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The Dreamer: The Creative Process

by

Hilary Ann Maxwell

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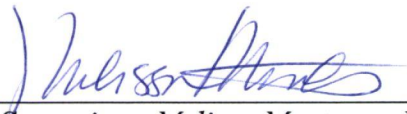
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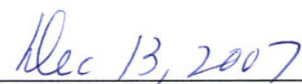
UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY  
FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies for acceptance, a thesis entitled "The Dreamer: The Creative Process" submitted by Hilary Ann Maxwell in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of Master of Fine Arts.

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
*Supervisor, Melissa Monteros, Program of Dance*

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
*Anna Mouat, Program of Dance*

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
*Suzette Mayr, Department of English*

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
*Date*

## **Abstract**

This written thesis discusses the nature of the creative process in general, specific influences that have had an impact on the author's own creative process, and provides an examination of the phases carried out during a seven-month creative exploration resulting in *The Dreamer*, a thirty-two minute choreographic work. Throughout this discussion, it is proposed that the creative process, in dance, draws upon a combination of objective knowledge and subjective creativity. As a result of an in-depth analysis of the various stages undertaken to create *The Dreamer*, this thesis suggests that a choreographer's intuitive response is supported by a broadened artistic, and objective knowledge base.

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## INTRODUCTION

This written thesis is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for my Master of Fine Arts in Dance. The major component of this degree combined course work with theoretical and experiential research culminating in the creation of a thirty-two minute choreographic work, *The Dreamer*. This paper, organized into three chapters, examines the creative process in general, the specific influences that have contributed to my working method and choreographic approach, and concludes with an in-depth analysis of the steps undertaken to develop *The Dreamer*.

Chapter One, *The Creative Process*, draws upon theoretical research to provide an examination of the creative process, and its application to choreography. It looks at various perspectives on creativity and the motivation behind a creative work, and addresses the role of objective knowledge and practical skills, as well as subjective creativity and intuition in the choreographic process.

Chapter Two, *The Footsteps Leading to my Choreographic Process*, discusses the choreographic approaches and working methods of four nationally and internationally acclaimed dance artists who have had a significant impact on my creative process. I worked with three of these four artists, Sharon Moore, Wojciech Mochniej, and Davida Monk, in the inaugural year of my Master of Fine Arts Degree. The fourth artist, Finnish choreographer Tero Saarinen, whose work I have experienced through performance and a workshop, has greatly influenced my aesthetic taste in dance.

Chapter Three, *The Development of the Dreamer*, is an analysis of my creative process. Employing the five-phase creative cycle of Peter Abbs, I outline the stages carried out to create my choreographic work, beginning with Phase 1: Impulse to Create;

followed by Phase 2: Work and Exploration within the Medium; Phase 3: Realization of the Final Form; Phase 4: Presentation of the Work, and ending with Phase 5: Response and Evaluation. Within this creative framework, this chapter looks at the various improvisational structures I used to generate movement vocabulary, as well as the methods I employed to shape and form the final structure of the choreography. In addition, I discuss how my research in video production and additional sources of inspiration fuelled and influenced the structural and conceptual direction of the choreographic work.

Creating a choreographic work necessarily involves a concentrated focus that requires the choreographer to personally invest in, and be deeply connected with, the development of the piece. A choreographer's physical, mental, and emotional immersion in the process often does not allow for reflection on the experiences as they occur. Writing this thesis has provided me with the opportunity to take an objective perspective on my artistic journey, allowing me to analyse the stages of my work. Furthermore, the process of writing has permitted me to contemplate and clarify my experiences throughout the process, making me aware of my working methods and choreographic voice.

## THE CREATIVE PROCESS

Research in the field of creative studies is diverse and extensive. In the past 20 years it has been an area of significant study within social and behavioural sciences, arts and humanities.<sup>1</sup> Regardless of the area of research in which creativity is the focus, engaging in a creative process is an autonomous path of exploration. The creator is armed with prior knowledge, experiences and abilities to stimulate and guide the creative process; however, in such an endeavour the creator must also discover new methods and skills, as well as foster his imagination to develop an authentic artistic voice. The creative process requires thought, exploration, questioning, refinement, and reflection. To quote Arthur Koestler, “The creative act is not an act of creation in the sense of the Old Testament. It does not create something out of nothing; it uncovers, selects, re-shuffles, combines, [and] synthesizes already existing facts, ideas, faculties, [and] skills.”<sup>2</sup>

There are many perspectives on what constitutes creativity. Some researchers share the belief that a result of a creative act should be a product of novelty that is both interesting and valuable.<sup>3</sup> For example, Mark Runco, a scientific researcher in the field of creative studies, defines creativity as “the development of original ideas that are useful or influential.”<sup>4</sup> Runco also suggests that creativity is a tool for change and cultural evolution, and that the obvious function of creativity is its role in the problem solving

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<sup>1</sup> Mark A Runco, “Creativity,” *Annu.Rev.Psych.* 55 (2004): 657-659

<sup>2</sup> Arthur Koeslter, *The Act of Creation*. (Great Britain: Hutchinson & CO., 1964) 120.

<sup>3</sup>George Mandler, “Origins and Consequences of Novelty,” *The Creative Cognition Approach* ed. Steven M. Smith, Thomas B. Ward and Ronald A. Fink (USA: The MIT Press, 1995) 9.

<sup>4</sup> Runco 635

process. It is through problem solving and problem finding that new concepts are formed and change occurs.

These perspectives support the notion that the definition of creativity is always evolving, and its boundaries are fluctuating. If each product of a creative endeavour is novel, then it could be argued that the methods and tools used in the process must also be developed and refined. The creator needs to find new sources of inspiration to refresh his perspectives so as not to acquiesce to the production of conventional work.

The designation of a work as being either original or important is a subjective judgement on the part of the viewer. A product of creativity could encompass an invention, a piece literature, a mathematical solution, a musical score, a sculpture, or a choreographic work. Factors surrounding each of these areas, such as expectations, goals, creative purpose, and the nature of the discipline, influence how it might be received and evaluated. It should also be acknowledged that a creative process does not have to lead to a final work or an outstanding discovery. An individual could engage in a creative process with the sole intention of exploring a specific idea that is of a personal interest. The findings from this research may be considered novel only to the person involved in its investigation. In both cases, however, some form of motivation drives the desire to carry out an exploratory process.

In his essay, *The Nature of Creativity*, Robert J. Sternberg highlights the work of Professor Teresa Amabile, in order to note the importance of creative motivation.

Amabile suggests that individuals will most likely achieve their creative potential in a subject about which they are passionate. In this circumstance, an individual is more



focused on the creative process rather than the potential rewards.<sup>5</sup> Many creators who participate in their artistic discipline as a career would fall into this category. The monetary rewards working in the arts do not frequently compensate the amount of time, effort, patience, and thought put into the work itself; artists invest in their creative process for the love of the subject.

Although the creative process is unique to the individual, it is agreed by many theorists that it consists of a series of phases that the creator follows as a framework. According to the late Professor Sir Cyril Burt, who was a prominent British educational psychologist, there are three main stages in the creation of a work. His proposed outline states that:

First, there must be the basic idea or conception; secondly the idea must be embodied in concrete and articulate form— a literary, musical, or dramatic work, the specifications for a machine, a manufacturing process, or a material product; thirdly, the outcome as thus embodied must be new; and finely...it must have value; the novelty must be a useful novelty.<sup>6</sup>

Burt's three stages in the development of a creative work is a useful guideline for application to the creative process in general.

Jacqueline M. Autard-Smith, an acclaimed dance educator, bases her research for structuring the choreographic process on the work of Peter Abbs, an educator and writer concerned with creativity and aesthetics. In contrast to Burt, Abbs states that the creative process includes five phases; first, the impulse to create; second, work and exploration

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<sup>5</sup> Robert J. Sternberg, "The Nature of Creativity," Creative Research Journal, 18.1 (2006): 89.

<sup>6</sup> Cyril Burt, forward, The Act of Creation, (Great Britain; Hutchinson & CO., 1964) 15-16.

within the medium; third, a realization of the final form; fourth, the presentation of the work; lastly, response and evaluation.<sup>7</sup> In the choreographic process, the application of Abb's five-phase cycle is generally not followed in its sequential order. Throughout the process there is a certain amount of editing, revisiting of movement ideas, and restructuring of phrases required, which necessitate that specific phases be looked at more than once.

In order to carry out a creative process, the artist will utilize a combination of objective knowledge and practical skills, as well as subjective creativity.<sup>8</sup> Objective knowledge and practical skills pertain to explicit knowledge. Within the creative process of choreography, these skills might include learned choreographic techniques and devices based on the knowledge of space, time, and shape, which are used in order to generate, develop, and structure movement. Knowledge of other art forms and disciplines may also provide new perspectives and tools to aid the creation of a work. In addition, a creator may adopt methods and practical skills through the experience of working with other artists in their creative processes.

On the other end of the spectrum from objective knowledge is subjective creativity. Subjective creativity relates to intuitive thought that stimulates the production of uncensored and spontaneous ideas. It can influence the conceptual direction of a work and impact its aesthetic quality. The artist may draw from imagination, feelings, emotions, and personal experiences to feed subjective creativity and guide the work. This

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<sup>7</sup> Jacqueline M. Smith-Autard, Dance Composition, 5<sup>th</sup> ed. (London: A & C Black, 2004) 139.

<sup>8</sup> Smith-Autard 138.

form of thought plays a powerful role in the creative process as it is comprised of aspects that are unique only to the individual implementing them. In dance, subjective creativity may partially account for the reason some choreographers' work reflect their individual character.

In the choreographic process, objective knowledge and subjective creativity work together to shape and direct the course of the creative work. The choreographer engages these two modes of thought in an interlacing relationship where objective knowledge rationally analyzes, steers, and refines subjective, creative ideation, revealing the most salient concepts and choices. Over time, experiences, techniques, and choreographic methods once learned by the choreographer are internalized and become a knowledge base from which the choreographer draws without conscious processing. In a discussion about the use of improvisation in the choreographic process, Blom and Chaplin, the authors of *The Intimate Act of Choreography*, illustrate this viewpoint by stating that:

Once the choreographic concepts are experienced improvisationally, they begin to become internalized. With time, these experiences will be automatically incorporated into your way of working. There will be no outside set of rules to remember each time you put a dance together, no check list, no do's or don't ...<sup>9</sup>

Skilled choreographers do not always have to deliberate over decisions about structures in space or the development of specific movement ideas; they are able to make these kinds of decisions intuitively even though, at one time, they had to be considered logically and rationally.

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<sup>9</sup> Lynne A. Blom and Tarin L. Chaplin, *The Intimate Act of Choreograph* (Pittsburgh, Pa.: University of Pittsburgh Press. 1982) 6.

## CHOREOGRAPHY AND INTUITION

Intuition provides choreographers with implicit knowledge about their creative direction and is a major influence on the development of authentic movement vocabulary. Amy L. Baylor quotes Carl Jung, who describes the phenomenon of intuition as “...the psychological function that explores the unknown and senses possibilities and indications which may not be readily apparent; it is a kind of instinctive apprehension.”<sup>10</sup> An intuitive experience is an unconscious act that unleashes new ideas of clarity and originality that surface to consciousness with immediacy. In this intuitive moment the mind does not have time to censor or deliberate upon the meaning of the unexpected idea. Finnish choreographer, Tero Saarinen, believes the creative process requires intuition. He comments that “[i]n the studio...sometimes pre-planned scenes and actions can take their own direction and something totally unexpected and exciting can happen.”<sup>11</sup> Working with this mindset allows for creative flexibility. In his process, Saarinen, Artistic Director of his own company, attests that his goal is to, “...enable all the creative collaborators to react through their intuition...[in a] secure mental and physical environment, [a] ‘safety net’, where one can feel safe to take risks and let the intuition talk.”<sup>12</sup>

For many choreographers, this uncensored approach is an intrinsic part of their creative practice. Wendy Perron, writer, choreographer, and a former member of the Trisha Brown Company, expresses her connection with intuition, cited by Louise

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<sup>10</sup> Amy L. Baylor, “A Three-Component Conception of Intuition: Immediacy, Sensing Relationships, and Reason,” *New Ideas in Psychology*, 15.2 (1997): 185.

<sup>11</sup> Tero Saarinen, E-mail interview, 27 July – 12 Aug. 2007

<sup>12</sup> Saarinen, E-mail interview

Steinman in *The Knowing Body*. She emphasizes the importance of listening to our intuitive selves to guide the development of a choreographic work by expressing how:

Dances are built on intuition: “Oh I think this goes here. Oh, how about doing this after that.” There is no rational way to explain these choices... I want very much to trust my own intuitions and follow them and not let rational thought get in their way.<sup>13</sup>

Intuition may provide an individual with the ability to sense or know something intensely without the interruption of rational thought. Psychotherapist Hans Welling believes humans have a primal sense or gut feeling that acts as an “important guiding principle for finding solutions... Intuition tells... [us] which directions are promising, where to search for a solution, and which avenues are dead ends.”<sup>14</sup> Intuitive sensing also supplies choreographers with implicit information about the conceptual or structural direction of their work, as well as insight into solutions to choreographic problems, and may indicate if something is lacking within the choreography. If choreographers are able to connect to, and trust their intuition to drive the work, the flow of thought and productivity occurs effortlessly in bursts of plain certainty.

How intuition arrives at consciousness, though, is a question that is difficult to address. The ineffable nature of intuition is its main characteristic. Individuals who come to a particular notion through intuitive processing often describe their experience as a mental visualization, or kinetic sense, that occurred unexpectedly. Sharon Moore, a renowned Toronto-based, Canadian choreographer, notes how she “...see[s] things in

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<sup>13</sup> Louise Steinman, *The Knowing Body: Elements of Contemporary Performance & Dance* (Boston: Shambhala, 1986) 70-71.

[her] aesthetic mind. They well up and are contributed to by all the energies and motion around [her].”<sup>15</sup> The nature of intuitive incidents is vague; however, the actual experience is quite powerful and strongly influences judgement and decision-making.

The aforementioned testaments of Saarinen, Perron, and Moore illustrate how intuition allows for spontaneity, is a subconscious guiding and decision-making tool, and imparts mental images of promising ideas, physical or conceptual connections, as well as potential structures in a choreographic work. Choreographing intuitively, however, requires self-trust. Self-trust, a product of self-confidence, is developed through experience and the practice of working in an uncensored manner with a non-judgmental mentality. Setting realistic and achievable goals further strengthens self-confidence. In time, and through practice, the application of explicit knowledge, as well as risk, and trial and error, spontaneous decision-making will occur more frequently.

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<sup>14</sup> Hans Welling, “The Intuitive Process: The Case of Psychotherapy,” Journal of Psychotherapy Integration, 15.1 (2005): 21.

<sup>15</sup> Sharon Moore, E-mail interview, 4-12 July 2007.

## THE FOOTPRINTS LEADING TO MY CHOREOGRAPHIC PROCESS

The year leading up to my own choreographic process—which began in the fall of 2006—served as the initial research for my choreographic undertaking. This preliminary year equipped me with choreographic tools and methods that I acquired from my experience studying and working with a diverse group of choreographers. During that time my professional development was focused on honing my artistic and technical skills as a performer while working in a contemporary dance company setting under the direction of four nationally and internationally acclaimed choreographers. The year was divided into four, six-week choreographic intensives, during which I was immersed in the individual creative processes of professional dance artists Sharon Moore, Wojciech Mochniej, Michèle Moss, and Davida Monk. Throughout my daily education, I was exposed to their individual philosophies of movement creation and methods through which they shaped their creative process. That year also provided me with insight into the alternate techniques choreographers use to direct dancers and communicate their ideas through movement, as well as introducing me to various improvisational structures that stimulate intuitive responsiveness. During this period I documented my experiences, observations, thoughts, and questions to assist me in my choreographic endeavour the following year.

One objective throughout my choreographic process was to discover and refine my own working method in order to support my creative intentions. In the development of my creative process and artistic voice, I was particularly influenced by three of the four choreographers with whom I worked in my inaugural year, Sharon Moore, Wojciech

Mochniej, and Davida Monk. The reason I was drawn to, and connected with, the creative processes of these artists was because their work and choreographic approach focused on the development of contemporary dance choreography. Moss' work, on the other hand, is rooted in jazz, African, and social dance, and her process focused on developing choreographic structures referencing these styles. My performing and choreographic experience is largely based in contemporary dance and, consequently, I drew more upon my experiences of working with Moore, Mochniej, and Monk throughout my choreographic process. In addition to these dance artists, the work and creative approach of Finnish contemporary choreographer Tero Saarinen has considerably influenced my aesthetic taste in dance. I have had the opportunity to see his choreography performed numerous times, as well as attending a workshop directed by Saarinen, all of which were experiences that greatly impacted my perspective on contemporary dance. The skills and devices gleaned from these performing artists served as a knowledge base from which I began my own work. The application of this practical knowledge led to discoveries of new ideas and new modes of working that inspired authentic movement vocabulary and choreographic themes.

### **SHARON MOORE**

Sharon Moore, an established choreographer who coaches both dancers and actors, directed the first six-week choreographic intensive. Her choreography is emotionally driven, based around concepts of conflict and resolve, release from aberration toward spiritual freedom, and emotional narrative that she defines as an emotional journey in which someone has high stakes and must confront and conquer



barriers.<sup>16</sup> For Moore, the creative process is ever evolving, with undiscovered paths to explore that she characterizes to be:

...A road along which one travels to create what will exist in the future. As an artist during this runway you rearrange what you know. You call on your spirituality, your mental energy and use the physical universe around you. These are all raw materials with which you build an illusion-in-essence creating future, putting something into the future. Every moment in life is a creative process.<sup>17</sup>

During Moore's six-week intensive, the focus was geared towards character building, physical connectivity, and emotional commitment, which were explored through improvisational structures and repertoire. The result of this period was the creation of a twenty-two minute piece entitled *Grand Land*.

Ms. Moore had an intuitive approach throughout the development of *Grand Land*. In her choreographic process, Moore reacted instinctually and spontaneously when she made choreographic decisions and generated movement vocabulary. During the first three weeks of her process, we learned all of the choreographic material. At the stage when Moore structured the piece, she had an abundance of movement vocabulary from which to choose, and in a similarly uncensored, fluid manner to that with which she generated this material, Moore selected and organized specific phrases into a choreographic structure.

To assist the dancers in their interpretation of her choreography, Moore would demonstrate her movement full out and in real time so as to clearly present the qualities

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<sup>16</sup> Moore, E-mail interview

<sup>17</sup> Moore, E-mail interview

and rhythms of, as well as the physical and emotional intentions behind, the movement. If a dancer still had difficulties sensing the essence of her movement, Ms. Moore would ask the dancer to place her hands on her body as she executed the step; this method directly informed the student of the movement's rhythmic sensibilities and the place in the body the impulse of the movement initiated.

In my own process, this directing tool was particularly useful. When I would demonstrate the movement and connect with the dancers physically, they had the opportunity to experience the movement both visually and kinaesthetically. I would also exchange roles with the dancers in an attempt to gain a sense of how they were approaching the vocabulary. In duet work, if a movement problem arose that broke the flow and connection of a physical phrase, I would often ask the dancers to exchange roles and demonstrate to their partner what they had been sensing from them. This technique allowed the dance artists to determine a solution to the physical problem that had impeded the flow of the phrase. The practice of problem finding and problem solving encouraged the dancers to actively engage in the creative process, and also established an individual sense of contribution, ownership, and responsibility towards the choreography.

Throughout Moore's intensive, she implemented many improvisational exercises that stimulated intuitive responsiveness and focused on physical and emotional intention, as well as personal subtext. For example, in one exercise, the dancers were organized in a circle. One by one, each dancer had to jump into the inner space and take the first shape that came to her body and mind. Holding this position, the dancers forming the circle would respond immediately to what character they saw presented by the embodied form of the dancer in the middle of the circle. The objective of the dancers in both roles was to

permit a freedom of the mind, and to act and respond from a gut feeling. Following an intuitive impulse stimulated ideas of originality and clarity, opening up a plethora of physical and imaginative possibilities.

Another exercise Moore frequently employed was called Story Telling. Organized in a circle, the dancers' goal was to attempt to create a sensible story that had a beginning, middle and end, one or two characters, a conflict and resolution, and lastly, a conclusion. The story commenced with one dancer saying a word and the others each adding a word in turn until the story reached its conclusion. Akin to the previous exercise, Story Telling required the participants to respond intuitively. In order to maintain a flow to the story, this exercise also involved rational processing to sustain an awareness of what was being said, and logically fathom where the story might go. This exercise is an example of how the balance of rational thought and intuitive processing allows for a guided and organized execution of innovative and elaborate ideas.

These two exercises were effective ways to stimulate awareness and heighten intuitive response. In rehearsals and performance, an acute awareness and intuition is beneficial to create safe, dynamic, and vibrant interactions. Most importantly, if a dancer is alert and able to respond with intuitive spontaneity they are more prepared to react appropriately in unexpected situations that may occur onstage.

In order to encourage the dance artists to gain an understanding of emotional and physical intentions, Ms. Moore employed an improvisation that she called, "I Blank You". This exercise involved the vocalization and physical implementation of different action verbs, and was carried out in pairs in a waltz-like stance that began with dancer A as the leader and dancer B as the follower. Dancer A would say the phrase, "I Blank

You” aloud, but instead of “Blank” she would insert an action verb of her choosing. As dancer A recited the phrase, she would do so in a vocal tone that emotionally or qualitatively represented the verb, while at the same time physically performing the action to her partner. In response, dancer B would physically react, and respond verbally with the action verb in the past tense. For example, take the action verb *pull*. Dancer A might say the phrase “I pull you”, and emphasize the sound of the double L, pulling her partner across the room. Dancer B would respond “I am pulled”, perhaps in a similar intonation, following her partner across the floor. Many action verbs, such as pull, thrust, twist, stretch, slide and fall, were explored, as well as verbs with an emotional context, such as love, adore, despise, deify, and worship. Each partnership would alternate between who was directing and who was following. The exercise integrated other elements, which included changes of tempo, levels in space, and quality. This exercise inspired us to re-examine each relationship and movement in the work, and discern the different physical and emotional intentions.

Exploring subtext through improvisation was another effective way employed by Moore to encourage the dancers to create meaning or a story to inform their movement. In one exercise in particular, which required the dancers to be in pairs, Ms. Moore would whisper to each dancer an intention and emotional quality that they had to communicate to her partner through movement and gibberish. The purpose of this exercise was to demonstrate that commitment to emotional and physical intention, even in an unconventional mode of communication, could speak profoundly to an outside observer in an authentic and genuine way. If dance interpreters create for themselves a story, personal subtext, or a purpose behind their role in the choreography, not only do they

embody the movement with more authenticity, they facilitate developing shape and complexity in the choreographic work.

### **WOJCIECH MOCHNIEJ**

The second six-week choreographic intensive was directed by Wojciech Mochniej. Originally from Poland, Mr. Mochniej is an international choreographer, performer, teacher and Co-Artistic director of W&M Physical Theatre, based in Calgary, Alberta. His choreographic style is rooted in realism that fuses contemporary dance with Polish physical theatre. Mochniej's work is highly textured with images and metaphors that allude to social and political issues, and everyday life. His movement vocabulary displays a strong sense of three-dimensionality that explores oppositional pulls in the body, spirals, swing, suspension and release, and suggests a strong sense of weight and physical connection with the space.

The outcome of Mr. Mochniej's six-week choreographic process was a forty-minute piece entitled *Porcelain Thoughts*. Underlying the process of this work was a focus on character building, as well as establishing an authentic embodiment and representation of each character. Throughout his process, Mochniej had a refined awareness of, and keen insight into the development of movement, spatial relationships, and the conceptual as well as structural direction of his work. Mochniej's ability to develop movement and to structure *Porcelain Thoughts* was similar to Moore's, in that it appeared to occur in an uncensored, effortless, and efficient manner.

In the first half of his process, Mochniej created many movement phrases based on the concepts that he was exploring. Once he had created these movement sequences he would re-examine them, and then manipulate their structure by inserting new movement,

shuffling around the order of movement, and developing the material. As a result of his swift approach in the first half of the process, Mochniej had time to revisit and edit certain ideas, re-shape choreographic structures, and work with the interpretive dance artists to layer images, energetic and emotional intentions, as well as personal narrative into the work.

During the development of *Porcelain Thoughts*, Mochniej encouraged the dancers to create a personal story in relationship to the piece in order to enrich and identify with the visual world he was creating by imagining colours, textures, and sounds in the spatial environment. One task undertaken was to chronicle the emotional and thematic development of our individual character. Mochniej proposed questions to address our purpose within the context of the piece and between each other. Such questions included: How did you arrive in this particular environment? Where are you going next? What emotions arose in response to the movement? What are your emotional and energetic intentions behind the movement and in connection with one another? Being compelled to consider these questions and discover my own answers helped me to identify with the concepts of the work, and build a personal connection to the choreography. The process of taking responsibility for my involvement in the work inspired an honest interpretation of the choreography.

Within his choreographic framework, Mr. Mochniej provided the dancers with a sketch of his conceptual objective, as well as some energetic and emotional qualities; however, Mochniej encouraged the interpreters to adapt his suggested qualities to their individual situations in a way that made purposeful sense to them. The role of the dance

artist was to create a personal story and discover specific intentions based on Mochniej's ideas.

One task Mochniej employed to assist the dance artists in creating their individual story involved solo, duet, or group work in which the dancers were required to travel from one part of the stage to another. Mochniej would supply the interpreters with information about their emotional intention and the purpose behind the travelling improvisation. It was then up to the individual to discover their physical pathway and particular movements based on his information. This technique held the dancers accountable for their role in the improvisation, by insisting on clarity of intention to support their movement choices. It also encouraged the dancers to consider how their character related to the specific section.

In my own work, *The Dreamer*, there were three sections in which I used this improvisational technique. Each section involved one dancer and two props, which were small white boxes. The dancer's task, during the rehearsal process, was to move the boxes to different parts of the stage, travelling clockwise. I guided the improvisation with some cues; for example, specific places to stop moving the boxes, different ways to move the boxes, and playing with varying energetic intentions while shifting the boxes. Throughout the rehearsals, the dance artist began to shape her pathway and actions. I would define such particular aspects of the improvisational phrase as focus, tempo, and physical stances. The main goal for the dancer throughout the improvisation was to find her own meaning behind her actions so that it created an authentic performance. The implementation of Mochniej's improvisational technique proved to be very useful.

Applied in rehearsal and carried through to performance, this technique kept the performance alive, and allowed for unexpected and exciting things to happen.

Mochniej's process also prompted me to assess the character development of the dance artists in *The Dreamer*. I encouraged the dancers to develop their own stories; I also set movement tasks within the work to assist them in self-identification and to build a connection with each other. I became aware of the importance for both the choreographer and dance artists, of questioning the meaning and relevance of each physical idea within the work, and its relationship within the context of the piece.

### **DAVIDA MONK**

The final six-week intensive of my first year was directed by Professor Davida Monk, Artistic Director of the Calgary contemporary dance company, M-body. Ms. Monk is a renowned Canadian choreographer, a performing artist, and is an Associate Professor of Dance at the University of Calgary.

Professor Monk acted as a choreographic mentor who guided the student dancers through their own choreographic process to the final production of individual twelve-minute solos. As our mentor, Ms. Monk provided us with the necessary choreographic devices to develop movement ideas, establish phrasing, and structure a piece, as well as introducing us to musical analysis, and assisting us with lighting decisions. Throughout Ms. Monk's choreographic intensive, we had the opportunity to hone our choreographic perspective by observing the work of our peers, and strengthen our directing skills by working on choreographic exercises in pairs. I recorded the stages of my creative process, noting personal discoveries, movement ideas, and my observations in response to feedback from Ms. Monk.



Professor Monk's six-week session began with each dance artist creating a one-minute phrase. This phrase was presented to the class, who then generated a list of the most prominent movement characteristics in the solo. Drawing from this list, each dancer was required to extract three or four movement ideas. The selected ideas served as the base components that were subsequently explored and developed, creating a twelve-minute solo.

In order to develop material from our specific movement ideas, Ms. Monk introduced the concept of limitations. Our use of limitations involved setting boundaries thereby defining a movement idea by specific characteristics. The goal behind setting these boundaries was the deep investigation of the movement idea. When exploring the movement idea of arms swinging alongside the body, I would limit myself to the investigation of swinging. Without leaving the essential idea, I could vary the motif of the actions while staying true to the essence of the movement. I could develop this action in a number of ways: altering the speed of the limbs moving; defining whether the movement creates momentum to travel the body through space; determining from which joint in the arm the swing occurs; or mimicking the action with another body part. To gain an understanding of how to work from limitations, we first practiced in partners, directing each other through the investigation. This practice required the student director to immediately access and reinforce her understanding of the components of time, space, and energy as forces acting on movement development. We were then able to apply this knowledge to our individual creative process. The methods to vary the motif of a single movement idea can be as diverse and abundant as the imagination will allow. Working

within limitations affords the improviser the opportunity to dig deeply into one idea in order to open up an assortment of physical possibilities based on a single theme.

Professor Monk also encouraged us draw upon other sources of inspiration to guide improvisations and to stimulate the imagination. During the intensive, Ms. Monk brought to rehearsal a variety of literature, including poetry and prose, as well as some books with work from various visual artists. We collectively discussed the use of colour, line, negative space, and shape in different images of artwork. In partners, we selected an image from which to draw inspiration, using it as a source to guide a movement investigation. One partner would direct the other based on the image in regard to its form, emotional intention, colour, shape, space, line, and flow. We carried out a similar exercise in response to literature. Specific vocabulary, images, and rhythm of written phrasing would be described and used as tools to inform the director about how to guide her partner.

The process of developing movement ideas instilled in me a sense of discipline that is essential in the choreographic process. At times, I was impeded from progressing forward in a movement investigation as a result of self-criticism. Ms. Monk advised me that in moments of inhibition one way to stay connected to the exploration was to repeat the movement idea continuously in order to push past frustration, and eventually something new would emerge. Monk also emphasized the importance of not holding back in a physical exploration, and remembering that a part of the process is to generate a large quantity of movement material without judgment, with the understanding that it might not all be used in the final creation.

In the stage of defining developed movement phrases, Professor Monk required that we be specific, spatially and intentionally, in all our actions, and have a reason behind our movement choices. We analysed why a particular decision was made, where the departure and arrival points of the phrase occurred, the transitions between movement ideas, as well as the intention behind the movement. Ms. Monk had us examine the use of time, contrast, repetition, and quick changes in the phrasing. Throughout the development of our solos, Ms. Monk emphasised that commitment to the exploration process and embodiment of movement will organically reveal aspects, such as character, narrative, or emotional intent, without compromising the authenticity of the movement.

Upon entering my own choreographic process in the fall of 2006, my experience working with Professor Monk provided me with techniques to develop movement, and an understanding about how the components of time, space, and energy play a role in the movement phrasing as well as the trajectory of the choreographic work. The choreographic skills I acquired during this time provided a motivation and a structure from which work, and served as a foundation to fall back upon if I was inhibited in my own explorations. This process made me aware that through in-depth investigation of a few movement ideas the development of authentic choreography can be achieved and will create a common thread throughout the choreographic work.

### **TERO SAARINEN**

Outside the sphere of my university education, I have been drawn to the work of Tero Saarinen, Artistic Director of the Tero Saarinen Company for the past six years. Mr. Saarinen began his career as a dancer in the Finnish National ballet in 1985, where he gained acclaim as a soloist. Leaving the company in 1992, he sought out new influences

to expand his artistic realm, including contemporary dance from Western Europe, and Japanese traditional dance and Butoh which he studied in Japan.<sup>18</sup> As a result of his eclectic background of dance styles and his individualistic character, Saarinen possesses a unique kinaesthetic signature which is reflected in his works of whimsical quality that touch on the grotesque paired with thoughtful beauty.

There is fullness to Saarinen's movement vocabulary that emphasizes the use of space and weight, connection to the floor, and sending energy out the five points of the body from its core. In an email interview, Saarinen comments that:

Technically speaking I pay a lot of attention in to the feet, fingers, eyes and skin [and believe that], when a dancer is aware of all the endings of his/her nerves he/she becomes authentic, alive, and is more versatile. All this leads into a dance that is constantly alive and surprising like our flora and fauna.<sup>19</sup>

The physical sensitivity, mental alertness, and spatial awareness of Saarinen and the dancers in his company provide an individual observing his work with a sensory and visceral experience. In his company technique classes, Saarinen notes that he "encourage[s] [his] dancers to be alert, aware and awake to all of the endless possibilities that lie in their own physical existence."<sup>20</sup> Perhaps the performing artists' active presence in his choreography, as well as the way Mr. Saarinen conveys his choreographic intention and imagination to his company members, might also impact and heighten an individual's experience with his work.

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<sup>18</sup> Saarinen, Tero. Tero Saarinen Company 15 Aug. 2007 <<http://www.terosaarinen.com/english/>>

<sup>19</sup> Saarinen, E-mail interview

<sup>20</sup> Saarinen, E-mail interview

In 2004, I had the opportunity to attend a workshop held by Tero Saarinen in Paris, France, during which I experienced his approach to embodying movement. Throughout this intensive, Saarinen stressed the importance of taking up space, and often encouraged the dance artists to have greedy hands and greedy feet, take up all the space with their palms and fingers, spread their toes into the floor, and to taste the space.<sup>21</sup> This workshop was an enlightening experience as it instilled in me the importance of having an active imagination and a refined sensory awareness. I gained an understanding of how the movements in space that are supported with physical intention have the ability to communicate profoundly and produce an honest interpretation.

In my own process, I encouraged the dance artists to have an active imagination and to think of the space as though it had colour and texture. Directing in this fashion, I wanted the dancers to be responsive to their senses while moving, allowing a sensory and whole body experience in the work.

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<sup>21</sup> Tero Saarinen, Dance Workshop. Carolyn Carlson Atelier de Paris, France. 10-13 Sept. 2004.

## THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE DREAMER

The creation of my thirty two-minute choreographic work, *The Dreamer*, a duet between two female dancers, Jennifer Jaspar and Kalyn Swihart, was the outcome of a seven-month creative process that began in the fall of 2006. As part of my thesis project, I elected to present this piece in the HiFi Club, a small nightclub in downtown Calgary, in addition to the University of Calgary Theatre. The performance at the HiFi Club was presented eleven days prior to the two showings at the University Theatre which were held on the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> of April, 2007.

The development of *The Dreamer* stemmed from a preliminary desire to create an interdisciplinary choreographic work which fused live dance and new technology, to explore the subject of intimacy, and to present that work in two performance settings. I believe that intimacy is an area of significance in all of our lives, and I thought that addressing the topic of intimacy in the work could establish and enhance a connection between the viewer and the performance. My interest in the subject of intimacy provided inspiration that influenced my movement vocabulary, the conception of what would be the screen-dance, and the overall mood of the performance spaces. These three facets of the piece allowed me to explore the different ways that intimacy could be portrayed. From this base of inspiration, new ideas and images began to emerge which shaped and had an impact on the choreographic and conceptual direction of the work. By the end of the seven months, these elements amalgamated to reveal a final project that explores the relationship between the waking and dream self of an individual.

One constant consideration throughout the development of my work was to sharpen the edge of my intuition so that I would be able to draw upon it more readily

within the process. At times, there were glimmering moments of clarity revealed in decisions made from intuitive inclinations. However, perhaps because of limited choreographic experience and an immature artistic voice, there were some instances, most notably during the first half of the process, where self-doubt shrouded these intuitive, choreographic impulses. To overcome the artistic constraints of this self-doubt, I was compelled to broaden my conceptual and practical limitations, and replace “rejection” with “acceptance” of all the movement possibilities that arose. By not censoring movement ideas generated in physical explorations, I was able to create a large pool of potentially useful material. This approach requires conscious effort to avoid rejecting movement ideas and to push past moments of self-criticism. By adhering to this mode of working and encouraging the same attitude in the interpretive dance artists, I strengthened individual and collective trust, which created a working environment that stimulated intuitive response.

Throughout the process, video documentation was used to mark the progress of the work, and to capture movement spontaneously generated by the interpretive dance artists in directed improvisational explorations. These documentations were an invaluable tool when it came time to edit material, define, and refine movement phrases. By providing a permanent visual account, the video footage permitted me to re-examine set movement and improvised material numerous times over, allowing me to identify significant moments and movement ideas. The features of speed manipulation in video playback also assisted in reviewing material. It provided an alternate perspective for me to observe rhythmic patterns and spatial relationships between the two dancers. Working with the video sharpened my perception, which made me more aware of specific and

finer details within the choreography, such as the performer's focus, physical intention, and placement of the body in space. Lastly, the video footage of the completed work served as the template to shape and set the musical score.

The steps taken to achieve the creation of my final choreographic work reference the five-phase creative cycle outlined by Peter Abbs: Phase 1: Impulse to Create; Phase 2: Work and Exploration within the Medium; Phase 3: Realization of the Final Form; Phase 4: The Presentation of the Work; and Phase 5: Feedback and Evaluation. In my process, however, I did not follow the phases in a linear sequence. In my adaptation of Abb's creative cycle there was a certain amount of editing, refining and re-examining movement that obliged me to re-visit phases 2 and 3 more than once. In addition, phases 4 and 5 were implemented periodically throughout the process in order to receive artistic and critical feedback. This feedback frequently served as useful information that encouraged me to revisit the exploration and structuring process.

### **PHASE 1: Impulse to Create**

At the beginning of my process in September of 2006, the concept of the relationship between the waking and dream self of an individual was not established. In addition, although the subject of intimacy was my primary topic of interest, I was not motivated to begin my process with movement explorations around this subject. My impulse to create emerged from a single mental picture, inspired by an unknown source. I was stimulated by a distant image of a woman sitting at the end of a dock with her back to the viewer, but turned enough to make her profile and legs visible. She is swinging her legs over the water in an irregular rhythm. As this uneven and subconscious action subsides, her attention focuses on the water; she moves her hair to one side revealing the



nape of her neck and she eases with a controlled movement tentatively off the dock. This vision surfaced to my consciousness with no preconceived planning, yet its tangible presence was a compelling motivation from which to begin to work.

Before I began rehearsing with Jennifer Jaspar and Kalyn Swihart, I worked in the studio alone with this single idea. I embodied the mental image by positioning myself on a high table and carrying out the actions of the woman just as I had envisioned them. From this experience, I selected four significant, intimate characteristics that included the leg swinging, revealing the nape of the neck, careful dismount, and the tactile placement of the feet onto an unknown surface. I then compiled some questions surrounding each of these images to act as guiding tools for one of the two dancers, Ms. Jaspar. The questions included: Why are you here? Imagine the texture of the surface you step onto; is it warm, wet, rough, smooth, deep, or sticky? Where are you going? Are you somewhere unfamiliar? What is the temperature of the air? What time of day is it? What do you see around you? Are you alone? Do you sense anyone or anything around you? These questions were utilized as a means to jump-start the dancer's imagination and prompt her to discover her own personal story. When I began rehearsing with Jennifer, I described the image to her, and set the inspired situation as an improvisation. The four main characteristics of the depicted situation were to provide Jennifer with a structure within which she could explore her own timing, qualities, and intentions. The dance artist's objective was to embody and interpret the image as described, and develop her own experience through intuitive impulses. After a few rehearsals of improvisation based on the image, the exploration was put to the side. Although this intuitive inspiration was the impetus to begin the work, it was present only for a short time during the start of the

process. The image of the leg swinging did not return until the second half of the choreographic process between the months of January and April 2007. During this time, when the choreography began to take shape, the image was reintroduced. The choreographic structure of the work needed to be somewhat established before the inclusion of the leg swinging phrase could have a purpose, and in order for the performer's interpretation of the image to feel sincere.

### **PHASE 2: Work and Exploration within the Medium**

The exploration process was a period of creative play that involved an assortment of improvisational structures designed to generate and develop movement material, as well as to establish a relationship between the two dance artists in the choreographic work. Some of these movement investigations were predicated upon exercises gleaned from my experiences working with the choreographers in my first year, which I then adapted to my own working method. Others, I based on the subject of intimacy or shaped according to the focus of the particular rehearsal. In many instances, the explorations were a course of trial and error. Working in this manner proved to be rewarding because it frequently led to choreographic discoveries that would then branch into unexplored avenues.

The use of improvisation in this process was an effective way to resource an inner and intuitive place in the body from which to create original movement. Improvisation is a sensory experience that stimulates spontaneity, might allow for a freedom of the mind, and requires the body and mind to be present in the moment. In *Body Space Image: Notes Towards Improvisation and Performance*, Miranda Tunfell and Chris Crickmay characterize the practice of improvisation as a research tool in physical explorations that

“provides us with a means to excavating layers of experience, sensation, character, and feeling that we normally rush through or suppress – to travel deeper and deeper into an ever enlarging and changing moment”.<sup>22</sup> Through improvisation, we not only discover and develop unique movement but we also heighten an internal and external awareness, as well as embed aspects of personal quality, emotion, and experience into our movement.

In my personal rehearsal sessions and rehearsals with the dance artists, I employed specific improvisational exercises to generate movement vocabulary, stimulate intuition, and develop movement ideas. These improvisational structures were: the Recall Exercise; Movement in Response to Music; Two People in Space; Trust and Sensitivity; and the Accumulation Exercise.

### **IMPROVISATIONAL STRUCTURES:**

1. The Recall Exercise was based on an improvisation developed by Melissa Monteros, Co-Artistic Director of W&M Physical Theatre. It involved a process in which I walked around the room implementing changes of direction, and changes of tempo. The walking would cease intermittingly at which point I would move in response to my first impulse and carry out the movement until it arrived at its energetic end. Following this, I would recall the phrase in an attempt to recapture its true essence and movement shapes. This would be repeated until the physical pathways and energetic intentions were solidified in my body. Varying the tempo and the body’s direction in space during the

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<sup>22</sup> Miranda Tufnell and Chris Crickmay, Body Space Image: Notes Towards Improvisation and Performance, (London: Viagro Press LTD. 1990) 46.

walking section was useful as it affected the place in my body where the physical impetus initiated, and how it was qualitatively expressed. The purpose of this improvisation in my creative process was to move spontaneously with an uncensored, intuitive approach. However, if I began repeating energetic pathways and moving from habitual places in the body, I would make conscious decisions to move against my initial impulse in order to affect the movement's rhythm and quality. Although a large quantity of material was accumulated from this exercise, it was not all used in the final work. This process was primarily an exercise to produce movement efficiently without excessive thought, respond to my intuition, and sharpen my awareness in the present moment. The Recall Exercise was also employed as a recording tool in other improvisations that were not video documented; in these explorations the dance artists could use the Recall Exercise to recapture exciting movements that were spontaneously created.

2. Movement in Response to Music was another influential tool in the development of my movement vocabulary. Tango music was the main musical source from which I worked. The passionate intensity of the Tango presents itself in a diversity of tempos and sensibilities. Improvising in response to this genre of music connected me with my intuitive self, and stimulated the creation of innate movement that artistically reflected qualities and characteristics of my personality. The tempo of the music complemented and emphasized my own rhythmic tendencies. In my physical vocabulary there is a play between sustained fluid action and sudden, clear changes of direction, position, and focus. The tango music that I used in the rehearsal process enabled me to exaggerate and define these rhythmic qualities. The sensory stimulation of this music also helped me to move non-analytically, producing new movement options and directions.

During these explorations, characteristics of my movement vocabulary began to emerge, some of which were spirals of the body; unfolding arms, wrists and fingers; oppositional pulls in the body; sudden knee and elbow-buckles; moving diagonally in space; body parts moving body parts; shifts of focus; and arms opening and closing around the body with straight legs.

3. Two People in Space was an improvisation that was based on a specific movement idea chosen by one dancer. The exploration began with Kalyn Swihart entering the space carrying out a movement idea. In order to develop this idea she would investigate the physical action through repetition, making the action large or small, or emulating it with other body parts. As Kalyn improvised, Jennifer would enter the space responding to the movement idea at hand. The improvisers would work in a symbiotic relationship, sometimes meeting in the space in close contact, or other times moving apart. Their objective was to maintain a relationship between one another spatially and thematically, and to stay aware of how the movement idea was evolving and linking to new ideas. Both the dancers and I carried out this exercise. We would exchange roles, keeping a balance of two people in the space improvising, with one person observing and the video documenting the improvisation. The observer would occasionally direct the improvisers if their focus started to drift and they seemed to stall in the development of the movement idea. Following the exercise, I would watch the video footage and mark moments that stood out to me, which I would then re-set on the dancers, who would interpret the selected video footage by trying to recapture the energetic and qualitative intentions of the movement. The extracted phrases were further developed and shaped later in the choreographic process.

4. Trust and Sensitivity was an improvisation that focused on mutual trust and sensory awareness. The improvisation commenced with Kalyn standing with her eyes closed. Jennifer would stand behind her and place one hand with even pressure between Kalyn's shoulder blades, and the other hand on her sternum. Jennifer would then lead Kalyn around the room moving forwards, backwards, and to the side, cueing her with her hands by applying pressure either with the back hand to move forward, the front hand to move backwards, equal pressure to stop, or equal pressure pulling to the right or left in order to move sideways. It was necessary that Jennifer apply a confident touch to communicate clearly the direction changes so that Kalyn could surrender to the movement and listen with her body. This exercise was the first part of the improvisation. After each dancer exchanged roles, they would begin again, but this time the dancer who was directing could apply pressure from different parts of her body to various parts of her partner's body, manipulating its form in alternate ways. For example, if the director wanted to move her partner's knee, she applied pressure with her own knee to the back of her partner's. In this version of the exercise, simple and clear cues were essential in order for the dancer with her eyes closed to understand and respond to what was being communicated. As the pair developed a comfort level with one another, the improvisation evolved in complexity of movements and directions, creating improvised duets that served as material for the choreographic work.

Implementing this improvisation at the beginning of the process was an effective way to place the two artists, who did not know each other, into an intimate situation, forging mutual trust and comfort. The technique also permitted each dancer to experience

two different roles, one that was dominant and assertive, and the other which was vulnerable and more passive.

5. The Accumulation Exercise began as an exploration of touch and gesture through a series of actions and responses, employing two small, white wooden boxes, which were later used as props in the final work. The boxes were placed side by side with a dancer sitting on each. While sitting on the boxes, the dancers could shift their direction or position, but had to maintain a physical connection with one another and the boxes.

The exploration commenced with one dancer initiating an action either by pushing, pulling, leaning, or turning her partner. In response, the partner receiving this action would execute the next movement. Their goal was to carry out the exploration in a practical and functional way, similar to that which occurs in everyday life. I provided the dance artists with the image of sitting on a bench at a train station where they had been waiting for a long time. This image resulted in a casual and intimate quality in their movements. In this improvisation, the Recall Exercise was extremely useful. The dancers might execute four or five movements that felt honest, then stop and recall what they had done. Over several rehearsals, the accumulation exercise evolved into the *Box Duet* which ultimately became a significant component of *The Dreamer*.

### **PHASE 3: Realization of the Final Form**

The first half of my creative process, lasting from September to December of 2007, which involved Phase 1: Impulse to Create and Phase 2: Work and Exploration within the Medium, provided me with an abundance of movement vocabulary that I later developed into choreographic phrases. In the second half of my creative process, this

material served as a base from which to form and develop the structure of my choreographic work.

The second half of the creative process, beginning in January and continuing until April of 2007, was the start of phase 3: Realization of the Final Form, and was geared towards shaping and establishing the final choreographic structure, as well as the concept of *The Dreamer*. In order to achieve this, I was required to shift periodically between phase 3 and phase 2. During the period between January and March, I reviewed and developed phrases created between September and December, generated new material, and formed choreographic structures. In addition, this period included an independent study with Dr. Jean-Rene Leblanc, professor of digital arts at the University of Calgary. Throughout this independent study, I researched video-creation, editing, and production, in order to create a screen-dance as a supplementary component to my choreographic piece. This research consequently served as knowledge that directly influenced both phases 3 and 2 of my choreographic process. Once the choreographic piece began to take shape, I had to consider musical support that would best represent the mood and visual world of the piece, as well as the changes I would make so that the work would be presented to its best advantage in both the HiFi Club and the University of Calgary Theatre.

In order to develop the collection of phrases created in the fall, I examined each, and explored various manipulation techniques, such as layering different qualities on the phrase, changing its tempo, restructuring the order of its movements, and placing the phrase in different spatial contexts. One phrase we revisited was called the *Standing Box Duet*, which initially evolved out of an advanced version of the trust and sensitivity



improvisation, and was further developed by manipulating movement vocabulary from the seated *Box Duet*. In the seated *Box Duet*, the actions of pushing and pulling, as well as coming together and moving apart, suggested that the two dancers were aware of one another and reacted consciously in response to each other. In the standing version, these same actions suggested an alternate reading of the relationship. Ms. Jaspas actively initiated contact with Ms. Swihart, who appeared not to know by whom she was being touched, but to be conscious only of a presence in her space. The new material generated in the *Standing Box Duet* started to reveal, not so much a story, but emotions and aspects of a relationship, including impatience, intensity, curiosity, resistance, insistence, and tension, as well as conjuring up ideas of control, searching, remembering, and self-recognition. These aspects became information that prompted further movement investigations. In *The Dreamer*, the ideas of searching, recollection, and self-recognition became core themes within the work.

As the process progressed, I would frequently examine the video footage of the developing material, seeking connections between movement ideas, and dominant characteristics and qualities. Once I had established what the predominant characteristics of my movement vocabulary were, I looked at the different methods through which the ideas could be developed and become interrelated. I broke down each particular movement and determined its point of initiation and inherent qualities. For example, one movement gesture involved the fingers wrapping and clasping around different parts of the body. To develop this action, the dancers and I played with the number of finger articulations being executed, performed the opposite action of the gesture, layered various qualities and tempos onto the movement, and mimicked the action with other

body parts. These explorations produced new movement that was a development or variation of a particular theme, which consequently linked movement ideas. To augment this process, I directed the dance artists to exaggerate the specific gestures and movement characteristics in the choreography. Physically embodying the movement to its fullest energetic and qualitative capacity stimulated the dance artists to associate emotionally with the movement ideas.

An additional tool that assisted in the development, clarification, and creation of my movement was my research and practice in video production. I researched video production in order to explore how video technology could offer another dimension to the live performance. In the final presentation of my piece, the screen-dance and projected images introduced the audience to the concept of my choreographic work and the performers, enriching the whole experience. Video, by its mediated nature, has the ability to emphasize intimacy and distance. With such useful contradictions embedded within the technology, I concluded that video could be used as a powerful tool to invite the audience to participate more intimately with the live presentation. Marrying this media to live performance allows the viewer to experience a closer relationship with the work. By virtue of the fact that the video camera has the capacity to isolate, focus on, and expand an object or its components when it is used in conjunction with dance, the choreographer can direct the observer's focus intently toward specific details that might otherwise be missed in the live presentation. The dance video in *The Dreamer* focused on particular movement vocabulary, gestures, and body parts that were emphasized later in the live presentation.

As a prelude to the piece, the video acted as a subliminal preparation for the live performance to follow. The mediated excerpts were employed to command the viewers' interest by stimulating their expectations of what was to come, and raising their aesthetic and intellectual curiosity. Often, it can take more than one viewing of a dance work to build a connection and formulate an interpretation. Considering the ephemeral nature of a live dance performance, the video and still images provided the audience with a context and a concrete reference with which to recognize scenes in the piece and facilitate individual interpretations. Furthermore, the fact that video is a medium that is recognizable by, and integrated into the lives of most North Americans, the implementation of it in *The Dreamer* attempted to bridge the viewers' understanding of a two-dimensional moving body image to that of a live, three-dimensional moving body in space.

During my video creation process, the knowledge I gained of editing and change of perspective began to influence how I perceived my choreographic process. Editing techniques, such as speed manipulation, alternate viewpoints, and various filters, including blurring effects and colour distortion, were devices that offered innovative ways of looking at how movement can be expressed, and how different angles of the body suggest various sensibilities and moods. After experimenting with these effects in the video editing process, I applied some of them to the rehearsal process with the dancers. The manipulation of speed seemed to provide the most immediate results. The dance artists explored moving in: retrograde; accelerated speed; slow motion; as well as inserting stillness within the phrases. Each of these effects could be applied to the entire phrase or just one movement. Not only did the manipulation of speed affect the rhythm of

the movement but it also shifted its quality. One particular place in the screen-dance and live presentation, which utilized this tool, was in the box moving sections. The accelerated speed of the moving box presented a sense of desperation and frustration in the dancer. As the intensity of the moving increased so did the rate and volume of the dancer's breathing, adding to the sensation of despair. At certain points, the performer would contrast her frantic pace with stillness. This would create a moment of reflection and emphasized the intensity of the previous movement.

The video techniques and editing skills acquired from my video research influenced my perspective towards structuring movement and the spatial relationships of the performers, as well as the props on stage. I began to envision how positioning the body in different directions and presenting changes of angle could communicate various meanings and qualities to the audience, as well as influence the relationship between the two performing artists. It also prompted me to address the relevance of the two props in the piece.

Up until the second half of the process, the props only represented something to sit on. To find an alternate purpose and meaning behind the use of the boxes, I considered a variety of ways in which they could be employed through physical improvisations. One exercise examined how both dancers could move around one another in any position other than sitting, while staying connected to a single box. The improvisation progressed to the point where each dancer's objective was to try and create different methods of pushing the other dancer off and command the whole space of the box. Another exercise explored separating the props and bringing them together in various locations of the space.

During one of these improvisations, Jennifer, the dancer with whom I worked at the beginning of the process with my intuitive inspiration of the woman on a dock, spontaneously placed one box on top of the other and perched herself atop. Intuitively, I directed her to carry out the improvisational phrase of the woman sitting on the dock, which began with leg swinging. Although this improvisation had been disregarded at one time, my decision to incorporate it back into the work revealed to me that my intuition was beginning to play a stronger role in the process. The leg swinging phrase was developed and became an important part of the choreographic work, but because the two boxes atop of one another did not provide a sturdy base, a small table was used as an alternative.

Aside from the *Box Duet* in the choreography, Ms. Swihart had the main interaction with the props, consisting of shifting and placing the boxes in different parts of the room. Swihart's challenge in these improvisations was to find an authentic connection with the props. To assist her in discovering meaning and reason behind moving the boxes, I set specific tasks inspired by written accounts of the thoughts she had before falling asleep. These thoughts involved reviewing the events of her day and thinking of ways in which she could have done things differently, stimulating the idea of shifting and rearranging the props. The dance artist's objective when moving the props was to carry out the task in a functional and practical way. Swihart would repeat the process of creating and seeing a functional problem with the position of the boxes and then find a solution. For example, one box might be in front of the other obstructing her view of the hidden box. To solve this problem, she would shift a box either left or right. If she felt that the boxes were too close to each other, she would need to create a distance

between them, and if it was not far enough, she would move it again until it was in the right position. Working from material that was significant and real to the artist helped her to find an honest relationship with the props.

Throughout all of the movement explorations, and as the dancer artists interpreted the movement, I directed them to keep an open imagination. I asked the dancers to look beyond the reality of their physical environment and visualize themselves in changing landscapes with their various colours, images, and sounds. This tactic was used to elicit the most visceral response possible from the dancers and maximize their experience. To assist in stimulating their imagination, the dance artists kept a journal recording their dreams when they recalled them, and thoughts that surfaced before falling asleep. These accounts conjured up images and colours, fanciful stories, and fantastic worlds. Drawing from the dancers' thoughts and subconscious experiences added an authentic layer to the piece, and helped them to identify with the world being created.

I began to structure the piece at the beginning of February, synthesizing the created phrases into an aesthetic whole. The work was primarily structured through a process of trial and error in the rehearsals and was further influenced and supported by my time spent in the alternate venue. Once I had the bulk of my movement material and had named each phrase, I undertook the task of listing a series of potential structures that placed the phrases in different orders. In rehearsal, the dance artists would present the various choreographic scenarios, displaying a variety of options, which allowed me to see if there were phrases that melded appropriately together. This process was done without too much deliberation over the logical relationship between the phrases in each version;

however, in the back of my mind I was frustrated because I kept waiting for meaning and the concept of the piece to reveal itself.

In-mid February, a pivotal moment occurred that affected the conceptual and structural direction of the work. At this time, the progression of the structuring process began to stagnate due to an overwhelming pressure I had placed on myself that the movement ideas and connections between them had to make literal sense. In a discussion with my Advisor, Professor Melissa Monteros, she proposed that I not think in terms of narrative and literal meaning, but rather expand my imagination and mind to embrace incongruous ideas. Her suggestion to invite absurdity into my process triggered the onset of innovative ideas, which led to a concept based around dreams. This significant revelation inspired research into surrealism and prompted an examination of the works of Surrealist, Salvador Dali. Two Dalian works in particular that struck my attention were *La Tentation de St. Antoine* and *Galatea de les Esferes*. The phantasmagorical context of the first work allowed my mind to explode in many different directions, and released my imagination from the confines of logic, reality, and the ordinary. The second work, a fragmented portrait of Salvador Dali's wife Gala composed of various sized spheres of colour and texture, presented insight into spatial perception in its exudation of three dimensionality through a two dimensional medium.

Simultaneously, I began visiting the alternate performance space of the HiFi Club. Shaping the piece was strongly influenced by my time spent in the performance site, as well as my interest in dreams and the relationship between the conscious and subconscious self in the dream state. During my visits at the venue, my perception of its structure began to change as a result of my research. I no longer looked at its brick walls,

hardwood floors, high ceilings, and narrow hallways as simply architecture. I started to see how the space could be a representation of the two facets of the mind, the conscious and subconscious. At this point, my intent was to make the site an additional component in the piece as well as being a venue to present the work.

In the club, there is a small proscenium stage 16x18 feet. Behind the stage, beyond public view, is a curtained-off, long hallway which extends at a lower level from the upstage edge of the stage. This area was incorporated into the piece to symbolize the depths of the subconscious mind. With this idea, I thought of ways in which to portray the conscious self and decided upon a rented stage which I would situate at the downstage right edge of the main stage. Once I had a visual image of the performance space layout, I returned to the rehearsal process and recreated in the studio, as well as I could, the spatial dimensions of the club. The reduced space posed challenges for the performers when they were dancing at the same time. I therefore adjusted the spatial structure of the performers so that the majority of the movement phrases were carried out on a diagonal between downstage right and upstage left. Fortuitously, this structural change reinforced the connection between the two extensions of the stage that portrayed the conscious and subconscious self.

Discovering the conceptual focus of the piece enabled me to look at all the choreography and the potential structures I had created and see which phrases fit appropriately together. It also helped me define the relationship between the two performers, as well as further clarify the meaning behind the incorporation of the props. Ultimately, I decided that the dance artists would represent the conscious and subconscious self of one person. The events of the piece would depict a woman who



drifts from reality into a lucid dream where in the depths of her subconscious she sees herself sitting and swinging her legs. In this lucid state, the dreamer is aware she is dreaming, and by shifting the two white boxes she is able to control the events of her dream, or alternately drift through them. The proscenium stage that divides the areas representing the conscious and subconscious realms of the mind is the meeting ground where the events of the dream take place, and themes of recollection, control, and self-recognition are explored.

To support the visual world of the piece that I was creating, I chose music that would act as a soundscape to enrich the environment, and complement the movement quality and phrasing in the choreography, in addition to representing the two conceptual realms of the performers. I incorporated music by Hedningarna, a Swedish neo-folk band that fuses electronic music and rock with elements of old Scandinavian folksongs; John Zorn, an American composer whose style is not confined to one particular genre but encompasses a wide range of stylistic qualities and sensibilities; and *Dark Muse*, a one woman “dream project” as characterized by the artist, whose work possesses a haunting, ethereal quality, and would be best described as experimental avant-garde, dark wave and ambient. The process of selecting appropriate music occurred once the *The Dreamer* was choreographically completed. The video documentation of the choreographic piece served as the means to make my final musical choices. I experimented with a variety of pieces of music to see how they supported or enhanced the phrasing of the dance in terms of rhythmic and emotional dynamics. Some compositions that I listened to individually, which I thought would be effective, actually made the physical rhythm of the body appear flat once I listened to them in conjunction with watching the video footage. By

contrast, other musical pieces surprised me in their ability to accentuate and reinforce specific phrasing in the choreography. This process of selection also allowed me to see where in the phrasing the tempo needed to accelerate or sustain, and which qualities should be exaggerated and emphasized. Working with the video was efficient and useful, enabling me to sample many different pieces of music in a short period of time. Once I had selected the musical works, I fused them together to create a musical score for *The Dreamer*. In two sections of the score, I chose to have silence. This decision was made after the first performance at the HiFi Club, and was used in the two presentations at the University Theatre. In the choreography, the use of silence on these two occasions emphasized the concept of the “subconscious self”. In the first instance, silence was used to acknowledge a significant shift of idea from the conscious state to a lucid dream. In the second instance, it highlighted a moment when Swihart recognizes her subconscious self in Jasper. In addition, the silence amplified the sounds of the dancers’ actions, their breath, and the shifting of the props. The audience’s ability to hear the sounds made by the dancers invited them into the performers’ world, creating an intimate connection between them and the work.

At the University Theatre, I had to consider how to recreate the structure of *The Dreamer*, which was initially established in response to the architecture of the HiFi Club, to best represent the concept and visual world of the piece. In order to achieve this I made strategic lighting choices. At the HiFi, the lighting possibilities were limited due to the Club’s minimal equipment. The use of lighting in the work at this venue was to act as an atmospheric support, offering a few different moods to the various sections of the piece. At the University Theatre, there were a multitude of lighting options, enabling the work

to still portray the concept I wanted to convey to the audience. In some ways, the lighting at the Theatre was more effective than the physical structure of the HiFi Club space because it seemed to capture the ethereal quality that dreams possess.

The last matter that I had to consider was how to restructure the choreography, which had been originally organised in response to the small space of the HiFi Club, to make the best use of the larger stage at the University Theatre. As a result of the specific lighting designs, the middle ground where the performers danced together was virtually the same size. The change of space mostly affected the distance that the dancers had to travel from their individual “worlds”. These adjustments were made, and then I edited the musical score to match the dancers’ new timing. The performers remarked that in the larger space they had more freedom to move, however, in the smaller space they experienced a greater intimate connection. Some audience members who had attended the performance in both spaces expressed that they could see the movement and relationship of the dancers with greater clarity at the University Theatre, but at the Hifi Club, they experienced a more intimate and visceral response to the work due to the environment and their close proximity to the performance.

#### **PHASE 4: The Presentation of the Work & PHASE 5: Response and Evaluation**

After carrying out the process of phase 3: Realization of the Final Form, the choreographic structure, including the music and screen-dance of *The Dreamer*, was completed. At the end of my creative process, phases 4 and 5 were implemented; *The Dreamer* was presented in two different venues and after each performance, as well as for many days to follow, I received feedback and responses from audience members. Although phases 4 and 5 were carried out in the linear sequence of Abb’s five-phase

cycle, they were also interjected periodically throughout the development of *The Dreamer*. The periodic incorporation of these phases, i.e. presentation of the work, and response and evaluation, was extremely useful to my creative process. The presentations were informal showings of the piece at work-in-progress stages, which were largely observed by my adviser, Professor Monteros, and, on a few occasions, by my peers. Having an impartial, but knowledgeable observer view my work was an essential part of the process. It can be difficult to maintain this impartial outlook when a choreographer is immersed in the creation of a work. I found that being present while another person viewed the rehearsal would shift me from choreographer to observer, providing a more objective perspective, and heightening my awareness of the material and relationship between the dancers. Furthermore, this critical feedback offered me fresh perspectives on improvisational devices, structural and conceptual directions, as well as ways to create new material and develop movement ideas.

## CONCLUSION

The seven-month creative process of developing *The Dreamer* was an ongoing experience of discovery and revelation. Before I began this project, I had a preconceived idea that the creation of a choreographic work unfolds intuitively, driven only by an inner inspiration and subjective creativity. My impression of how to develop a choreographic work had been predicated on my former experiences working as an interpretive dance artist with seasoned choreographers whom I believed created movement solely from inner inspirations. The choreographic approaches of these dance artists gave me the impression that they made their decisions and generated movement material exclusively from intuitive inclinations. My choreographic endeavour, however, revealed to me that intuitive response is nurtured and supported by objective knowledge and practical skills, and that the creative process draws upon an interweaving relationship of objective knowledge and subjective creativity. Reflecting upon the stages of my own creative process has made me aware that choreographers develop their craft by acquiring, and refining objective knowledge, such as choreographic devices, and methods of generating movement, and then by applying these choreographic tools to their work in a process of trial and error. Over time, these practical skills become internalized in the body which then inform the choreographer's intuitive sensing. The relationship between objective knowledge and subjective, intuitive creativity oscillates, creating innovative ideas which venture off into uncharted, choreographic directions. Throughout the development of my choreographic work, I recognized the importance of opening my mind to new ways of thinking in order to develop an authentic choreographic voice. This process of freely expanding my mind and embracing innovative ways of creating movement was

facilitated by actively broadening my pool of artistic knowledge. I exposed myself to other forms of visual and performance art, literature, and concepts of new media, including the works of surrealist Salvador Dali; various types of music; literature on surrealism, the choreographic process, and the subconscious mind; as well as researching the alternate components of video production, such as editing techniques, light, perspective, and mood. I also drew upon my prior experiences working as a dancer in other creative artists' choreographic processes, and as a student in their workshops. From these experiences, I gleaned practical skills about movement composition, including improvisational structures designed to generate material, develop movement and conceptual ideas, and evoke emotional and intuitive responses. Over the course of my creative process, this wealth of information provided me with sources of inspiration that stimulated my imagination and directly influenced my intuitive approach to working. In the beginning of my process, I relied heavily on my acquired practical knowledge to trigger the onset of my own work, which I now acknowledge was partially due to a lack of confidence in my own choreographic ability. However, by the second half of the process, the majority of my decision-making occurred with minimal conscious censorship, in a more self-assured manner, and was influenced by an inner intuition. I believe that my ability to react intuitively and with greater self-trust was largely influenced by an internalized artistic and objective knowledge base.

As a result of my own choreographic process, my perspective towards viewing dance has changed. The steps I undertook to develop *The Dreamer* required me to consider a multitude of choreographic details, such as the relationship of the dancers in space, the emotional and physical intentions behind the movement, methods to develop

choreographic phrases from single movement ideas, and being specific about the departure and arrival points of my movement pathways, as well as the importance of transitions between ideas. In addition, I was challenged to step out of my own work and perceive it with an objective eye in order to distinguish, for example, when and where the rhythm and quality of the phrasing needed to change. Before I had experienced this process, many of the choreographic devices used in the dance works of others were not evident to me. The experience of acknowledging, questioning, and exploring these aspects of creation throughout the development of my own work has had an impact on, and influenced how I now perceive choreography and a dancer's performance.

The process of developing *The Dreamer* has left me inspired about my future as an independent dance artist. Whether I will be working in my own creative process as a choreographer or in another choreographer's work as a dance interpreter, experiencing the seven-month choreographic process of *The Dreamer* has equipped me with a broadened practical skill set and artistic knowledge base, as well as a fresh awareness of my creative and inner, intuitive capacity.

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