my awareness capability. And I actually find the

> moment when all of this merges together into one thing—which I think is why I do this, why I want that—I get terrified. That loss of self and loss of clarity. Like I'm listening to them and I'm listening to myself and it gets mushy. It's challenging, this loss of familiarity.
>
> JOHN: But you come back to this dance and the experience.
>
> REBECCA: Yes.
>
> JOHN: Do you find that staying with the experience is good for you in some way?
>
> REBECCA: I think so, yes. (ECCJ)

In this excerpt from the group discussion, Rebecca expresses that she is terrified, and yet through John's questions we see that she appreciates the experience, believing that it is good for her. One thing that may bring Rebecca back despite her fears, is that by living through the experience with another person, she is deepening her understanding of herself, her partner, or perhaps the world.

Although participants did not agree completely about whether or not they are *making* within the context of dance, it is clear that personal growth is something that everyone experienced. Personal growth is a creative act and is further expanded by the enjoyment and challenge of connecting with other dancers through CI. The experience of dancing CI can foster relationships and elicit personal growth through cultivating a kind of listening and being present.

Facing expectations and honoring the teaching/learning aspect of CI can lead to a deeper understanding of both the dance form as well as a dancer's sense of herself. The ECCJ offers a platform for exploring CI in a peace-seeking community. Newcomer Barb reflected on what she learned about CI through this ECCJ experience. She recognizes the power and challenge of connecting with other people in combination with the potential for learning new things as an individual:

> I think contact [CI] can be very useful and very freeing, and people can learn to open up more. Or some people don't process information verbally or communicate as well verbally, but maybe they can channel it through movement, and maybe there is a dance that can open up doors for changes. I always want to help people move along a path towards being more solid. If people are more solid within themselves and feel good about themselves that may contribute to them making different choices in their life to be healthier on many levels. And I really had a lot of fun at the jam. (Longbow)

Personal growth and enjoyment from the challenges of seeking connections and deepening the skills necessary to listen and be present allow jammers to continue developing personally as well as developing the form. A discussion of what is getting made and what skills are developing within an environment designed for dance creation as well as an examination of collaboration in the next chapter will synthesize the information presented in this chapter along with the previous two chapters.

CHAPTER VII

COLLABORATING: A SYNTHESIS OF THEORY AND PRACTICE

This chapter synthesizes the ideas laid out in the theoretical framework chapter (Chapter III) with the data revealed by and discussed in the chapters about the three observed sites (Chapters IV, V, and VI). First, I will address what dance making is or could be as a springboard for understanding the data, the research participants, and the act of collaboration more deeply. Then, with the concept of relational being (explored in Chapter III as the theoretical framework for data analysis) in connection with the sentiments and insights of the research participants, I will discuss the four core responses to the data highlighted in this concluding chapter. For the purpose of discussion, the four core responses are separated; in actuality, however, they are fluid and merging concepts that are not clearly distinct from one another.

From my own explorations of the theorists involved in this research, I recognize the difficulty inherent in discussing interwoven concepts. Therefore, the four core responses are not presented in any kind of hierarchical or cumulative order. They are confluences, overlapping and spilling into and out of each other, rather than pure, singular concepts. During the discussion of each of the four core responses, I will acknowledge several skills and behaviors emerging from the data that the research participants described as helping collaborations to feel gratifying and successful. I will also illuminate several ways in which the processes of dance making in groups engender applications of collaboration through the synergy of the four core responses. Finally, I will make suggestions for future research.

The concept of co-creation of the event of being presented in the theoretical framework chapter (see "Bakhtin and the Event of Being" in Chapter III) comes alive within the data through conversations with and observations from the research participants in connection to my own journaling within the three dance making sites. I found evidence of the ways in which dance makers think together and connect energetically with others in an effort to feel like a group.

In the case of Company Rose (Site One), the dancers gathered out of love and friendship and agreed to make a dance together; thus, a dance emerged from the activity of coming together to support and be present with one another. Alternatively, in the collaboration between the Margaret Jenkins Dance Company and Kolben Dance Company dancers (Site Two), focus and commitment were revealed as the dance makers endeavored to create a dance together. Through offering movement ideas, giving feedback to others, and learning to discuss the process, the dance makers discovered connections and learned to think together. At the East Coast Contact Jam (Site Three), a question surfaced that sparked an ongoing discussion of whether or not participants in that site were making dance at all. Therefore, because this dissertation inquiry is a concentrated conversation about collaboration among dancers who are involved in dance making processes, exploring and questioning what dance making is or could be is significant.

DANCE MAKING AND COLLABORATION

There is merit in reflecting on the nature of dance making processes and what they might include. I find that a discussion of what dance making means gives clarity to my evolving understanding of collaboration and further enhances my desire to be a part of a dialogue about relationships. A broadened discussion of what collaboration involves may also deepen the notion of what dance making is or could be.

The various viewpoints of the Contact Improvisation participants in Site Three call into question the meaning of a dance making process and compare dance making to other types of creative processes that I will address later, some of which may have more or less emphasis on a product and may include products other than dances. In my experience—and as the data for this research continue to show—there are as many ways to consider dance making as there are groups that materialize to do it; in other words, there is no one way to make a dance. Clearly, in this research, the term *dance making* was described by the participants as meaning different things to different people working in different situations. Dance making in these sites represents multiple possibilities that emerged while the participants engage together until a direction was created from those possibilities and definitive understanding was voiced and agreed upon. Thus, *dance making* is an excellent example of Bakhtin's idea of *heteroglossia*.[36]

---

[36] As discussed in Chapter III, *heteroglossia* is a term coined by Bakhtin to suggest an arc of potential responses from many space/times that are possibilities for a response until the moment of utterance.

Whether or not they were making dance was not a question at all for the dancers in Sites One and Two because those two groups of people distinctly consider themselves to be participating in the act of dance making; making dance is the wellspring and mission of both of these sites. Although both sites emphasize and spend a great deal of time in the *process* of dance making, they nevertheless are held accountable by having to create a dance to perform at a certain point. Their funders as well as their audiences—who no doubt factor into the expectations and assumptions of the dance making process—hold them responsible for presenting their dance works. Still, what dance making means for each participant is discussed as being relative to his or her roles and responsibilities within the group and within his or her own life away from the dance making environment.

The participants at Site Three provided several alternatives for describing what they sensed themselves doing that were different than “dance making.” These alternatives included meditation, sharing an experience of moving or feeling, and the practice of being present with a partner. These alternatives can also be understood as creating some type of product. For example, meditation is a process that seeks to bring peace or clarity to the participant, while sharing an experience and engaging in the practice of being present with a partner are both processes of moving toward the product of relational connection in particular ways.

Therefore, all three sites provided interesting reflections on what it means to be engaged in the dance making process and how that process leads to some product that is dependent on the needs of the group. However, it is not my aim to expound on dance making itself, although that seems to be a by-product of this research. Rather, I have specifically explored collaboration in dance making groups; I have reflected on the experiences of people who are deliberately working together and, through that process, have uncovered insights into how to become a better collaborator. The act of dance making with differing intentions in differing contexts demonstrated multiple possibilities for how collaboration could be discussed.

The word *collaboration* is often used in contemporary culture to suggest a way of working that involves people, organizations, or entities that may or may not always be in agreement. The term seems to possess a meaning that includes positioning two or more singular entities together with the aim of creating a single outcome. One scenario that this definition offers is of negotiations, deal making, debates, and diplomacy; another scenario is of one entity taking over to make all of the decisions yet sharing the credit with another entity. These scenarios can be viewed as alike with regard to their emphasis of giving something up to achieve productivity. However, when viewed from a perspective of relational being, the participants in the research expressed a sense of growth or enlightenment that was gained from their experiences collaborating. The process was not about loss—rather, it was about discovery.

With this sense of collaboration as discovery in mind, I developed four core responses to the synthesis of my data and theoretical framework as a basis for discussing the possibilities of the act of collaboration: 1) Listening and Being Present; 2) Voice and Bodying; 3) Living Through; and 4) Thinking Together. In this concluding chapter, I will present ideas that lend themselves to a visceral understanding of living through a moment as a relational being with the purposeful intention of thinking together. The participants discussed this intention as fundamental to their collaborative process: it is the practice of being in relation with another person.

LISTENING AND BEING PRESENT

The actions of listening and of being present are crucial parts of being in dialogue and seeking relationship with another person. Participants from each site speak to a need for sensitivity and honesty when doing the work of dance making in groups. To honestly seek understanding with another person, one must be open and willing to listen to the ideas of others. Being present is a way of listening physically with the whole body; it is beyond an exercise for the ears. In the research data for this dissertation, listening and being present are notions that clearly dominate the conversations of participants from all three of the sites explored. Therefore, I am enfolding these ideas into one core response that I call "Listening and Being Present."

Listening and Being Present involves an attitude of attention and intention that includes an awareness of others as well as a commitment to responding with honesty and courtesy; this is in contrast with reacting out of impulse, dominating, or manipulating another person. Site Three participant Rebecca said, "I have to trust that this person [dance partner] is taking care of herself and having to let go of that so that I can just dance, you know, listen and respond" (Lisak). In this example, Rebecca is speaking of listening and responding as an activity she is charged with that requires her to trust her partner but not manage her partner. The participants repeatedly reference Listening and Being Present as a physical sensation that goes beyond the actions of the ears alone; there is a respect for and awareness of others and of the agency of others as well as a respect for and awareness of the self and one's own potential personal choices.

The act of Listening and Being Present also physically portrays the philosophy of relational being. Committing to Listening and Being Present through the body asserts that a person is sensitized to the environment and to the other people within the situation; an awareness and compassion for the context is privileged. For the philosophers of relation being—Bakhtin, Gergen, and Shotter—being is always co-being, because everything is always in relationship first and foremost. Through verbal and non-verbal utterances, a dialogue is established that both forms to the present while also pulling with it the past; this dialogue navigates previously established meanings in language and gesture while moving through the personal experiences of the participants in the present moment. Listening and Being Present is a way of affirming oneself and others within the dialogue, and it is experienced with directed attention through the senses.

Shotter outlines the sensorial aspect of listening and describes the importance of directed attention through being present:

> . . . [I]f we are not *present* to each other, that person will not hear what we have to say. And that sense of our being *present* to each other is a *felt sense*, something we say we can have an 'intuition' of. Without it, without being in a relation of joint or reciprocal being with them. . . . We will fail to 'get their point.' (*Getting It* 199)

In this way, Shotter is illustrating the concept of Listening and Being Present. By Listening and Being Present, dancers get a sense of the emotional climate of the group and what needs to be explored, discussed, or removed so that the group can continue to move in professionally productive ways that also address the personal and intimate nature of dance making.

Shotter further outlines the ways in which language in a dialogical practice is dependent on "*specifically vague* terms" in order for people to create meaning together, thereby allowing space to direct attention and account for the particular environment and histories that contribute to each unique dialogue (*Getting It* 201). In this way, Listening and Being Present can be conflated with the next concept I will discuss, Voice and Bodying, as well as with the last of my core responses, Thinking Together.

If we consider the group to be the fundamental organism of collaboration, then Listening and Being Present has an obvious importance to collaborative group members. For Sites 1 and 2, the dance makers struggled with feeling like a group and worked hard to establish a sense of connection with each other; the struggle for connection was profound and revealing work. As Inbar from Site Two said, "I want honesty in the space, otherwise it is like toxic and graceless" (MJDC/KDC). Janelle from Site One reflected that she had to put her aesthetic interests aside and learn to "think out of love" for other people in the group (Bonifer-Mikes). Both Inbar and Janelle are referring to ways of relating to others in the midst of conflict, confusion, or disappointment; they hope to be thoughtful, authentic, and compassionate in the ways they give and receive communication. The dance makers describe this as listening and responding deliberately rather than impulsively. Sometimes they are more successful with this practice than at other times. Nevertheless, this is one way that the relationships are central to the work of dance making. In this research, the concept of Listening and Being Present speaks to skills that facilitate relationships.

The philosophy that surrounds relational being poses that a self emerges from the act of being in relation. In a similar fashion, Listening and Being Present with other dance makers in the group allows an individual to continually configure her role and identity in the dance making process. A dancer may wonder, “Where am I needed? What strengths do I have to offer this challenge that we are facing as a group? How can I support this ever-changing process?” Listening and Being Present thus can lead a dancer to situate herself within the dialogue of the dance making process and incite her to find ways of asserting her voice in relation to the movement and vocal dialogues that are emerging around her.

VOICE AND BODYING

All three sites exhibited applications of the voice and the body as presented by theorists Bradford and Sartwell, who offer the following:

> . . . what will get understood is not up to me, or my listeners, but is made out of the interactions between them. The meanings of these interactions are set up by the intersections of my history and theirs . . . (195)

Similar to Bradford and Sartwell, the acts of voicing and bodying open up the relationships developing between people as their differing histories interact through their bodies. In that interaction, new discoveries are made. Although there are potent examples of these interactions from all three research sites, the participants from Site Two, in which two companies of dancers with different nationalities and cultural backgrounds gathered to create one dance together, offer excellent examples in which the core response of Voice and Bodying is clearly manifested.

Sharing movement ideas as well as vocalizing feedback about each other's offerings is an essential part of the dance making process for the dancers at Site Two. MJDC dancer Ryan said, "Everyone needs to come in willing to share physically and really intimately" (Smith). This was evidenced by the working habits of the group during rehearsal. They were very committed to trying each idea that was offered by group members and to giving opinions and feedback about those ideas in the hope of distilling together what they believed the dance work to be. Ryan alluded to the struggle of this process:

> You can't come into this kind of atmosphere and environment expecting to be told what to do. You have to be really eager. You have to be a problem solver. And you have to be accepting that; that is part of the process and that is tedious and challenging. (Smith)

Accordingly, the dancers of Site Two are asked to use Voice and Bodying to express their opinions and ideas. They physically engage in movement generation and design trials with the other dancers and then reflect verbally together on what was made; they do this over and over again. The discussions are often hearty and heated as the group together attempts to understand and make decisions about the dance on the basis of their experiences with the movement trials as well as their bodyings within the group.

For Site Two, the dancers of MJDC and KDC were clearly committed to developing a creative process together. However, throughout the process, differences in what was offered as well as how it was offered were evident. Voice and Bodying became a constant endeavor toward understanding in multiple directions. The group persisted in striving toward a commonality of understanding among its members by checking in with each other, one relationship at a time. Through this process of both voicing and bodying, the dancers were able to slowly come to a consensus about the emerging dance; they developed a sense of themselves as a group made up of diverse interacting bodies that informed each other throughout the dance making process.

For Site Two, it became obvious during my observations that balancing the power of Voice and Bodying with Listening and Being Present was an integral aspect of the dance making process: the dancers sought a kind of collaboration that was emotional and driven by contributions and consensus among themselves, a group with remarkably different personal histories and experiences. Asserting a voice and a historied body while at the same time respecting other people's voices and historied bodies can be challenging and tedious in a large group, but it was nevertheless a part of the dance making process for the participants of Site Two.

This challenge ties into the ideas of theorist Shannon Sullivan, who considers bodies to be activities that are co-constituted with the environment and with other bodies. She states: "As the act of withdrawing from or avoiding fire, body is not a thing existing prior to its engagement with the fire, but rather *is* that act, that engagement itself" (30). Abolishing the notion that there is either a pure nature or a pure nurture, the idea of bodies as transactional with their environments establishes both *bodies* and *environments* as configuring each other and as not capable of existing without each other. Even so, the two remain distinct and separate from each other inasmuch as the dancer is separate from the dance.

Sullivan further confirms that there is no mind-body dualism. In her view, we exist corporeally; we *are* our bodies. She folds together notions of mental and physical, locomotion and language into one continuum so that there is no difference between habits of thought and habits of physical activity. In her ideas about transactional bodies, Sullivan further places an emphasis on habit and the ability of habits to be adaptable. She views habits as helping people to move easily through life. They allow us to communicate fluidly, to interact with intention, and to draw distinctions between what is known and understood and what is not. According to Sullivan, “What is important in the cases of all habits is that, ideally, habits be formed with the recognition that new situations and environments will require their modification” (33). Continual transaction with the environment allows habits to become more sophisticated and nuanced, thereby allowing the transacting body to become more sensitive and intuitive to the environment.

Even while becoming aware of habits and noticing the ways in which a particular change relies upon a particular transaction, people can learn how to make shifts in the environment and in what ways they themselves are shifted. Sullivan describes this as follows:

> Recognizing the cyclical relationship of control between organism and environment allows humans to ask how they might transform for the better the various impacts that organism and environment have on each other without assuming that human organisms have total control. (47)

This relationship between organism and environment suggests a very integrated and enmeshed existence in which the organism shifts the environment and vice versa. However, shifts are not entirely controllable. A person cannot exert his or her will at all times in domination over an environment; rather, the person and the environment work together. This is not a tit-for-tat or cause-and-effect relationship. Instead, it is an ingrained weaving of organism and environment, and the confluence is largely imperceptible. The transaction is an always-giving and always-taking relationship between the organism and the environment.

By substituting Sullivan's "organism" with "person" and "environment" with "other person," it is easy to postulate the interactions of transactional bodies through Voice and Bodying in ways that align with relational being. Furthermore, through Voice and Bodying, transactional bodies can be thought of as contributing to a gratifying sense of collaboration. For example, despite the struggle and tedium involved in the dance making process described by the Site Two participants, these individuals found rich learning experiences and dance making satisfaction as they moved together to develop a dance. The use of Voice and Bodying by the participants of Site Two is an example of the ways in which communication is approached and understanding is approximated so that pure knowledge is never actually reached; rather, knowledge is always being informed and reformed by history, context, and environment. This sense of knowledge becomes the continuing dance making process.

By establishing a conscious habit of exercising Voice and Bodying, even to the point of discussing the ways they are voicing and embodying their thoughts, the dance makers create a dialogue that culminates in the making of decisions within the creative process. The dance makers are constantly seeking to balance their voices, and they encourage each other to contribute and offer opinions to both stimulate the creation of new choices and strengthen the heteroglossiac nature of dance making possibilities. Thus, Voice and Bodying leads to and frames the next concept discussed, Living Through, and ultimately enacts the last concept, Thinking Together. In this way, my four core responses overlap and merge to indicate what is meant by *collaboration* for this research.

LIVING THROUGH

"Living Through" is terminology that emerged from my dissertation pilot study (see Chapter I) and that has reappeared and continuously affected my thinking about collaboration throughout the performance of my dissertation research. The concept of Living Through alludes to an experience wherein dancers share a sense of being present with each other within a particular set of circumstances: an improvisational prompt, a movement phrase, or an attitude or quality of the dance making intention. Living Through by its nature suggests a fluid, malleable push-and-pull of the limits of the circumstance insofar as a shared experience and connectivity are understood among the participants.

Experience is central to understanding the idea of Living Through. Dancers give life to this concept by Listening and Being Present with one another within the given circumstances to such a degree that, as philosopher Erin Manning might put it, the many become one. In this way, the concept of Living Through invokes Manning's ideas about relational movement. For Manning, the idea of the *interval* is the space between moving relational counterparts; thus, the interval is relational movement. The interval acts on the relational body in such a way that "[f]orming to deform, the body composes to recompose. To move is to exfoliate" (*Relationscapes* 27). In the movement of the interval between bodies, the decisions that dance makers make during the creative process also form, deform, and reform, thereby inviting a relational dynamic through the shared experience. Manning describes it as follows:

> Relationally, we move through these effects, experience the texture of the interval. When the relational movement flows, it is because we surrender to the interval: the interval in-forms our movement. We re-form: we create a collective body. (*Relationscapes* 27)

Thus, Living Through via Manning's suggestion constitutes a "surrender[ing] to the interval" wherein people in relationship with each other experience other intersecting and transacting processes, like Listening and Being Present and Voice and Bodying, which contribute to the forming of a collective body or group within specific circumstances (*Relationscapes* 27).

In an episode that brings Manning's insights to life, Site One participant Marsha expressed her perspective of Company Rose as a group of dance makers always reconstituting itself around each unique project that is taken on and the surrounding life priorities of the dancers during that particular time period. Marsha illustrated the ways in which the company renegotiates itself:

> We make this thing and we go through this experience, and then I haven't seen these dancers since the show. And I probably won't see them again until the next project comes around and we have to start working again. So we are always renegotiating. And who knows if the same dancers will want to pick up with me again? I think that is really interesting too, that the group is always changing. (Barsky)

Marsha alludes to the ways in which the group is malleable: forming, deforming, and reforming. Within a set of circumstances specific to the project and the dancers' life priorities at the time, the group becomes a group by Living Through the process of making one particular dance; it must then reestablish itself and become a whole new and different group when the next project comes along. This new and different group Lives Through the experience together with the new and different set of circumstances that govern the new project. Therefore, for the Site One participants, the specifications of the project and the ways in which their personal lives intersected with those specifications created the circumstances that allowed the group to experience Living Through.

A more visceral illustration of the term "Living Through" is the way in which the dancers at Site Three form a relationship within the dance form of Contact Improvisation. They seek a connection and share an experience with one partner that continually shapes and re-shapes itself in the moment of contact. The dancers then move on to a different partnership that involves new connections and experiences as a new dance takes shape. Research participant Althea commented on this process when describing a connection with one particular partner with whom she danced just several short dances: "It is amazing that you can meet someone and develop a relationship that feels so heart-felt and authentic" (Skinner). Within this shifting relationship, Althea confronted some personal issues. Thus, with this one particular dance partner, she was able to Live Through an emotional experience that was enlightening for her and that contributed to what she considered personal growth. Her experiences with other dance partners included descriptions of different connections, exchanges, and histories, which thus composed different circumstances for Living Through.

Althea and her partner were able to Live Through a particular enlightening emotional experience with a sense of connectivity between their moving bodies within the form of Contact Improvisation. Living Through, therefore, is a concept that describes a shared experience during which a group can evolve with and through the specific bodies and lives of each member moving within the scope of certain defined circumstances. Living Through speaks to shared experiences during which a group makes choices and, as will be discussed in the next section, Thinks Together.

THINKING TOGETHER

Bakhtin, Gergen, and Shotter all describe cognitive activity as being a co-action that is shared with other people who are present together in time and space; however, this co-action is described by the theorists as also involving "invisible voices" from previous interactions. John Shotter specifically speaks to the ways in which I am conceiving Thinking Together, as a core response to the data, through a theory he calls *withness-thinking.* In *Social Construction of the Edge: Withness-Thinking and Embodiment* (2010), Shotter uses the ideas of Bakhtin and others to develop a philosophical inquiry that explores how communication is an active and relational practice. In a passage that affirms the previous discussion of Voice and Bodying, Shotter writes the following:

> . . . words do not *do* anything on their own: they do not stand for things, nor represent ideas. They have a meaning only in those situations in which living human beings make some *use* of them in relating themselves to other living human beings. In these situations, living people bodily *respond* to each other's utterances and voicings, and in so doing, not only do they *relate* themselves to

> each other, but they also relate themselves to their surroundings. (*Social Construction* 44)

From this understanding of communication and relation, Shotter investigates the ways in which people use utterances and pauses in conversation to both reveal thoughts and engage with a partner to create meaning and understanding through dialogue. The inner world of thinking is constructed and re-constructed by activity with other people and within the environment. To this end, he concludes the following:

> In this responsive, relational, dialogical view of our inner lives, the 'things' supposedly contained 'in' them are not to be found 'inside' us as individuals at all, but 'in' the continuously unfolding relations occurring between ourselves and others (or otherness), in our surroundings. (*Social Construction* 74)

Thinking Together, as an act of collaborative practice in this research, echoes Shotter's thoughts about withness-thinking; dialogue is the activity that reveals Thinking Together. Dialogue persists in "continuously unfolding relations" that weave together experiences, histories, situations, and meanings to create a mutual understanding (*Social Construction* 74). This dissertation research thus focuses on how these conversations can happen through a collaborative movement practice.

An example of this can be seen through the eyes of a newcomer to the form of Contact Improvisation, Site Three dancer Barb, who describes the process of dancing with a partner as a conversation. She described her emotional reflections on making a particular kind of connection with a partner from her experience at the Jam:

> I liked how I could let go of everything else and just be in that dance. I think of it as focus because I constantly had the [thoughts of] "Is this person enjoying this? Am I doing this right? Am I going to screw up? Am I going to lose that person?" You know, all of these conversations happening in my head—or even judgments or worry or anxieties. But in a few of my dances at the jam, I let that go by being

> more in tune with the other person and really sort of sensing what they were looking to do or wanting to do or trying to do and my response, and I felt like the other person was doing the same thing! Feeling or focusing on the conversation is a two-way acknowledgment. . . . (Longbow)

Barb is describing her experience as at first being internalized. Then, when she is able to "let that go," she has a sense of doing something together or creating a communication through a bodily language with her partner. She continues to use the metaphor of a conversation to generally describe how she is able to be in relationship with another person through Contact Improvisation:

> And that it really is a conversation and you are trying to see where it goes. It's sort of like when you invite someone to dance, you have this deep conversation where you are there for hours and suddenly it's 3 o'clock in the morning. . . And that's kind of how I see it. In Contact, you may have a lot of conversations with people but there are certain ones where you are like, "Wow. Where did the time go? That was awesome. That was a great conversation." And it can be somewhat forced, or interesting, or filled out, and sometimes it can't always turn into this intense conversation—it might just be you and this one other person who can have this crazy awesome conversation. (Longbow)

Barb is able to make decisions and to move in mutually agreed upon directions through her actions by creating a conversation in movement with her partner. Some conversations are deep and intense, whereas others may feel more like chit-chat. Whatever the depth or meaning made among the dance makers, they describe their actions as creating meaning through the "continuously unfolding relations" of dialogue and thus enacting Thinking Together as an aspect of collaborative practice (*Social Construction* 74).

Site Two dancer Ryan further illustrates the concept of Thinking Together as he describes his feelings about his MJDC coworkers. He states that he is interested in continually evolving the ways in which all of the dancers engage and work together:

> I think that while I value that we have this really nice chemistry right now—we are positive, supportive, creative, and functional, we get things done and we work well, we're very solid together—I hope that we can find ways to keep pushing ourselves because there is something in the discomfort that automatically causes you to push and that is harder to make happen when you are comfortable and can easily become complacent. (Smith)

Ryan is open about how well the MJDC dancers work together, and he also alludes to a discomfort that can shift the working environment enough to keep the group of people active and intentional about being a group. In this way, the group members set up a professional climate in which they can Listen and Be Present with each other, exchange ideas through Voice and Bodying, and Live Through circumstances that are clear and agreed upon. This process allows them as a collaborative whole to develop possibilities that the individuals may not have imagined on their own. In other words, allowing conversations to become uncomfortable can also allow for new methods of thinking and doing.

Even with the atmosphere of colliding and re-balancing that was present at Site Two as a result of power dynamics and disharmony among personalities in the two companies of dance makers (MJDC and KDC), the participants seemed to believe the group as a whole to be mutually striving in the same direction. This striving was motivated by the sense that the Living Through circumstances that were both challenging and frustrating in the moment would be fruitful in the end. Ryan describes how it felt to be part of this situation:

> Thankfully everyone in that process from both companies is and was so invested that while there were frustrations and challenges, that investment never changed. Most people, I felt like, you could call them out and they would be almost wanting someone to ask them what was going on so that they could express it and get to a better place about it—move on. It was always a frustration in feeling like we could be more productive or things could be going better; it was with the right intention or goal in mind. Which made the conversation fairly easy because you were always saying: "You're right. We could be doing this better. Screw the complaining about it. HOW can we make it better? What do we need to do to make it work for you or to fix this dynamic?" I do think that everyone, their hearts and intentions were in the right place and made it [collaboration] possible. (Smith)

Since the group was so committed to Living Through, the ways in which they struggled and learned to communicate with each other were very particular to the personalities and context present in this one specific dance making process. Ryan concludes his thought about the shared intention of the group:

> Collaboration is about the people in the room. That special mix is going to create a different end product every time and it means that you are going to have to address the problems in the process differently every time. (Smith)

This example shows the ways in which the dancers navigated through obstacles like different work ethics, subject matter confusion, and "power-postulating" by different people. They collectively held a shared intention and a desire to build consensus together. The dance makers deliberately took action to build rapport with each other so that they could do the work of making a dance together. In this way, they enacted the concept of Thinking Together. They were reliant on each other to dialogically create meaning and to embody a sense of growth and understanding in the work that they were doing as a group.

THE COLLABORATIVE SYSTEM

Relational being philosopher Kenneth Gergen outlines relational being as compared with bounded being (see Chapter III). For Gergen, all mental processes are relational processes, and every action is a co-action:

> Approaching knowledge from a relational perspective, we can say goodbye to the thorny questions arising from mind/world dualism. We can also appreciate the many and varied claims to knowledge . . . . Further, we will find it unsurprising that the knowledge claims of one group may be discounted by another. We will understand that the reason the major universities of the land typically privilege empirical knowledge over artistic or athletic knowledge is not based on the intrinsic superiority of empirical research, but rather, it reflects the realities and values of particular people at a particular time in history. (205)

For Gergen—and for the purposes of expanding my four core responses into a collaborative system—knowledge co-creation marks a particular claim of inclusivity and accessibility: it is made by the community for the community and from within the co-experiences of the community. However, communities create their own languages in which certain aspects of living are valued. In Western societies, the valued community discourse has often centered on the mind as predominant over the body. This dissertation research is positioned to show how other communities working within bodily discourses can also co-create different knowledge. Discovering how to speak with others through bodily communication can open new possibilities for discourse in general.

Gergen continues to warn against attempting to unify knowledge and the ways in which knowledge is created within relationships:

> Our departments of knowledge are not demanded by the contours of the world, but result from social agreements at a particular time in history in a particular culture. Likewise, these communal constructions of knowledge are not likely to converge . . . . In the world of the biologist, atoms play no role; for the atomic

> physicist there is no economic structure; for the economist there is no God. Indeed, from the perspective of any marginalized group, attempts at grand synthesis are dangerous. Inevitably, there will be silenced truths, a loss of pragmatic potential, and desecrated relationships. (207)

Gergen is clearly hesitant about the ways in which disciplines corner knowledge and knowledge-creation methodologies. Thus, a guiding feature of knowledge creation for Gergen is that knowledge must have accessibility and a usefulness in dialogue with society, which is a broader spectrum than the community from which the knowledge emerged. Through this accessibility, knowledge becomes fluid across communities, and there is an ongoing process of approaching meaning through continual exchange.

To place Gergen's insights into a bodily context, theorist Sullivan further situates and reveals differences in bodying within communication:

> *Precisely because* different understandings of bodying can be respected as valid in hypothetical construction, modifications in bodily comportment and habit may be desired to facilitate improved communication. Instead of being a homogenizing disregard of the distinctiveness of others, modifying one's behavior in accord with another's understanding of it can be a respectful acknowledgement of that person's particular way of transacting with the world. (78-79)

Sullivan and Gergen are both putting forward a way of being in the world that recognizes the potential for a multiplicity of truths and for knowledge that perpetually shifts the nature of those who create it. Thus, knowledge does not simply possess the potential to make change; rather, during the process of creating knowledge, the thinkers *are* changed.

Similarly, within a dance making process, the dance makers conspire to create the dance; through communicating with and relating to each other, the dance makers are formed and reformed. For the purposes of this dissertation research, this process of forming and reforming collaboratively is a knowledge-creation process that encompasses

Listening and Being Present, Voice and Bodying, Living Through, and Thinking Together in such a way that the transactions within relationships—not the individuals themselves—are responsible for thinking and knowledge creation. This is not a negotiation in which compromise involves the forfeiting of one idea to gain another, something being sacrificed or lost to make a deal on behalf of the group, or one individual continually dominating over others. Rather, collaboration as framed by the four core responses places the group and consensus among its members as the work of the collaborative practice. The intended product—be that a dance, an economic endeavor, or an act of Congress—is the outcome of the actions of the group together. There is no singular or personal achievement.

The knowledge that is created admittedly goes beyond the existence of the dance that is made. Janelle from Site One was very forthcoming about what she learned and the revelations that she experienced during the creative process for *Pools of Glass*. She disclosed that she genuinely had to recognize and shift her habits in order to Listen and Be Present with the other dancers so that the group could Think Together. Janelle describes a clear example of Sullivan's hypothetical construction in the following scenario:

> To me, it was much less about the dance and more about the people, being and making with people. And how to navigate making a dance—collaboratively making a dance—when you're not all best friends. I mean, we all have really good relationships with each other, but I know that I can't give my unfiltered opinion, whereas to another person [outside of Company Rose] I might be able to. And that was a huge growing experience for me: to have to think before I said anything. Out of love—thinking out of love and not necessarily my own agenda. It was a wonderful, wonderful learning experience. (Bonifer-Mikes)

For Janelle, the process of making a dance with other people created knowledge about her behaviors that she was able to use and change to support further knowledge creation. She was able to understand this knowledge because of her relationships and interactions during the dance making process.

Site Three participant Ken spoke at great length about personal growth within the dance form of Contact Improvisation. In this case, "growth" also indicates a kind of knowledge that emerges as a result of experiencing creative interactions with others. Ken describes it as follows:

> The dance context, the form, is a microcosm of the larger picture of how we navigate the world. How we find what we are looking for and how we grow and develop. Improvisation in general is like that, but you could also say that collaboration with other people is like that. I mean, we are doing collaborative improv which requires us to be receptive to ourselves and others AND it's in that combination that growth happens. Or at least, growth in terms of how we cooperate and how we learn to cooperate. (Manheimer)

Ken's comments epitomize the collaborative synergy that unfolds from my four core responses. Ken speaks of knowledge gained as personal growth. To me, personal growth and the amelioration of our abilities to be with and understand each other are significant skills to cultivate in an effort to live a compassionate and enlightened life. Ken indicates that dance making in the context of Contact Improvisation is a "microcosm of the larger picture of how we navigate the world." This comment expresses Ken's beliefs about his dance practice and it encapsulates my feelings about collaboration as well.

I mentioned in Chapter I that my experiences with partnership dances, dance making in groups, and group projects in general have contributed to a growing sense of awareness, a compassion for others, and a motivation for becoming a more sensitized and enlightened person in areas of my life that include and that go beyond dance. Megan from Site Two also alludes to the ways in which her dance practice informs her perspective of the world and teaches her about evolving as a person:

> The thing that I'm making that is going to last the longest is going to be the crafting of the people in the room around me and the crafting of myself as a person. The little con is the making of the dances but we're playing a much longer game, which is about being a citizen. . . . You can push anything you want into the umbrella of dance and it will hold up and it will give in and it can be about anything. And you can craft it in so many different ways. And that is interesting to me as well—that I can use dance as a vehicle to learn whatever it is I need to learn about the world that I live in. I like that! (Wright)

Janelle, Ken, and Megan all described ways in which their experiences as dance makers informed their perspectives of the world and how they might evolve, each in their own ways. More research is necessary to understand the potential for dance making experiences to affect the ways people experience relationships and knowledge creation outside of dance making practices. This will provide a way for the discipline of dance to discuss the importance of collaboration within the dance making process, and it will also provide the field of dance with a voice in a larger conversation with other disciplines to discuss the importance of collaboration within those fields.

THE WAY FORWARD

A deeper investigation into what dance making is and does for different communities within different disciplines of dance may bring up more or other insights that contribute to the collaborative process as outlined in this dissertation. Although I defined the term *dance making* with a rather open set of parameters, exploring the nature of this process beyond even those limits may be enlightening. As a way forward personally, I am interested in how somatic practices—specifically the Alexander Technique—already incorporate and account for ideas akin to Listening and Being Present and Voice and Bodying into both a method for practice and a style of teaching. I am interested in how this somatic perspective is enveloped by or envelops the ideas presented as part of a dance making scheme. Insight into how somatic practices embrace the ideas synthesized from dance makers and theorists introduced in this dissertation may provide a way that systems of collaboration could be studied across dance practices and then made accessible beyond the discipline of dance.

Another area of investigation could include the ways in which the presented ideas about collaboration are or can be taught as part of dance curricula. One question to consider is what the pedagogy of this system of collaboration might look like. Learning objectives could be designed to help student dance makers discuss with each other moments when they felt silenced or were themselves dominating, and when challenges to or with the intention of the dance needed to be addressed. Further, these learning objectives could help students problem solve how to clarify responsibilities with and for each other as part of the dance making process. Unfortunately, these types of learning objectives are difficult to measure academically and, therefore, difficult to initiate given institutional mandates for evaluation. However, all of these unmeasurable behaviors continually surface in my own practice as a dance maker, and they repeatedly occurred at the dance making sites that I observed for this research. Further investigation is necessary into the best ways to develop, implement, and evaluate learning objectives that get at the skills associated with Listening and Being Present, Voice and Bodying, Living Through, and Thinking Together. Additionally, these types of skills may help dance makers learn how to contribute in ways that support community and compassion among individuals in addition to self-expression through dance.

With community and compassion in mind, I am also inspired by the potential that the four core responses and their synergy in a system of collaboration have to create perspective related to conflict-resolution paradigms within communities. There are many calls for conversations from different social movements that are interested in creating reconciliation projects, reframing cultural identities, and discovering peace-building resources and opportunities. Research into how this study of collaboration may impact people who are interested in dialogues that address social issues, cultural change, political attitudes, and so on, may further open potential applications and broaden understanding of this work, ultimately resulting in new ways to be, share, and think with other people.

At the end of one interview, dancer Erin from Site One expressed her interest in being a participant in this research. As a university dance educator and a freelance dance maker, she illuminated a way forward in her own thinking for this research, and she situated her participation in the study as she senses the dance field evolving:

> I think it is important that we document: No, actually, we are not just coming to rehearsal and the director is telling us what to do and we are all just doing it like these robots. It [dance making] is actually changing so much, so drastically. And maybe these horizontal models have been around for years and years, but I feel like right now it is starting to explode. I think that is important to how we, as educators, look at training dancers. They can't just come to class and do what we tell them. They have to make choices—we have to educate them on how to exist differently in these settings and that there is so much autonomy coming from them. . . . We need to be in dialogue as artists and it is so hard to make something in a vacuum and then hope that it is going to reach people. It is really nice to have people ask you questions. (Law)

In closing, I think the passion and charge that Erin expresses in this statement are good reminders that this research is part of an ongoing conversation and that the experiences of dance makers are important to understanding what people do in relationships. Dialogues about dance, dance making, and relationships in dance making processes can help to ground experiences, meaning, and knowledge creation in ways that people can be aware of and actively participate in doing with and for each other. The nature of how meaning and knowledge are created is dialogical, and relationships are the work and the working of collaboration.

WORKS CITED

Bales, Melanie, and Rebecca Nettl-Fiol, editors. *The Body Eclectic: Evolving Practices in Dance Training*. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2008. Print.

Bakhtin, Mikhail, M. *Art and Answerability: Early Philosophical Essays*. Edited by Michael Holquist and Vadim Liapunov. Translated by Vadim Liapunov and Kenneth Brostrom. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1990. Print.

---. *Toward a Philosophy of the Act*. Edited by Michael Holquist and Vadim Liapunov. Translated by Vadim Liapunov. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1993. Print.

Barsky, Marsha. Personal Interview. February 25, 2014.

Bonifer-Mikes, Janelle. Personal Interview. February 18, 2014.

Bracey, Lauren. "Voicing Connections: An interpretive study of university dancers' experiences." *Research in Dance Education*, Vol. 5, no.1 (2010): 7-24. Electronic.

Bradford, Judith, and Crispin Sartwell. "Voiced Bodies/Embodied Voices." *Race/Sex: Their Sameness, Difference, and Interplay,* edited by Naomi Zack. New York, NY: Routledge, 1997, pp. 191-203. Print.

Butterworth, Jo, and Liesbeth Wildschut, editors. *Contemporary Choreography: A Critical Reader*. New York, NY: Routledge, 2009. Print.

Clarke, Adele E. *Situational Analysis: Grounded Theory After the Postmodern Turn*. San Francisco: University of California Press, 2005. Print.

Company Rose. Group Discussion. January 31, 2014.

Creswell, John W. *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design*. 2nd ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2007. Print.

East Coast Contact Jam (ECCJ). Group Discussion. April 12, 2014

George, Melanie and Joan Meggitt. “Imbed/In Bed: Two Perspectives on Dance and Collaboration.” *The Collaborative Turn: Working together in qualitative research*. Ed. Walter S. Gershon. Boston: Sense Publishers, 2009. 185-208. Print.

Gergen, Kenneth J. *Relational Being*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2009. Print.

Golden-Biddle, Karen, and Karen Locke. *Composing Qualitative Research*. 2nd ed. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, Inc., 2007. Print.

Holquist, Michael. *Dialogism: Bakhtin and His World*. 2nd ed., New York, NY: Routledge, 2002. Print.

Law, Erin. Personal Interview. February 23, 2014.

Leavy, Patricia. *Method Meets Art: Arts-Based Research Practice*. New York: Guilford Press, 2009. Print.

Lisak, Rebecca and Benjamin Pierce. Personal Interview. May 14, 2014.

Longbow, Barb. Personal Interview. April 22, 2014.

Manheimer, Ken. Personal Interview. May 2, 2014.

Manning, Erin. *Always More Than One*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013. Print.

---. *Relationscapes: Movement, Art, Philosophy*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2012. Print.

Margaret Jenkins Dance Company and Kolben Dance Company (MJDC/KDC). Group Discussion. March 13, 2014.

Maser, Daniel. Personal Interview. April 26, 2014.

Merriam, Sharan B. *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Higher & Adult Education Series, 2009. Print.

Sabisch, Petra. *Choreographing Relations: Practical Philosophy and Contemporary Choreography*. Munich: Epodium Press, 2011. Electronic.

Shotter, John. *Getting It: Withness-Thinking and the Dialogical…in Practice*. New York, NY: Hampton Press, Inc., 2011. Print.

---. *Social Construction on the Edge: Withness-Thinking and Embodiment.* Chagrin Falls, OH: Taos Institute Publications, 2010. Print.

Skinner, Althea. Personal Interview. April 20, 2014.

Smith, Ryan. Personal Interview. April 30, 2014.

Sullivan, Shannon. *Living Across and Through Skins: Transactional Bodies, Pragmatism and Feminism.* Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2001. Print.

Williams, Antony. "One Small Step." In *Knowing Differently: Arts-Based Collaborative Research.* Eds. P. Liamputtong, J. Rumbold. New York, NY: Nova Science Publishers, Inc., 2008. Print.

Wright, Megan. Personal Interview. April 30, 2014.

APPENDIX A

East Coast Contact Jam Code of Conduct

This document, entitled *Respecting Boundaries*, is found on the website for the East Coast Contact Jam (http://eastcoastjam.com/jam-registration/respecting-boundaries) as well as dispersed in paper form at each jam event. Participants sign waivers indicating they have read this document among other legal things associated with the event.

RESPECTING BOUNDARIES

Contact Improvisation is based around mutual cooperation rather than control. To work well it depends on respect for one another's boundaries, which we describe here. Please read, to help foster a good and safe jam!

Exploring Cooperation

Contact Improvisation is a terrific opportunity to explore and deepen your ability to coordinate with others, and with yourself, in an exceptionally open structure. In the spirit of the form, contact improv jams are, as a whole, also improvisational, with little official regulation. This generally works well because the practice, itself, is a pursuit of cooperation rather than control.

Communication is never perfect, however, and sometimes people miss recognizing or honoring the boundaries of others. In improvisation, you can't regulate communication without sacrificing key opportunities for individual discovery and growth. However, clear guidelines can help everyone understand what they can do to keep such mistakes from spoiling a good situation.

Clear Communication and Connection

As with any shared freedom, CI cooperation depends on each of us being able to recognize and respect our own limits and the limits of others - the personal boundaries.

People cannot abide by boundaries that they do not see.

> While exploring and expanding your frontiers, you must strive to be clear with yourself and with others when you reach your limits.
> Safety as well as success depends on everyone recognizing and clearly expressing their limits. This is especially so in a practice that frequently involves reevaluating and adjusting those limits.

Cooperation depends on respecting one another's boundaries.

> In order for everyone to seek what suits them - pace, depth of connection, daring maneuvers, etc - everyone must be attentive for and respect the limits expressed by their partners, verbally and non-verbally. Safety as well as good connection depends on that sensitivity.
> People can offer material for others to explore, but they must not try to control the other's choice to accept or refuse those offers. Each of us is in the best position to steer our own explorations.

Genuine opportunities to connect include the option to not connect.

> In order for everyone to have the opportunity to choose which dances they accept, everyone must be ready to accept being refused a dance. Even followup to discuss a refusal must be an option, which may also be refused.

Sometimes Clarity Doesn't Come Easily

Sometimes you find effortless understanding with someone, and sometimes it doesn't come as easily. If a gesture does not successfully convey your message, you may have to explicitly speak it. Sometimes communication legitimately needs to be repeated. People may forget what you said, or understand incompletely, so you may have to repeat yourself, at the risk of seeming harsh. Sometimes, you will be unable to get your message across and will have to remove yourself from a dance (or similarly, conversation, outing, etc.)

What To Do When One-on-one Communication and Exiting Doesn't Work.

Occasionally even the best communication is not enough. If you feel that you have been clear about your limits but they are not being honored, and you are being pursued even after removing yourself and asking to be left alone, you can ask for mediation. Request consultation from jam organizers, workshop teachers, or anyone you trust, asking them to help convey to the other person to leave you alone. Everyone should do their best to communicate clearly and reasonably, and avoid unnecessary condemnation.

Though they should know better, it's possible that a teacher or facilitator is the one refusing to disengage. If there is no one that you trust available for consultation and mediation, it's your responsibility to leave an unsafe situation. Once you have left, you can find another facilitator to help you address the issue.

Each East Coast Jam has three designated organizers who make the arrangements for the jam, conduct town meetings, etc. The organizers are dedicated to supporting everyone in maintaining healthy boundaries, and are willing to do the best they can to constructively mediate, when asked. Please do ask for help if you need it!

Fundamentally

Contact improv, at its core, is about cooperation, not control. To work well it fundamentally depends on participants respecting each other's boundaries. Much like a lot of life.

For more on this topic, Martin Keogh has a fine essay on his website that discusses many of the interpersonal boundary dynamics which people have grappled with in CI.

APPENDIX B

Institutional Review Board Approval Letter

TWU
TEXAS WOMAN'S UNIVERSITY
DENTON DALLAS HOUSTON

Institutional Review Board
Office of Research and Sponsored Programs
P.O. Box 425619, Denton, TX 76204-5619
940-898-3378 FAX 940-898-4416
e-mail: IRB@twu.edu

August 29, 2013

Ms. Julie Mulvihill

Dear Ms. Mulvihill:

Re: You, Me, and the Dance: Developing Relationships in Creating Choreography (Protocol #: 17416)

The above referenced study has been reviewed by the TWU Institutional Review Board (IRB) and appears to meet our requirements for the protection of individuals' rights.

If applicable, agency approval letters must be submitted to the IRB upon receipt PRIOR to any data collection at that agency. A copy of the approved consent form with the IRB approval stamp is enclosed. Please use the consent form with the most recent approval date stamp when obtaining consent from your participants. A copy of the signed consent forms must be submitted with the request to close the study file at the completion of the study.

This approval is valid one year from August 29, 2013. Any modifications to this study must be submitted for review to the IRB using the Modification Request Form. Additionally, the IRB must be notified immediately of any unanticipated incidents. If you have any questions, please contact the TWU IRB.

Sincerely,

Rhonda R Buckley

Dr. Rhonda Buckley, Chair
Institutional Review Board - Denton

cc. Mary Williford-Shade, Department of Dance
Dr. Linda Caldwell, Department of Dance
Graduate School