TOWARDS A DECIDED BODY

AND CHOREOGRAPHY

by

Nathan Dryden

A thesis submitted to the faculty of
The University of Utah
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts

Department of Modern Dance

The University of Utah

August 2015

Copyright © Nathan Dryden 2015

All Rights Reserved

The University of Utah Graduate School

STATEMENT OF THESIS APPROVAL

The thesis of **Nathan Dryden**

has been approved by the following supervisory committee members:

Eric Michael Handman, Chair **5/6/2015** Date Approved

Pamela Geber Handman, Member **5/6/2015** Date Approved

Stephen J. Koester, Member **5/6/2015** Date Approved

and by **Stephen J. Koester**, Chair/Dean of

the Department/College/School of **Modern Dance**

and by David B. Kieda, Dean of The Graduate School.

ABSTRACT

This thesis examines a state termed the *decided body,* which describes an engaging and qualitatively fluid presence in performance. My research explored this state of presence and drew from the embodied qualities arising out of the state as source material for choreography. Dancers were trained in *passive sequencing*, which is a somatic technique where a conscious body passively resists intentional movement and is instead physically moved by others. The process of *passive sequencing* produced a particular state of embodied conscious that allowed dancers to intuitively initiate new pathways of movement in the action of improvising.

This thesis tracks the creation of two new dance works built from the process of passive sequencing to improvisation to setting choreography and then to preparing for performance. It also provides a theoretical framework from performance studies and contemporary healing practices on how *passive sequencing* functions on the body-mind complex to create this state of the *decided body*.

For Rebecca

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT………………………………………………………………………….. iii

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS……………………………………………………….. vi

CHAPTERS

1 INTRODUCTION…………………………………………………………...... 1

Chapter Synopsis……………………………………………………… 4

2 ON THE DECIDED BODY…………………………………………..…. 5

3 PASSIVE SEQUENCING……………………………………………... 14

Background……………………………………………………..…. 14
Practice………………………………………………………….…......... 16
Postsequencing Movement…………………………………….….. 21
Observing Postsequencing Dancing……………………………….…… 26

4 *THE RATHER LONG GOODBYE*……………………………...……. 29

Section 1 - *the one that comes and goes*…………………………….... 31
Section 2 - *arrested thought*…………………………………..… 34
Section 3 -*the goodbye*…………………………………………...... 37

5 *ABSENT LOVER*……………………………………………………...… 39

6 CONCLUSION……………………………………………………...….. 48

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY………………………………………….... 52

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge my thesis committee, Eric Handman, Pamela Geber Handman, and Stephen Koester, for their encouragement, engagement, and respectful feedback during all aspects of this thesis process. And I would like to thank the dancers who joined me in this research and inspired me with their creativity, energy, good humor, and trust: Alyssa Tolman, Jasmine Stack, Samantha Matsukawa, Yebel Gallegos, with a special thank you to Florian Alberge, who kept coming back.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The memory is clear and felt in my body. *I am onstage improvising with a group of dancers and musicians and as I shift into my turn for solo dance I feel a calmness descend. I enter a familiar performance state where the "I" that is my thinking self has shifted spatially, locating itself somewhere deeper in my body - behind the spine or deep in the torso, and in consciousness, allowing the dance to unfold through the machinations of my body. In a sense, I am witnessing my own dance manifest itself in the moment. I am embodying a paradox where I have no preconceived notion of what my next movement will be while also feeling as if I am performing known choreography. There is no doubting and no judgment on the movement of the dance. I am fully aware and attending to my timing, spatial orientation, connection to the audience, and the vibratory influences of the live music. I feel both fully present in my body and somehow interactive within the larger "body" of the space and within the flow of time.* Performing in this paradoxical state gives me the greatest joy and freedom. There is a sense of trust, of being enfolded and moving to rhythms beyond the language systems of my consciousness, moving to cellular or magnetic rhythms, or by other means that guide my dancing to follow a logic I do not recognize.

The mystery of this performance state has led me to research performance theory, theater anthropology, and the writings of Eugenio Barba. Barba describes the act of

performing as involving a number of paradoxical modes that produce energy and theatrical presence. The term "presence" has many different definitions within dance and the performing arts. I will refer to presence as the quality or vibrancy of a performer's energy in the moment. A lack of energy would describe a lack of presence, while a performer fully engaged in what they are doing would exude a fully active sense of presence. Presence is not to be confused with other performance qualities such as charisma (a dynamic sense of personality) or projection (the ability to send voice or emotive energy through the whole of a performance space). One specific paradox that resonates with my performance experiences Barba calls the *decided body* (1991).

The paradox set up in the decided body draws from the grammatical expression in which, "a passive form assumes an active meaning, and in which an indication of availability for action is expressed as a form of passivity" (Barba, p. 17). An example of this is when one says, "that is to be decided," indicating that one is neither deciding nor actively carrying out the action of deciding, but assumes that a decision will eventually occur. The decided body is available for action or already in action, already decided. This describes the feeling state I am attempting to reach in performance. When in this state, I am fully engaged in and responsive to the unfolding moment.

While I continually strive to cultivate the state of the decided body in my improvisation practice, I also yearn to incorporate it into my choreographic practice and to train dancers to move from this state. My challenge is to explore both training for and construction of concert dance-forms that evolve from explorations of the decided body. My research questions involve the following: How can I co-create an environment with dancers that allows us to produce work from the state of the decided body? In making

such work, how set does the choreography need to be? Will focusing on a performance state generate consistent enough movements to structure a recognizable and repeatable dance? What is a *decided choreography*, and is it possible?

To explore these questions, I started work on two different dances using the process of *passive sequencing* as the starting point in each. Passive sequencing is a physical practice where one partner passively lies on the floor with her/his eyes closed while being actively moved by one or several other partners. The task of the passive partner is to physically do nothing, a task more difficult than it sounds. They are encouraged to track the experience they are receiving with their mind and senses. The task of the active partners is to find ways to give an experience of movement to the passive partner. This typically begins with simple gentle movements of the head, arms, and legs. Later, more playful and whole body movements are explored including rolling, dragging, and lifting the passive body. The term 'sequence' refers to the way the body's anatomical architecture organizes movement. This architecture is expressively experienced when the passive partner refrains from activating her/his musculature or attempts to control the movement. As this process continues, the receiver may begin to let go of habitual movement patterns and muscular tension held deep within their tissues. Once the partner has received sequencing (often in spans of 10-20 minutes), she/he is left alone to experience whatever movements might arise.

I found that passive sequencing instigates a version of the decided body for the receivers, who can then begin to improvise from this state. From the material of these improvisations, I began to shape the movement for two choreographic works. This thesis documents the process of creating and performing these works while providing a

theoretic framework for state of presence termed the decided body and how it can lead creative process.

Chapter Synopsis

Chapter 2, “On the Decided Body,” will elaborate on Eugenio Barba’s concept of the decided body as a state of presence compared with descriptions of similar performance states by individual practitioners in the fields of dance improvisation, theatre, and contact improvisation. Chapter 3, “Passive Sequencing,” will detail the practice of passive sequencing and its function in the creative process. I will share my theories on how passive sequencing functions to create the decided body, based on my research in somatic healing practices including craniosacral therapy and Watsu aquatic body work. Chapter 4, “The Rather Long Goodbye,” will delve specifically into the process of creating a solo that was performed both by me and another dancer. Chapter 5, “Absent Lover,” chronicles how the same process led to creating a quartet. In my conclusion, I provide a context for this working process with considerations for continuing this creative process in choreography and performance.

CHAPTER 2

ON THE DECIDED BODY

> *Certain Oriental and Occidental performers possess a quality of presence which immediately strikes the spectator and engages his attention. This occurs even when the performers are giving a cold, technical demonstration. For a long time I thought that this was because of a particular technique, a particular power which the performer possessed, acquired through years of experience and work. But what we call technique is in fact a particular use of the body.* (Barba, 1991, p. 8)

Theatre anthropologist Eugenio Barba studied several codified forms of theatre and dance performance including but not limited to Noh, Kabuki, Mime, Odissi, and Balinese, Ballet, and Modern dance, in an attempt to discover what he refers to as the "secret art of the performer," meaning the energy or presence that certain performers have that makes them particularly engaging to an audience. Barba describes the appearance of presence as when the, "flow of energies which characterise our daily behaviour has been re-routed. The tensions which secretly govern our normal way of being physically present come to the surface in the performer, becoming visible, unexpectedly" (p. 54). Barba distinguishes a difference in the use our bodies in daily life to how performers use them. *Daily techniques* are used for the purpose of communication, "we move, we sit, we carry things, we kiss, we agree and disagree with gestures which we believe to be natural but which are in fact culturally determined" (p. 9). *Techniques of virtuosity* are used to transform the body for specialized tasks or to

create amazing physical feats in acrobatics, gymnastics, sports, ballet, etc. *Extra-daily techniques* are used to develop the presence of an actor and are for the purpose of information, "they literally *put the body in-form"* (p. 10). This body in-form is a state of being powerfully present while *not yet* representing anything. It is a pre-expressive state of availability, which Noh master Moriaki Wantanabe defines as "the situation of performers representing their own absence" (p. 10). For me, this describes my practice of becoming a malleable vessel through which the performance manifests, whether based on a script, set choreography, or in improvisation. These extra-daily techniques are not the typical focus of virtuosic ballet and modern dance technique classes, but may be found in practices focusing on expression, embodying quality, and somatic conditioning.

Barba researched the concepts and techniques used for performance practices across the world, in an attempt to distill a series of shared foundational approaches. The basis of my research investigates his concept of *the decided body,* which stems from the grammatically paradoxical expression 'to be decided.' Barba states that the expression is a passive form that assumes an active meaning,

> 'To be decided' does not mean that we are deciding, nor that we are carrying out the action of deciding. Between these two opposite conditions flows a current of life that language does not seem to be able to represent and around which it dances with images. Only direct experience shows what it means 'to be decided.' (p. 17)

This paradoxical expression is how Barba explains the lived experience of the performer. 'To be decided' describes, "the dances of oppositions on which the performer's life is based" (p. 21). 'To be decided' is a state of embodied actions "that break the automatic responses of daily life," in order to allow the performer to carry forward their art (p. 17). 'To be decided' is to surrender into the flow of the moment while being fully present in

the world of the performance. The decided body is a state of availability. The performer is alert and ready for any impulse and response. When action happens, it is instantaneous, a decided action that preempts contemplation. In the paradoxical world of the performer, 'to be decided' means that even within a set choreography or production, "it seems that something flowers spontaneously, neither sought for nor desired" (p. 22).

Many dancers describe the lived experience of presence in performance in similar terms. Choreographer and performer Merce Cunningham states,

> Our ecstasy in dance comes from the possible gift of freedom, the exhilarating moment that this exposing of the bare energy can give us. What is meant is not license, but freedom, that is, a complete awareness of the world and at the same time a detachment from it. (Cunningham, 1964, p. 151)

Dance experimentalist Deborah Hay describes her experience of presence as, "a saturated quality and intensity of focus, with the simultaneous, connected attention between the performer's inner and outer life" (Daly, 2002, p. 37). Choreographer and improviser Simone Forti describes what she calls "the dance state," which she experiences as,

> a state of heightened awareness where one possibility after another presents itself like an unfolding path…I think it is a state of being. Like sleeping, figuring out, or panicking are states of being. The dance state can occur in performance of choreographed work. Improvisation depends on it. (Benoit-Nader, 1997, p. 138)

The decided body exists first as a *pre-expressive state*. To create this energetic power, the performer trains not just the body and the voice, but in the articulation of energy. Cultivating a pre-expressive state entails the performer's preparations to transform not only the body but also the self into an instrument available to the demands and nuances of the performance, the "presence ready to re-present" (Barba, 1991, p. 190). The pre-expressive level is included in and supports the expressive level witnessed by the spectator. The performer "manifests a quality and an energetic radiation which is

presence ready to be transformed into dance or theatre according to convention or tradition" (p. 190). This pre-expressive state can be worked on separately, to then integrate into the specific dance or theatre process.

To acquire presence, one must rigorously train in a combination of physical, mental, and energetic dynamic alignments. These involve the paradoxical embodiment of the decided body (ready for action but not choosing action), cultivating a dynamic balance, a nondaily expression of time, an extra-daily flow to rhythm, and the ability to transcend typical states of humanness. When the decided body becomes an action, the performer integrates awareness and practice in order to continue consciously embodying or recreating it moment-by-moment. In improvisation, I find I can freely give myself over to a decided state so that with my body in action, I am witnessing my own actions. On some level, my consciousness is making micro-adjustments according to my awareness of aspects of space, audience, balance, rhythm, energy, and other expressive states. These aspects maintain and expressively articulate the decided state of the performer, in training or choreography.

So the decided body begins with a pre-expressive state of 'to be decided.' This is the state of availability and readiness that precedes expression. However, this state can also carry through into action and performance as a readiness for change or dynamic shifts of quality. In a sense, it is a state that underlies other shifting states or embodied qualities of the performer; it is the stream of consciousness upon which the imagery and ideas of consciousness flow. This is how I describe the moments in improvisation when I become the observer of my own movement.

In a discussion with Agnes Benoit-Nader, performance improviser Steve Paxton

describes a self-witnessing process. "From the inside I see very clearly…. Witnessing my own movement, yes indeed. I see it very clearly from the inside, but I know nobody else has that view, it's unique" (Benoit-Nader, 1997, pp. 57-59). Paxton's dance career has led him from performing with the Merce Cunningham dance company from 1961-1964, to exploring radical choreographic practice with the Judson Dance Theater, and later with the Grand Union, a dance theater improvisation collective that existed from 1970-1976. Paxton also initiated the development of the dance form Contact Improvisation (CI) beginning in 1972. He and others continued to develop the CI over the years and it has expanded to include a global community of practitioners and performers. A basic definition of CI is, "two moving bodies follow the point of contact between them, creating an improvised dance of weight sharing and bearing" (Buckwalter, 2010, p. 192). CI dances can also include trios or larger groups and practitioners may add moments of solo moving as well as integrating other modes of improvising. Paxton described how the practice of CI informed his improvising-self as,

> When your body is allowed to do whatever it wants to do, or whatever it is able to do – for instance in Contact Improvisation, you don't consciously find your movement, it happens and arises from the duet, you do many things that you don't expect – your reflexes are sharpened. My reflexes are then a little bit more available to me as a soloist. Sometimes I have moments when they take over and I'm not consciously doing it, which I like very much. I'm not thinking ahead of the movement, but instead, I'm just observing the movement while it happens. (Benoit-Nader, 1997, p. 47)

CI trains the practitioner to be responsive to an ever-shifting landscape of tactile awareness, force, and gravity. "While in contact, we attend to our own reflexes, which have been stimulated by the other's movements. Our reflexes move us, and this causes our partner to move. This cycle of movement responses is continuous" (Paxton, 1988, p. 39). In CI, the movement emerges from the continual cycle of responses between both

partners to each other. Sometimes these responses are innate bodily reflexes and sometimes they arise from the training ingrained from experience. Dancers may add an element of conscious play by making choices in the moment that affect and further the dance. Sometimes these playful choices are ways back into the decided state of presence. As performer Jonathan Burrows claims, “Sometimes in performance you have to find a way to distract yourself, in order that yourself can be revealed” (2010, p. 102).

Contact Improvisation cultivates another mode discussed by Barba, balance and in particular a dynamic shifting extra-daily balance. “The characteristic most common to actors and dancers from different cultures and times is the abandonment of daily balance in favour of a ‘precarious’ or extra-daily ‘balance’” (p. 34). The method of extra-daily balance is specific to each cultural theatrical tradition, but involves standing and moving with an atypical alignment designed to intrigue the audience. “The performer’s dynamic balance, based on the body’s tensions, is a *balance in action*: it generates the sensation of movement in the spectator even when there is only immobility” (p. 40). In corporeal mime technique developed by Etienne Decroux, this dynamic balance is created through what is called triple design technique where various sections of the body articulate through the vertical, horizontal, and sagittal planes. Increased complexities of bodily shape are ‘designed’ through the alteration of varying segments of the body (i.e., head, torso, pelvis, and limbs) through the three planes (Barba, 1991; Shepard, 1971). In CI this extra-daily balance is created through the shared and constantly shifting center of weight between the two or more dancers. It is a balance in continuous action. When improviser Mark Tompkins was asked, “what makes you move?” he replied, “the body falling… off balance, being off center, the sensation inside an articulation, the speed of

which I come near somebody, or at which I go away" (Benoit-Nader, 1997, p. 227). The practice conditions dancers to cultivate a dynamic balance or a multidirectional alignment with energies emanating in all directions, with the body available to follow a spatial pull or an intended mobilization.

Steve Paxton developed the somatic based practice of the *small dance* to train balance awareness. The small dance is a practice of standing in a relaxed way while observing the systems in the body and sensing how your reflexes hold you up. Dancers stand with their eyes closed and focus their attention on the inner play of sensations. These sensations may include feeling the weight of the mass of the body transferring along the supportive architecture of the bones, through the feet, and into the floor, and noticing which muscles engage and which muscles relax in order to remain standing. Over a period of time, dancers begin to notice the more subtle details in the continuous change happening in their standing body.

> Your mind starts to pick up faster and faster aspects of it, because there is a lot of sensation going on at a very high speed to hold you up…. You start to pick up the subtleties and it becomes more nuanced and you get faster at perceiving and understanding what's going on. (Paxton, 2015, p. 39)

Paxton's small dance trains dancers to sense the natural dynamism inherent in bodily architecture as opposed to the designed artificial architecture of corporeal mime and other traditions. However, for training to adapt to the level of speed of reaction needed in CI, the small dance increases the speed of awareness on a micro level. Through this practice, dancers realize the "big movements of Contact are far slower than the movements of standing" (p. 39).

Another mode discussed by Barba is the manipulation of the perception of time by a performer, primarily through the play of movement rhythms. "The actor or dancer is

she who knows how to carve time. Concretely: she carves time with rhythm, dilating or contracting her actions" (p. 210). To create a dynamic presence on stage, the performer needs to shift not only their own, but the audience's perception of time. "During a performance, the actor or dancer sensorialises the flow of time, which in daily life is experienced subjectively (and measured by clocks and calendars)" (p. 210). In Eastern theatrical traditions, the flow of time is greatly considered and often extended to create narrative tension or to provide the viewer with the luxury to take in the details of a highly expressive or dramatic moment. In contemporary television or film, these alterations in time would be created by technical events such as slow motion, freeze frame, and even close-ups – which condense space to allow for details and nuances to register more quickly. The performer in live theatre must self-create these technical events within the performance. "My improvisation is an exploration of the mood and of the second – how that adds up," relates Steve Paxton (Benoit-Nader, 1997, p. 57). In an expression of extra-daily time, rhythms of movement are in flux, resisting normal recognizable syncopation.

The expression of carving time is not only the province of the performer, but also an aspect of the whole work.

> The way performers exploit and compose the weight/balance relationship and the opposition between different movements, their duration and their rhythms, enables them to give the spectator not only a different perception of their (the performers') presence, but also a different perception of time and space: not time in space, but a 'space-time.'" (Barba, 1991, p. 244)

Russian theater director and actor Vsevolod Meyerhold was "obsessed with the problem of scenic movement and its interweavings with rhythm" (p. 216). Meyerhold was interested in exploring the ways "segments of time acquired meaning" in his theater

experiments in the 1920s. He focused on what he referred to as “breaking the rhythm” of action and pacing throughout a whole play, so that audience and actors were continually on edge due to the shifts of tempo. He often added a musical background that at times supported or drove forward the actions of the actors. Some people saw these performances as “dramatic ballet” (pp. 90-91). The traditions of Kabuki and Noh (for example) also reveal detailed attention to the breaking of rhythm during the course of a work. These influences continue today in various hybrids of movement theatre and dance theatre from artist like Robert Wilson, Pina Bausch, Alain Platel, Shen Wei, and others.

Transitioning through states, extra-daily balance (in particular, small dances and falling), carving time, and rhythmic shifts all work towards creating performance presence and access to the decided body. For my thesis creative research, I engaged the dancers in aspects of all of these techniques. However, the technique I primarily drew from was the practice of passive sequencing. Passive sequencing became our gateway to the state of the decided body.

CHAPTER 3

PASSIVE SEQUENCING

Background

The term *passive sequencing* has a fairly vague definition within the communities of dance, Contact Improvisation, and somatic practices. It can be used as a catchall phrase to refer to any practice where one person is actively moving or manipulating another person who is attempting to remain intentionally inactive. Many choreographers, improvisation teachers, and technique teachers use practices in body manipulation for creative and kinesthetic feedback purposes. I have been investigating my own versions of these practices since beginning to create performance art in the early 1990s. For example, my performance partner for many years, Greg Colburn, and I investigated a process he named “Listening,” where one dancer stands behind the other, initially hugging their partner from behind, and then begins to physically direct her/him into movement. The receiver’s challenge is to moderate how much intention they can give up while still dealing with gravity. I still use Listening as a creative and instructional practice.

My training in the Skinner Releasing Technique (SRT), a somatic-based dance technique developed by Joan Skinner, also informs my interest in passive sequencing. SRT uses both poetic metaphoric imagery and hands on partner-studies to enable a release of patterns of muscular tension and habits of ineffectual movement (Davis, 1974).

For example, a facilitator might lift the shoulder girdle of a partner while suggesting that the whole of the shoulder *lets go and melts* into the facilitator's hands. If the receiver has been carrying a tension pattern in the tissues of the shoulder causing her/him to unnecessarily lift the shoulders, this SRT practice may facilitate a release of that strain. These hands-on partner-studies facilitate kinesthetic awareness that can then be taken into individual movement explorations. This aspect of SRT mirrors my own creative research in offering tactile kinesthetic experiences followed by movement explorations and has informed my version of passive sequencing.

I was introduced to the term passive sequencing as a specific partnering practice when working with UMAMI Performance in Seattle, Washington around 2009. In this group, the dancers used a version of passive sequencing as part of our warm up for improvising. Where the term originated is unknown, but Karl Frost in his Body Research project uses the term to describe an avenue of contact improvisation research that he began developing in the late 1990s. Interestingly, his influences also come from SRT, along with the Alexander Technique, Tai Chi, and the trauma therapy work of Peter Levine (Frost, 2012). For Frost, one of the main purposes of passive sequencing is to help the subject sense and inhibit reflexive or fear trigger responses in the body. This is useful both in the highly dynamic dances of contact improvisation and in the practice of healing bodily stored trauma. Although I have never studied with Frost, the essential structures of our practices are similar with both parallel and divergent interests in application.

Practice

The practice of passive sequencing involves one or more *givers* (or *sequencers*) and a passive *receiver*. Passive sequencing begins with the receiver lying down on the floor, typically on to her/his back. The receiver is instructed to be as passive as possible through the process, but with the permission to actively move if in a position of great discomfort or to protect her/his head. Then the receiver is encouraged to close her/his eyes, to take a moment to relax and breathe. This brief moment of relaxation allows for inward shift of awareness. The giver then begins to physically bring the receiver's body into motion.

The term "sequencing" describes the way the receiver's body naturally moves, based on the architecture of the bones and where the joints are situated, in play with gravity and the support actions provided by the giver. Although sequencing may start at any area of the body, givers are encouraged to begin working distally before engaging in larger movements of the core. There is no set procedure or order to the practice of passive sequencing. Typically, givers begin moving their partner's arm, leg, or perhaps supporting the head an inch or two off the floor and providing small random movements. A giver might choose to support and sequence each limb one at a time, while letting the other limbs rest on the floor when not in motion. The process works best when a giver works intuitively and combines caring for their partner while following their own playful interest in the movement of their partner's body. For example, when supporting the arm, a giver can facilitate the movements of the wrist and the rotation of the ulna and radius of the forearm. By supporting the receiver's arm upright while her/his elbow rests on the floor, the giver can play with dropping and catching the forearm as it falls in different

directions. A giver might slide the receiver's arm in arcs along the floor and then lift the weight of the whole arm and shoulder structure off the floor for a moment, until slowly allowing gravity to assist sequencing the arm's return to resting beside the torso. When moving the arm, a giver may sense the receiver's attempts to engage muscle tone. Many movement habits are stored in the neuromuscular pathways of the arms and working with the arms early in the process is helpful in raising an awareness of unconscious muscle engagement. Once aware of these habits, the receiver can begin the practice of letting go of unneeded muscular tension.

Letting go is, in itself, a paradox of doing "not doing." In this process, the receiver practices not engaging the muscles or releasing already activated tone as the body is being moved. Sometimes, the receiver is not even aware that she/he is engaging muscle groups. In most cases, this process of letting go proceeds from the more active surface musculature towards deeper habits of tension and engagement in the inner supportive musculature. In dancers, it is often the core muscles of the torso and even the psoas that are the last to begin letting go.

I have noticed several of the dancers who have engaged in this process over time, myself included, beginning to exhibit a spastic muscle release emerging from deep within the torso typically around the solar plexus region where the ribs separate. In many systems that describe energy pathways in the body, the solar plexus is regarded as the center of personal power (Milne, 1995; Myss, 1996). In the chakra system of Eastern yogic traditions, the solar plexus represents the third chakra (of seven) and houses "the magnetic core of the personality and ego" (Myss, 1996, p. 167). Anatomically, the solar plexus is where the diaphragm connects upper and lower torso areas just above the psoas

and organs. It is the place where breathing initiates. The spasms can appear surprisingly and often initiate further motion throughout the body. The release of tension deep in the tissues may also trigger emotional distress, both from not knowing their source and as a re-experiencing of stored emotional trauma. If the solar plexus is indeed connected to our personality and ego (as yogic tradition suggests), I find it interesting that a practice of giving up control or agency in moving triggers this area.

Involuntary spasms may also be the dancer's response to releasing blocks of stored energy in the muscles; this can produce spontaneous contractions. As muscles release, they unblock a flow of energy that has been stagnant for some time. This idea is supported by energy release practices such as Zen Shiatsu, Watsu, massage therapies, and craniosacral work (Dull, 2010; Lidell, 1984; Masunaga, 1977; Milne, 1995).

As the passive sequencing session continues, the giver typically begins to facilitate larger whole body movements for the receiver. Often a dancer's torso muscles will engage once the giver begins rolling or lifting her/him. Dancers are trained to help in movement, to help in being lifted, and so are habituated to assist with these deep core muscles. One benefit of passive sequencing is to encourage turning off these muscles for a while. Dancers relearn how not to engage muscles when they are not needed. One dancer commented that before participating in passive sequencing, she only found such deep release when sleeping. For a dancer to become aware of their own patterns of muscle engagement ultimately gives them more control over the instrument of their body.

A passive sequencing can be offered in a one-on-one situation or with several people offering the sequencing to a single receiver. In each session, it is important to begin simply and gradually, as the stimulation of several points of touch and movement

can cause the receiver's system to reflexively attempt to regain control. One image I suggest to the givers of the passive sequencing is that they consider how their choices will offer a movement experience for their partner. We do not use the term "manipulation" to describe the act of passive sequencing, because it connotes a potentially harmful power dynamic in a situation where one partner is consciously ceding control. Instead, I suggest that the giver attempts *to create the dance that the receiver wishes to have*. Such prompts help to create an empathetic connection between the giver and receiver, since a caring aspect is needed for the process to fully succeed. As Shizuto Masunaga says in his writings on Zen Shiatsu, "the giver and receiver create a warm and understanding human relationship through touch and body pressure and become sensitive to each other (1977, p. 16). While we may be focusing on moving muscles and bones, what we are primarily addressing is the sympathetic nervous system, the action system of the body.

The nervous system has been described as an " electro-corporeal web of symbiotic relationships" (Dull, 2010, p. 116). Through cellular matter and organic proteins of nervous system, we respond and process stimuli. Traditional Chinese medicine describes the human body as having three "brains" that coincide with the division of the autonomic nervous system into three subsystems: the enteric, parasympathetic, and sympathetic systems. These systems are interwoven but are related to larger concentrations of neurons and neural activity in certain anatomical centers. The enteric nervous system is related to the gastro-intestinal tract and is the primary sensor of safety and nourishment (pp. 117-118). "If, we find ourselves in an environment of danger or lack, the intelligence of the enteric system will alert the sympathetic nervous system to

respond or react" (p. 118). The parasympathetic nervous system has its primary nerves running from the base of the brain to the sacrum and is connected to system balance, cellular regeneration, and healing. The sympathetic nervous system's primary nerves "expand outward from the nerve ganglia in the thoracic and lumbar regions of the spine" and activate modes of "choice, curiosity, individuality and expression" (p. 116). The sympathetic nervous system is the system that bridges inner needs with action and exploration of the outer environment. It also provides an alert state expressed "either in expansive clarity (response) or defensive alarm (reaction)" (p. 119). Passive sequencing in a sense confuses the sympathetic nervous system, which recognizes through tactile and proprioceptive sensing that the body is in motion, but the system itself is not relaying the triggers for activity.

Passive sequencing actually co-engages the sympathetic and parasympathetic systems simultaneously, as the systems are "mutual and supportive," and "thrive in a diverse environment of action and rest" (p. 120). Passive sequencing involves the receiver cultivating a state of rest while being moved, even if the moving becomes more dynamic and playful. The engagement of the parasympathetic system would explain how the process tends to rejuvenate dancers who may be tired or suffering from sore muscles. "Cells regenerate when the nervous system is in an open and unthreatened state of parasympathetic repose" (p. 114). It may be like a massage directly for the nervous system. It may also provide a break for our busy, social constructing ego and conscious directing mind.

Postsequencing Movement

The next step in the process was to leave the receiver in a postsequencing stillness and begin a variation of an Authentic Movement practice. Authentic Movement, developed from a process created by Mary Starks Whitehouse, involves one or several participants witnessing a soloist, whose eyes are closed, as he or she waits for inner impulses to follow into movement (Benoit-Nader, 1997; Buckwater, 2010). In this practice, "the body is the guide, and the mover takes a ride on the movement impulses as they emerge" (Benoit-Nader, 1997, p. 95). What I have taken from Authentic Movement is the basic structure of mover and witness along with an acceptance of all movement being valid. Even nonmovement (stillness) is valid. After receiving passive sequencing, the receiver is left in a resting position on the floor and encouraged to wait for movement impulses to occur, while the giver(s) remain nearby taking on the role of witness. Later in our work, we began to explore the witnesses joining the dancing and sometimes providing physical partnering.

Dancers described these first moments of stillness as if their bodies were trying to remember how to move. They described waiting for the impulse to reactivate or reconnect the neural pathways for movement. This is a fascinating paradoxical state to experience. We know on some level that we can instantly override our system into action with directed thought, but we instead remain witness to our own process of letting movement emerge - perhaps emerging from someplace mysterious. This pre-emergent state is akin to *still points* as described by Hugh Milne in his book, *A Visionary Approach to Craniosacral Work*.

Craniosacral work is a healing touch practice developed out of cranial osteopathy and involves gentle moving of the bones of the cranium, spine, and sacrum in order to facilitate the unrestricted flow of the cranial wave. There are three motion patterns found in the human body including breath, heartbeat, and the cranial wave, which is the subtlest (Milne, 1995). While somewhat mysterious, the cranial wave seems to originate from "involuntary muscle contractions that take place throughout the body in a tidal, ocean swell-like motion… transmitted to the spinal cord and brain via the spinal nerves, the bones of the cranial base, and the mediastinum" (p.166). This discreet rhythmic pulse affects all the bones and joints and even the brain itself. Craniosacral work focuses on discerning disturbances in the rhythm of the cranial wave and gently correcting its natural ebb and flow.

A craniosacral session may involve *unwinding* where the practitioner attempts to relieve trauma stored in the tissues and bones by following the arcs of movement suggested by the area being touched. Milne describes this touch as a *listening* or *Taoist Touch,* where "you begin to respond to the form and the dynamics of the tissues in the way you sense they are asking you to, not how you may think they need responding to" (p. 135). For me, this is similar to the state of offering passive sequencing, where we *create the dance that the receiver wishes to have*.

> Taoism points out that if you are trying, nothing magical can happen. So relax, and stop trying – allow the very concept of effort to drop away, and just listen to the voice of the tissues. In allowing your presence to deepen, let go of all the ideas of what is needed or not needed. Then a new world of silent guidance opens up. Then the tissues tell you what to do. (p. 135)

Craniosacral work may be integrated into many healing practices including massage therapy and energy work. When we hold and move our partner's skull in passive

sequencing, we engage in an extremely basic form of craniosacral work.

A *still point* in craniosacral practice describes a "spontaneous or induced cessation of the cranial wave formations" (p. 171). These are moments of rest, a pause, when the cranial wave formations are potentially reorganizing. When reaching a still point, the practitioner must wait to allow the client's own physical self to make an unwinding movement. It is a cusp moment achieved in a slightly altered state, a waiting, and a place to break from old patterns. "Still points allow the body's own optimum-seeking mechanisms to create a new pattern or revert to an older one. Still points can be induced in any bone, muscle or reciprocal tension membrane-related structure" (p. 138).

Passive sequencing shares with craniosacral work the practice of not only holding the skull but also moving the bones and muscles in various ways that encourage a deep release of tensions. The arcs of movement in passive sequencing are far larger than those of craniosacral work, but they do tend to follow the natural structure for sequential movement patterns in the body. This creates a similar process of unwinding, which combined with the receiver's passivity, tends to shift them into a meditative state. This state produces what Milne refers to as an "open-field consciousness – a nonjudgmental, non-doing, non-trying presence. This opens access to very deep levels of activity and information…" (p. 134). Milne's description of "open-field consciousness" could also describe the pre-expressive state of the decided body. When the dancer is finally left still with permission to move or not move, what emerges is a highly individual process akin to the body relearning or remembering how to move itself, without, at least initially, a directive consciousness. This may be similar to the reorganization that follows a still point.

An interesting aspect of the passive sequencing is that the process also affects the givers. An empathetic link is created between the givers and receivers over the extended amount of time. Both are physically connected through touch and energetically connected through the sequential "conversation" between their nervous systems. This link is revealed during the witnessing process when those who had been givers claimed to see or sense energy moving within the partners' resting bodies. To the witnesses, the still dancers emanated an energetic presence, even with little to no external movement.

When I was in the role of witness, I often shifted my gaze to a specific area of my partner's anatomy and after several seconds, movement would begin there. I referred to this as the *decided gaze*, since I did not consciously choose where or how I was looking, but it would happen when I was most present and attentive to witnessing. In these cases, I sometimes wondered if my eye was drawn to that place because the energy for movement was already building there, or if the energy was drawn to that location by my attention to it. Gary Zukav writes that in quantum mechanics, the observer alters what is observed (1979). "Observer and observed are interrelated in a real and fundamental sense. The exact nature of this interrelation is not clear, but there is a growing body of evidence that the distinction between the "in here" and the "out there" is illusion" (p. 92). So many synchronicities and unexplainable effects arose during this research process that we began to question the very concept of cause and effect. Within the conceptual framework of quantum mechanics, it is not that one cause and effect pattern (energy building in a location drawing my attention) or another (my attention drawing energy to a location) is the certain reality, but the *interaction* of witness and dancer that manifests possibility into movement. When dancers share a deeply empathetic connection to one

another and are acting from an intuitive state, their interactions do not follow a linear cause and effect progression and no decisions are being made. This is the state of the decided body as I use the term. We might also describe it as the *decided self*.

In some cases, in order to help facilitate the dancers' collaborative relationship, I seeded ideas or structures for the dancers to follow once movement emerged. I used the term 'seed' in order to circumvent the mind over body dialectic. It would be easy for the dancers to make my ideas happen, but this would undermine the research objectives. So instead, I asked that they let the seed ideas lie dormant and wait to see if the idea manifested organically from the body during the process. The dancers never consciously made something happen, but let it emerge. This worked even better than I expected. As an example, in one rehearsal, I seeded the idea for two dancers to have a partner dance. After receiving passive sequencing, the two would be left somewhere in the space. With their eyes remaining closed and without making it happen, the seed was that they would eventually find each other and partner. I asked them to avoid hunting for the other, but to know that they would eventually be partnering.

After receiving the passive sequencing, the two dancers were left about 30 feet apart in the space. Another dancer and I witnessed their emergence. There was very minimal shifting in both for several minutes, but then at exactly the same moment, both rolled to their right and into mirroring positions. The two of us witnessing were shocked by how perfectly synchronized and unexpected the movement was. One dancer then began to slowly rise to his feet. However, with each movement, he seemingly aligned himself with his still partner. He then traveled backwards through the space in almost a direct line to her. She remained quietly still on the floor while he gradually sank down.

He reached his hand back just as she shifted her torso and they connected with a small jolt of surprise. Neither was sure where the other was, though later they confessed to suspecting that they had gotten close. Both dancers claimed to have kept their eyes closed during the entire movement exploration and avoided consciously listening for the other. However, they were deeply connected and had the tendency to be drawn to each other. Such moments were not uncommon in the process, and I hoped to keep the quality of these interactions in the more conscious choreography that emerged from these rehearsal experiences.

Observing Postsequencing Dancing

In witnessing the movement that arises from the dancers postsequencing, I have come to label three basic movement modes: *decided movement*, *desire-based movement,* and *choice-based movement*. There may actually be many more movement modes, plus these three modes describe distinct stages in movement that may often blur or overlap in degrees of prevalence. Choice-based movement manifests from an idea or thought as the impulse for movement. This mode reveals choice making at play and follows a linear development of pattern. By contrast, desire-based movement is a less conscious shifting of the body, typically for comfort or following a pleasure-based impulse. The third mode I named *decided movement* in order to represent that it is movement arising from the state of the decided body. Decided movement is revealed by an unconscious movement impulse. There is no preparation to a decided movement and the dancer appears unconsciously motivated. To me, decided movement is the most mysterious and most delicate mode to maintain. Often a decided movement may shift once the dancer begins to consciously develop the motifs that began unconsciously. Occasionally, a dancer can

continue to shift through the various movement modes, though typically, there is a progression towards more choice-based movement.

The postsequencing movement practice also reveals the differences between what I consider habitual patterns of movement and movement tendencies. Through my experiences of observing dance and improvisation, I have come to identify two distinct patterns of movement. The first is a *habituated pattern*, which is a learned pattern arising either consciously or unconsciously. Dance techniques create learned patterns for the individual that are often revealed when inexperienced improvisers cycle through their familiar ways of moving. Habituated patterns can also be learned through unconscious repetition. These patterns are also revealed by dissociation between intention and action, when the pattern overrides embodiment.

The concept of movement *tendencies* assumes that individuals have some essential patterns in how the body moves and responds to the environment. Tendencies are recognizable patterns, which often reemerge. The dancer tends to move in specific ways or tends to inhabit certain qualities. Tendencies may be reflections of personality and the development of a movement style may arise from a dancer noticing their tendencies and then consciously practicing them, until they become habituated patterns.

My use of the term *tendency* is drawn from quantum physics where scientists observe that subatomic particles act in ways that are not laws but predictable tendencies. "Quantum mechanics views subatomic particles as 'tendencies to exist' or 'tendencies to happen.' How strong these tendencies are is expressed in terms of probabilities" (Zukav, 1979, p. 32). Due to their tendencies, particles will probably move in specific ways, or be attracted to each other, but not always. I noticed that in the Authentic Movement

practice after passive sequencing, dancers' revealed individual tendencies by repeatedly generating similar movement themes or qualities. When habituated patterns arose, they had a distinctly different nature. Habituated patterns revealed a more precise shaping in the body of the dancer and followed a more prescriptive succession of movement events. There was also a shift in the energetic presence of the dancer between habituated patterns and tendencies. Tendencies flowed from qualitative interest and the dancer remained fully present in the how of doing the movement. In contrast, habituated patterns of movement are action oriented and their familiarity created a momentary disconnect of the dancers attention. They are performed in a more matter-of-fact manner. Choreographically, my interest was in building one dance based on tendencies and another dance that accentuated the shifts between tendencies and habituated patterns. My hope was that the passive sequencing practice would prepare the dancers and myself to perform both of these dances from a state of the decided body.

CHAPTER 4

THE RATHER LONG GOODBYE

> *The only real 'you' is the one that comes and goes, manifests and withdraws itself eternally in and as every conscious being. For 'you' is the universe looking at itself from billions of points of view, points that come and go so that the vision is forever new.* (Watts, 1966, p. 130)

The Rather Long Goodbye was structured into three main sections called, 1) *the one that comes and goes*, 2) *arrested thought*, and 3) *the goodbye*. My initial concept for the piece was inspired Alan Watts's philosophy on the nature of the self as described in *The Book*. Watts claims that, "The prevalent sensation of oneself as a separate ego enclosed in a bag of skin is a hallucination which accords neither with Western science nor with the experimental philosophy-religions of the East" (1966, p. ix). My research explored the possibility of removing (or making less prevalent) the "I" or this constructed sense of self from the performer within the equation of choreography. I suspected that by circumventing or transcending the "I," the dancer would reveal more of her/his self. This is a contradiction I noticed in improvisation and sometimes in other situations where an individual's energetic presence is manifested. These moments typically arose in moments of unselfconsciousness. How then to create this unselfconscious state and, from there, begin to construct a dance?

When one is busily presenting their selfness, what sociologist Eric Goffman refers to as the everyday social construction of the self, then one loses this aspect of presence

(1959). However, when one is engaged in an activity and fully invested in the process of that activity, one tends to lose this mask of social self-consciousness. For Watts, the only real "I" is the whole endless process, the action of becoming human and living:

> Thus when the line between myself and what happens to me is dissolved and there is no stronghold left for an ego even as a passive witness, I find myself not *in* a world but *as* a world which is neither compulsive nor capricious. What happens is neither automatic nor arbitrary: it just happens and all happenings are mutually interdependent in a way that seems unbelievably harmonious. (p. 124)

My research was to connect to this endless process through the practice of passive sequencing and then discover what happenings tended to arise and repeat. These emergent tendencies then became decided choreography.

We began discovering these emergent tendencies through the consistent rehearsal process of improvising postpassive sequencing with the other dancer as witness. Following an improvisation, the witness and dancer would share what they noticed. We also videotaped many of our rehearsals and gleaned material from watching the dances again. As rehearsals continued, I added to our working process; after finishing an improvisation, the dancer would start again by dancing the memory of the dance. In this practice, the dancer attempted to let the body remember the dance, even when the mind was unsure that the dance was the same. We practiced following sensation and trusting the felt memory of the dance instead of attempting to recreate images of specific forms. The key became accepting the paradox that the state of remembering could continue even when we shifted back into improvised movement. This paradox of remembering the dance that we were in the process of creating reproduced the 'to be decided' state from which our tendencies emerged.

I called these tendencies "decided" because they continued to arise

unselfconsciously. Once identified, these unconscious tendencies became conscious. To keep tendencies from becoming rigidly patterned into movement habits, we never connected them together into a specific order. "The problem is: how can the performer, who knows the succession of the actions which must be carried out, be present in each action and make successive action appear like a surprise for herself and for the spectator?" (Barba, p. 212). I solved this by shaping choreography from the movement tendencies, but kept the succession of actions unknown, or 'to be decided.' Our practice was to remain empty vessels and allow ourselves to be danced. Watts describes this active allowance as being in the flow of an activity; "there is a certain passivity to the sensation, as if you were a leaf blown along by the wind" (p. 125). If one tries to forcibly hold onto the flow or becomes overly self conscious within it, the flow stops or becomes a struggle. When I perform the solo and am dancing well, I feel a sense of unfolding choreography, a sense of "leaf in the wind," a decidedness, even while shaping the flow of the dance to follow the greater structure of the piece.

Note: Since both another dancer and myself performed versions of the solo *The Rather Long Goodbye*, I will use the plural "we" when describing the general aspects of the piece. I will specify who is dancing only when discussing individual variations.

Section 1 - *the one that comes and goes*

We began the piece by walking onto the unlit stage until the stage. We would stop as the lights suddenly came on and take in the lit space. As a surprise response, we tended to shift our weight back onto our right leg with our hands at our hip crease. In this position, we remained still for a few seconds. This stillness related to the stillness after passive sequencing when our bodies struggle to remember how to move. As our studio

practice repeatedly involved dancing the memory of an earlier dance, I noticed we both tended to look up and to the right when accessing memory. Individuals will code and store sensory information through various representational systems (visual, auditory, kinesthetic, etc.) that can be triggered by where the eyes shift. In this way, our eyes reveal the maps of our internal sensory experiences (Robbins, 1989, p. 124). Our eyes actually trigger the neural pathways to elicit a specific state of remembering. For both of us, that involved looking up to the right, a common trigger for visual memory. Our initial impulse was to see the memory of the dance in our minds eye. However, once we began moving, we tended to drop our focus to the left, indicating a kinesthetic representation memory (p. 127). We set these pathways of looking as choreography to help trigger the qualitative state for dancing.

In my own process dancing this solo, I noticed that turning my head to the right creates a release of my left shoulder so that my left arm begins to rise. When I look down to the left, my right shoulder releases my right arm into movement. By the time I shift my focus back to my right arm dancing, I recognize that I am in a highly sensitized kinesthetic state triggered by following the choreography of these neural pathways.

In the first minute and a half of the dance, we embodied the initial memories of movements we would more fully reenact later, once the music arrived. The last of these movements was to brush our right hand along the floor before floating the arm upwards and rising back to standing. At this point, we abruptly dropped the dancing and walked upstage right to where we initially entered the stage. We repeated walking along the same diagonal until the music begins – completing the theatrical environment of lights, sound, and performance. We then repeated a more fully articulated version of the movement

phrases. Once we arrived at the arm floating up from the floor, the dance proceeded by our shifting through any number of states and movement motifs developed from our tendencies. Our decided body consciousness danced, "as if different voices, different thoughts, each with its own logic, were simultaneously present and began to collaborate in an unplanned way, combining precision and fortuitousness, enjoyment of the game for its own sake and tension towards a result" (Barba, 1991, p. 59). These were all brief moments that tended to arise in rehearsal, or that we set, or that surprised us within any particular performance. This was the dance of decided choreography.

In our rehearsals, we improvised out of passive sequencing to generate and identify a series of possible movement phrases. I set the material in this section by studying our tendencies and habits. The tendencies revealed themselves in movement themes. An example would be the dancer's tendency to explore enclosing across her centerline with her arms and legs, folding inwards and then opening out. She never repeated the movements in exactly the same way, but she tended to move in that theme at some point while dancing. Habits are revealed, as specific movements like a favorite turn learned from technique class. The action of shooting a basketball is a highly engrained habitual sequence in me so it is easy to trigger and fulfill. We selected several movement habits to add to our choreography to contrast the more explorative tendency-based movement. For the tendencies, I encouraged in-the-moment variations as a way to train us to trust that with each performance, the expression would be as it should be. In this way, we allowed the variations 'to be decided' for each performance.

A major difference in how this piece was performed is that I am more practiced in performance improvisation and willing to trust the dance to be decided. The other dancer

was less fluent in performance improvisation and did not trust her decided body as much. She began to set an order to her shifts and created transitions to link phrases. In this way, she did not allow herself to be surprised by her self to the degree I did. However, her ability to be fully present in performance, whether in long phrases of movement or in simply looking out at the audience, shaped her version of the piece.

Section 2 – *arrested thought*

The second section arrived decided one day in the studio as I worked alone. I was dancing the memory of her dance from the day before, when I found myself remembering new material. I walked to the studio mirror and sought to share my thoughts with my reflection, but in the exact moment of speaking, I forgot what I was going to say. And then I remembered, but forgot again, and continued repeating this over and over. The thought or desire to speak rose in my chest. I breathed in to support my voice. I leaned forward to energetically express my desire, but then it all dropped away. Frustrated, I closed my eyes and shifted my focus inward. My hands touched my face and body, in an attempt to connect to my inner self. This attempt was further mirrored by the outward action of unbuttoning my shirt, a stripping away to reveal the inner self that cannot be expressed. My eyes opened in the simple realization that now I knew what to say, but with my shirt open and heart exposed, I no longer needed to speak it.

Though the choreography of this section arrived decided, the difficulty came in rehearsing how to perform it. We needed to connect to the felt experience sensed in the desire to speak, instead of actually thinking of something to say before each action of trying to speak. To think first and then move is too slow. Theater director Peter Brook recognized this cognitive process back in 1968 when he wrote in his seminal work *The*

Empty Space, “A word does not start as a word – it is an end product which begins as an impulse, stimulated by attitude and behavior which dictate the need for expression” (p. 12). We needed to be already in the act of expressing before we knew what to express.

I discovered when reading Mark Johnson’s *The Meaning of the Body* the work of psychotherapist and phenomenologist Eugene Gendlin, which seems to aptly describe this portion of the dance. Gendlin’s project explores the feeling sense that underlies linguistically based thought structures and expressions. Gendlin proposes, “to think – about and with – that which exceeds patterns (forms, concepts, definitions, categories, distinctions, rules…)” (as cited in Johnson, 2007, p. 80). Gendlin proposes not only an analysis, but also a practical application of embodied thought. Gendlin’s work speculates on the phenomenon of suddenly stopping midsentence when the right wording fails us. “The words were flowing out just fine, and then all of a sudden they stumble or stop. The ‘stopping’ feels a certain way, and it feels very different from the flow of thought that went on before” (p. 79). More importantly, the question arises of “*where* exactly is this so-called meaning that you are trying to express?”

> It is not merely in the words themselves, although it is not wholly independent of them either. The words help carry it forward, and make it present. But meaning is in what you think and feel and do, and it lies in recurring qualities, patterns, and structures of experience that are, for the most part, unconsciously and automatically shaping how you understand, how you choose, and how you express yourself. You *have* meaning, or are *caught up* in meaning, before you actually experience meaning reflectively. (p. 79)

Gendlin describes a story of a poet searching for the right words to express a felt sense. The poet may try and discard many different phrases until finding the ones that properly fill in the blank that she is attempting to describe. So in reasoning and meaning making, Gendlin and Johnson theorize that there is a nonlinguistic dimension. This is not

a preverbal dimension, because one feels there are words or symbolic expressions that are appropriate for the situation; they just need to be found. This felt sense is not vague but "so precise that it rejects many candidate expressions as inadequate" (p. 82). Further, Gendlin does not refer strictly to language only as linguistic symbols but "all forms of symbolic interaction, from music to painting to dance to ritual to gesture to sign language" (p. 83). For Gendlin, when confronted with the failure to find a precise symbolic articulation for felt meaning, expression simply stops. If this expression is embodied in movement (or dance), then the movement simply stops.

In this section, we needed to tap into the physical impulse of wanting to speak, to share something, while instantaneously cutting off that same impulse. The choreography involved recognizing the physical impulses and recreating them without the strict cause of an identifiable thought or emotion. We practiced by facing each other or by looking in the mirror and quickly attempting to share thoughts out loud. I noticed a physical connection between a sudden inhale as the upper torso rose and shifted forward initiated from the heart area. My body leaned forward into space to help propel my words forward. My mouth opened to shape words but then all energy was cut off and my movement arrested. As I began to retreat back, the impulse to express rose again and I flowed forward only to lose it again. The key was to connect the impulse to speak with the movement of the breath.

This section was designed not for the audience to *think* we might speak, but for them to *feel* we might speak. Children were attuned to this. I had children in the audience call out to me during a performance, encouraging me to get out what they felt I needed to say. This section was perhaps the most difficult to perform, to live within a

paradox of searching for words, while knowing we will fail, yet engaging the audience through a variety of rhythmic timings. I considered it a ride. I attempted to keep building the tension as long as I could, until surrendering to the gesture of unbuttoning my shirt and revealing my heart. The practice was to follow my decided body through the performance.

Section 3 – *the goodbye*

The choreography in this last section was set as a successive whole to contrast the fragmentary nature of the first section. We revisited several spatial pathways and movement motifs from the first section, including our hand brushing the floor and floating up to bring us to our feet. The single moment of unset movement occurred when the gestural motif of the shoulder bumping into the cheek built into a chaotic frenzy of tossing our bodies back and forth, until becoming caught in a suspended gesture of goodbye.

In our rehearsals, we discovered a kinesthetic connection between the impulse patterns of trying to speak, reaching for a hug, and gesturing goodbye. Each of these patterns followed an impulse from the core that initiated a forward motion in the upper torso with a slight rise. This core impulse radiated out distally to cause the arms and hands to rise in a reaching gesture. At the end of the piece, we cycled through these three impulse-gestures, blending them into one combined gesture aimed at the absent presence downstage right, as we slowly exited along the diagonal to upstage left.

This last section was performed to the song *The Very Thought of You* and as was common in music of the 1930s, the first half is solely instrumental with the lyrics coming in during the latter half of the song. Several audience members mentioned to me later

that they were surprised, yet also relieved when singing began. They felt that our expressive attempts throughout the piece were finally fulfilled on a linguistic level by the vocals. For me, the piece progressed through many layers of expressive meaning produced by the decided body. Embodied expressions do not necessitate words and how those layers were interpreted intellectually and/or felt by the audience was where the art resided. The arrival of the vocals added a linguistic layer of meaning. The piece was not designed to show an evolutionary progression towards linguistic expression, but for the audience members who interpreted the dance in this way, I enjoyed hearing this response.

CHAPTER 5

ABSENT LOVER

The state in which you begin work determines the quality
of the material found. (Tufnell & Crickmay, 1993, p.1).

I began rehearsals on *The Rather Long Goodbye* a month before gathering together the group of dancers who would help me to create *Absent Lover.* I chose to approach the rehearsal process for both pieces with the same initial structure of using passive sequencing followed by improvisation to both train the dancers in the quality of the decided body and to begin to develop the movement vocabulary and choreographic structures for the piece. For this quartet, I focused on the concept of absence, or that which is not present. This arose from several influences but in particular from the passive sequencing work itself, where the absence of conscious intention created a sense of presence in the individual. I wondered if passive sequencing might provide the means to create a movement vocabulary that expressed a sense of absence. I further wondered how else I might access presence in the choreography and performance of a dance work through the construction of absence.

The absences that came to be important considerations in the work included the absence of physical forms (empty space), the absence of physical bodies (phantom bodies/negative space), and the absence of emotional connections (felt memories of

absent lovers). This progression moves from a more general outer awareness of absence toward specific sense manifestations of absence: not just an awareness of absence, but seeing its shape, feeling its texture, and experiencing its affects upon the inner life. The use of memory, kinesthetic and visual, was key in creating these various states of absence for the dancers. Our use of lighting was key in creating an environment of absence for the audience.

Even before rehearsals began, I considered space and how to activate the stage space where dancers were not present. "Like silence and stillness we experience space as an absence, an interval or relationship between things" (Tufnell & Crickmay, 1993, p. 82). The architecture of the stage space where we would be performing needed to be considered as I shaped the work. I chose to create an *architecture of absence* with the lighting design. Whenever I pictured a specific way the lighting could shape both the space and the choreography, I spoke with our lighting designer to be certain my ideas were possible or, if not, what his closest solution might be. When I knew the lighting supported the architecture of absence I envisioned, then I would shape the choreography to it.

One of the designs for this architecture of absence included using the lighting to create a vast landscape in which a dancer or several dancers moved. This was akin to the romantic landscape paintings of Casper David Friedrich where a single figure stands alone, regarding the grandeur of nature. More recently, widescreen movies in the Western genre, made by the likes of John Ford or Sergio Leone, contain scenes where the hero's isolation is revealed against the expansive landscape of the American West. Often in lighting design a single spotlight is used to focus attention on a singular stage element.

In this design, the singular element is framed by the darkness of the rest of the stage. However, I wanted to activate the whole space, including the areas not being used by the dancers, in order to isolate them within a landscape of absence. Darkness evokes one sense of absence (absence of light) but bare space creates a different sense of absence (emptiness). We used both designs at different times in the piece.

Another image of mine included a wall of light that shone in front of a dancer that she could move in and out of. This light came from the side, so it would not register as a lit shape on the floor. The designer chose to fill the stage with haze to reveal the presence of the light. The first image of the piece was this wall light suspended in space. Then a dancer began to move slightly forward into the light, becoming partially illuminated, before backing away again, into the darkness. She repeated this forward and back movement, becoming present to the audience and then receding into absence. The next lighting event illuminated the upstage scrim in a deep blue, which added an element of depth to the stage while shifting the dancer into a silhouette. As a silhouette, she embodied another image of absence. The audience saw the shape of her body dancing as a dark hole against the field of blue. The sense of her absence was accentuated by a clearly lit duet happening downstage. These are just two examples of the use of lighting to create the architecture of absence for the work.

Each of our rehearsals began with the process of passive sequencing followed by time for the dancers to explore the stillness and movements that arose. I watched the dancers move and looked for their tendencies in both solo and partnering movement. As rehearsals continued, dancers began to reveal more nuanced and subtle articulations post-passive sequencing. When fully present with the movement, a dancer can express a lot

with very little action, and when bigger movements are required, a detailed clarity is nuanced in the performance.

We began to construct sections of the dance based upon *movement meditations*. We created these movement meditations by identifying a dancer's movement tendency and then asking her/him to find a name or an image for what they were doing. In this way, we developed a shared language and the dancers metaphorically mapped out a link to access these states of moving. By linking the name or image to the movement and accompanying feeling state, the dancers' were creating their own *gateways* neurologically to quickly access specific material. "In this way acting is mediumistic – the idea suddenly envelops the whole in an act of possession" (Brook, 1968, p. 109). When dancers focused on moving from a qualitative state, then their primary expression became the sense of that state. Instead of following a set pattern of movement, dancers followed their named tendencies as a movement meditation and the choreography.

In watching the dancing, I noticed the embodied qualities of movement more than the specific shape forms created by the dancers. However, dancers sometimes shifted their focus away from quality and instead focused on reproducing the shape patterns of previous material. When this happened, the presence of embodied quality diminished. I continually reminded the dancers to focus on accessing the qualitative state of the movement meditation as the choreography. When working on presence, Barba states, "One does not work on the body or the voice, one works on energy" (p. 55). Our movement meditations involved an investment of energy and attention that informed the movement in subtle ways that were absent when the dancers' focus shifted to creating form, instead of finding form through investigating quality.

The dancers eventually trusted my intention to build the piece more from the qualities expressed in the movement meditations than from setting steps and prefigured choreography. What I saw, and what they eventually developed the sense for, was that when fully embodying a certain quality, they tended to manifest and repeat specific forms and patterns of movement. These movement tendencies became set only through the dancers' commitment to the meditations by which they moved. Even the partnering work was built from this method. Once the dancers gained confidence in the working process, I could then set choreographic details such as facings, sculptural elements, and specific timings. At this point in the process, I felt my role was more as a director than choreographer. "A director is not free of responsibility – he is totally responsible – but he is not free of the process either, he is a part of it" (Brook, 1968, p. 108).

As rehearsals progressed, the passive sequencing further informed our work in subtle ways. The dancers' sensitivity to touch became heightened and I saw this lingering kinesthetic memory informing the improvisations where dancers moved as if yearning for the return of contact. Often, without even being aware of doing so, they would roll, reach, or even rise to their feet to travel towards a witness or another dancer.

One rehearsal we experimented with a process of repeated and then absent hugging. A dancer with eyes closed stepped forward into an embrace with another dancer. They would hold this for a moment and then slowly pull away from each other. The dancer with eyes closed stepped back and then stepped forward again to embrace the negative space of the missing body – reenacting the felt experience. They then stepped back and then stepped forward again to physically embrace another dancer. This process repeated as the dancer with closed eyes followed a rhythm of stepping forward into an

embrace present or absent, and then stepping back. Eventually, the physical bodies stopped coming and the dancer let their movement evolve from the rhythm of their steps and the tactile memories. The whole cast was taken aback by how beautiful and emotionally sad these dances became. This practice informed the choreography of both the opening and ending sections of the piece.

My intention to shape the piece through qualitative states and movement meditations relied on clear structures for the dancers, while keeping some of the improvisational and 'to be decided' edge to the performing. Steve Paxton suggests that the companionship of technique and improvisation builds a more complex instrument (body) for performance. For Paxton, improvisation asks questions while technique searches for answers. "Once you can perform something properly, once you have the technique physically, maybe some part of the process of searching stops. But with improvisation the questions never stop" (Benoit-Nader, 1997, p. 53). In this spirit, I strove to create choreography for the dancers where they felt confident in performing yet still maintained the state of presence of the decided body. Jonathan Burrows asks in *A Choreographer's Handbook,*

> When you work from other physicalities…can the material be ordered the way that other movement materials – for instance steps – might be ordered? Or could the process for ordering the material come from an equivalent emotional, sensory, philosophical, conceptual, or intellectual source as the material itself, or from the process by which you found the material? (2010, p. 100)

For the various sections of the piece, I structured the choreography differently, depending on what the material needed to express. Certain sections had set steps while other sections were structured by movement meditations along spatial pathways for the dancer to reinterpret in each performance.

The dancers in one duet improvised on an image of *small fallings* that initiated swings and turns. For me, these small fallings accessed the extra-daily balance that Barba describes. The kinesthetic image of small fallings led the dancers to release in their joints to initiate a shift of weight into movement. This created an image of dancers launching themselves off balance and gracefully falling through movement. We developed the choreography based on where their bodies tended to go in space. The challenge for the dancers was in tracking the different spatial pulls needed for counter-balances and shifts in direction. The dancing shifted between natural flows of movement and contradictory initiations that pulled dancers off balance. During one performance of this duet, a dancer added a graceful drop to the floor, into a roll and then rising. She had not intended that choreography but had slipped on stage. However, she was so immersed in the energetic quality of the movement that her fall instantly became decided choreography.

One challenge to this process was that as dancers gained familiarity with the movement, they often began to homogenize the dynamics of phrasing by resorting to habitual baseline tempos or rhythms. This was sometimes difficult for a dancer to sense, so I directed them in finding stops, suspensions, and specific timing shifts. A large portion of my process focused on practices to let the body lead or decide movement choices. This attempted to address a cultural philosophy of a mind/body dichotomy and a mind over body hierarchy. Steve Paxton agrees with the Buddhist perspective that he says “includes the mind as one of the senses” (1987, p. 16). I interpret this perspective to mean the mind and bodily sensations - in connection with the environment; all collaborate in creating articulate dancing. When a dancer learns to sense this tendency to

homogenize movement or tempo, then she/he can initiate a shift or rhythmic change.

Barba describes rhythm as "a particular way of flowing" (p. 210). Through this research, I became aware of the vital practice of constantly shifting microrhythms in performance. This practice transforms the human perception of time by transforming the natural rhythms of the body. Barba calls this technique *negating action.*

> To execute an action while negating it means inventing an infinity of micro-rhythms within it. And this obliges one to be one hundred per cent in the action one is carrying out. The successive action will then be born as a surprise for the spectator and for oneself. (p. 212)

This is a difficult skill for performers to embody. It is further complicated by the awareness that not only must rhythms change, "but the rate at which they change must also change" (Burrows, 2010, p. 87). This is the paradox of finding the flow of the movement, but then needing to create microrhythmic disruptions within that flow. Dancers tend to unconsciously embody this skill of negating action after receiving passive sequencing. While receiving passive sequencing, dancers could fully attend to the inner sensorial microdetails of movement. Repeated sessions gradually trained them to consciously engage microrhythms in their dancing.

While the performers' learned to inhabit the various qualitative states that made up the dance, I structured the space and environment in which the dance would live. "Choreography is a way to set up a performance that takes care of some of the responsibility for what happens, enough that the performer is free to perform" (Burrows, 2010, p. 105). In our work, this meant facilitating a process to make the dancers aware of their tendencies and then shaping these into choreography, as I described. On a few occasions, the instant dancers began moving, I already knew the shape of an entire section of the dance. It was *decided choreography*. Merce Cunningham wrote, "if it is

there, we do not have to pretend that we have to put it there" (2005, p. 55). In these moments, I did not choose what to choreograph, but just left the choreography 'to be decided.'

CONCLUSION

With the conclusion of our performances, I felt sad that our process was ending. I mentioned to the dancers that we could continue meeting once a week over the next semester to continue exploring passive sequencing but in a more open improvisational format. By the end of winter break, all the dancers requested that we begin meeting again even without a specific goal or performance to work towards. Obviously, there is something especially resonant about this work and the process we developed of passive sequencing into the variation of Authentic Movement improvisations. While I acknowledge the bond created when dancing together as part of a shared creative process, I feel this group accessed and witnessed deeper expressions of themselves through this particular practice. We began to shed the ego constructions of our social selves and lived, moved, and expressed from a more unfiltered sense of self. Whatever each dancer's individual reasons for continuing were, I am glad we chose to continue.

I feel there are many possibilities to explore through the passive sequencing process. My intention was to use the process towards opening up our movement vocabulary and to explore a new way of generating and organizing material for creating dances. In this, we were successful. Through very similar working processes, we generated two very distinct dances and even two distinct versions of the same solo. This leads me to believe that the process can generate many more possible dances. I wonder what potential modes of performing and methods for organizing performances are

possible if the same group of dancers continued the process over a long period of time. I do know that several of the dancers have begun incorporating passive sequencing into their own working processes and I am interested to witness what they generate.

The next step for me is investigating how to capture the presence of the decided body on video. I recorded more than half of our rehearsals, including portions of the passive sequencing sessions, postsequencing improvisations, and setting choreography. The dancers and I were fascinated with the footage, partly in order to reconstruct what happened during incompletely remembered improvisations and partly to witness our own unfamiliar movement patterns emerging from the passive sequencing. This footage was shot for documentation using a stationary camera on a tripod. I am interested to explore artistically capturing the energetic presence of the dancers and the beautiful small dances that emerge during the earliest moments after passive.

Besides being a practice towards choreography and performance, passive sequencing proved useful in the teaching of Contact Improvisation. I facilitated sessions in passive sequencing in CI classes for both majors and nonmajors. In CI, the experience of moving a partner, along with exploring joint articulation and the weight of a partner's body, are all valuable lessons. Just the skill of allowing one's self to be passive is challenging and informative. For a kinesiology class, passive sequencing can provide valuable hands-on experience of the architecture of the bones, the mobility of the joints, and the modes of sequencing through the entire body. In technique classes, passive sequencing could be used as an initial warm in to moving at the beginning of class. The process encourages a deeper somatic awareness of the moving body. One of my dancers shared with me that her dancing had changed since beginning our process. She no longer

approached technique class as a mere attempt to replicate the movement offered by the instructor, but to also experience the feeling states generated in her own body by new modes of moving. In each case, the process of passive sequencing enlivens the felt experience of moving for the dancers.

My process of exploring Barba's concept of the decided body was to connect with a lived experience in my own dancing and performing and to give it a name. By naming the experience, I hoped to understand it more deeply and then be able to articulate it to others. While I associate a certain aesthetic with the decided body – a sense of being moved by internal or external sources, a certain fluidity with the outward socially based constructions of the ego-self or identity, and a focus on extra-daily techniques over daily techniques or techniques of virtuosity – I do not feel that in order to access the decided body I need to always frame my work within this aesthetic. I am not interested in creating an aesthetic of passivity. Passive sequencing and the decided body are not aesthetic goals. They are processes towards creating greater freedom of movement and expression. In the state of the decided body, a "performer manifests a quality and an energetic radiation which is presence ready to be transformed into dance or theatre according to convention or tradition," or any mode of experimental performance (Barba, p. 190).

My research is not about getting past or devaluing training in techniques of virtuosity. All cultural bodies are trained bodies, dancers especially, but we are also virtuosically human. We can embrace the body's need to release tensions created from these cultural and virtuosic trainings as part of the process of integration. Passive sequencing reduces us to a certain 'humanness,' allowing the body to reveal less

consciously filtered impulses. The social mask disappears and the face of the dancer glows. In this way, passive sequencing helps train the performer to achieve the extra-daily technique of the decided body. Within the decided body, a dancer drops the self-conscious doing of the movement or choreography and just moves. They are available for any possible articulation, including resonant stillness. I found this aspect of training in extra-daily techniques missing from my experiences in the dance world. As the genres of concert dance and theatre continue to intertwine, I feel that dancers need the support of a training that addresses aspects of both virtuosic and extra-daily techniques, in order to meet the demands of contemporary performance.

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Albright, A. C., & Gere, D. (Eds.). (2003). *Taken by surprise: A dance improvisation reader.* Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press.

Barba, E., & Savarese, N. (1991). *A dictionary of theatre anthropology: The secret art of the performer.* New York, NY: Routledge.

Batson, G., & Wilson, M. (2014). *Body and mind in motion: Dance and neuroscience in conversation.* Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Benoit-Nader, A. (Ed.). (1997). *On the edge: Dialogues on dance improvisation in performance.* Brussels, Belgium: Contredanse.

Brook, P. (1968). *The empty space.* New York, NY: Simon & Schuster.

Brown, C. (2007). *Chance and circumstance: Twenty years with Cage and Cunningham.* New York, NY: Alfred Knopf.

Buckwater, M. (2010). *Composing while dancing: An improviser's companion.* Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press.

Burrows, J. (2010). *A choreographer's handbook.* New York, NY: Routledge.

Cull, L. (Ed.). (2009). *Deleuze and performance.* Edinburgh, Scotland: Edinburgh University Press.

Cunningham, M. (2005). The impermanent art. In D. Vaughn & M. Harris (Eds.), *Merce Cunningham: 50 years* (pp. 86-87). New York, NY: Aperture. (Original work published 1960).

Daly, A. (2002). *Critical gestures: Writing on dance and culture.* Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press.

Davis, B. (1974). *Releasing into process: Joan Skinner and the use of imagery in the teaching of dance* (Masters thesis). University of Illinois, Urbana.

Dull, H. (2010). *Watsu: Basic and explorer path.* Middletown, CA: Watsu Publishing.

Frost, K. (2012). The Passive Sequencing work. Retrieved from http://www.bodyresearch.org/contact-improvisation/body-research-approach-to-ci/the-passive-sequencing-work/

Goffman, E. (1959). *The presentation of self in everyday life.* Garden City, NY: Doubleday Anchor Books.

Johnson, M. (2007). *The meaning of the body: Aesthetics of human understanding.* Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.

Kleist, H. (1989). On the marionette theatre (R. Paska, Trans.). In M. Feher (Ed.), *Fragments for a history of the human body: Part one* (pp. 415-420). New York, NY: Zone Books. (Original work published 1810).

Lidell, L. (1984). *The book of massage: The complete step-by-step guide to Eastern and Western techniques.* New York, NY: Simon & Schuster.

Masunaga, S. (1977). *Zen Shiatsu: How to harmonize yin and yang for better health* (W. Ohashi, Trans.). Tokyo, Japan: Japan Publication, Inc.

Milne, A. (1995). *The heart* of *listening: A visionary approach to craniosacral work* (Vols. 1-2). Berkley, CA: North Atlantic Books.

Myss, C. (1996). *Anatomy of the spirit: The seven stages of power and healing.* New York, NY: Three Rivers Press.

Paxton, S. (1987). Improvisation is a word for something that can't keep a name. *Contact Quarterly*, *12*(1), 15-19.

Paxton, S. (1988). "Fall after Newton" Transcript. *Contact Quarterly*, *13*(1), 38-39.

Paxton, S. (2015). Why Standing? *Contact Quarterly, 40*(1), 37-40.

Robbins, A. (1989). *Unlimited power: The new science of personal achievement.* London, England: Simon & Schuster.

Shepard, R. (1971). *Mime: The technique of silence.* New York, NY: Drama Books Specialists.

Tufnell, M., & Crickmay, C. (1993). *Body, space, image: Notes towards improvisation and performance.* Hampshire, England: Dance Books Ltd.

Watts, A. (1966). *The book: On the taboo against knowing who you are.* New York, NY: Vintage Books.

Zukav, G. (1980). *The dancing Wu Li masters: An overview of the new physics.* New York, NY: Bantam.