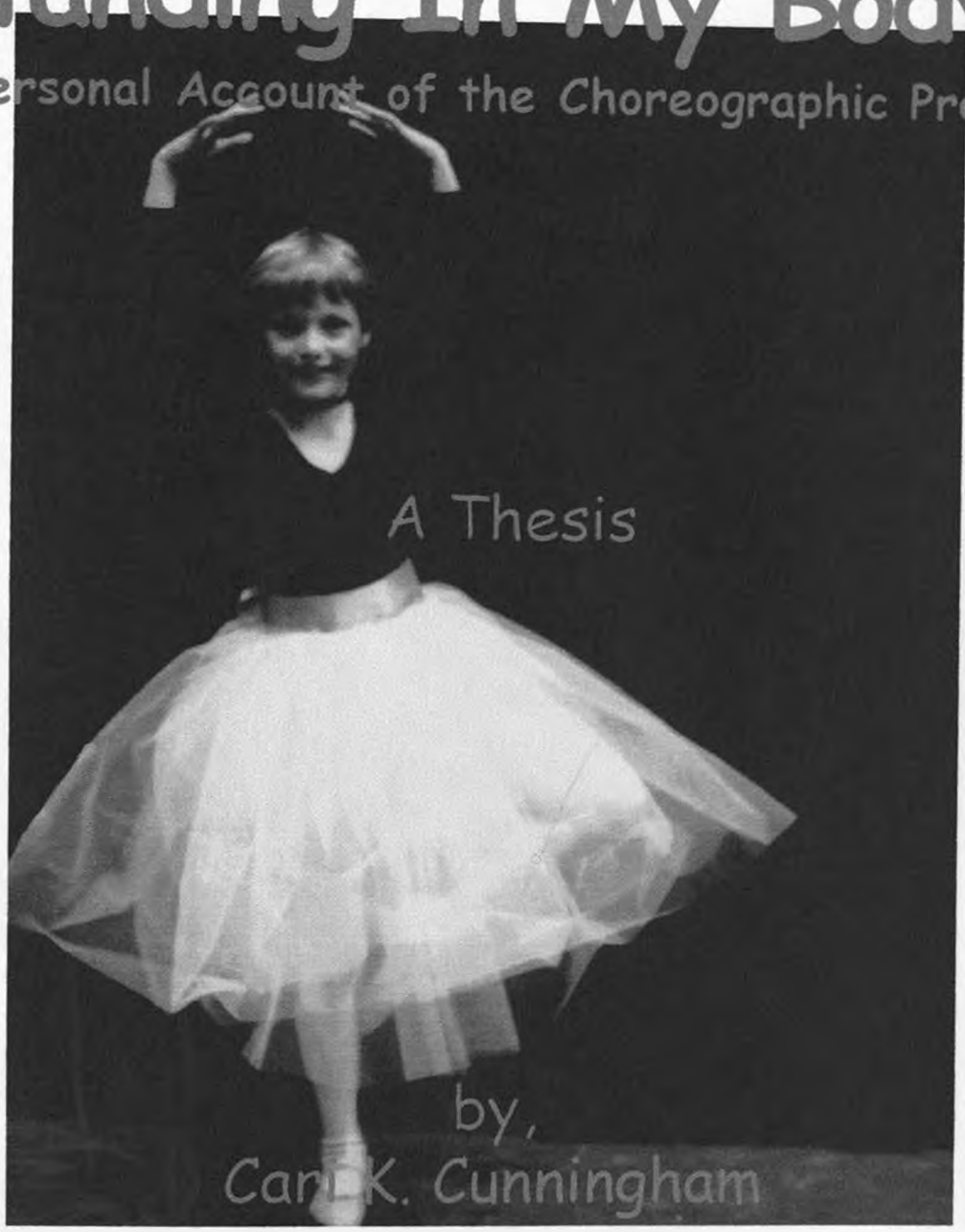
Standing In My Body:

A Personal Account of the Choreographic Process



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APPROVED: 





for Julie, Sara, Jennie, Sarah and Dawn






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Definitions of Terms

The following terms are defined as they are used in this document:

A collaboration denotes an equality of responsibility to the final product. In reference to the dance that was created, the dancers had as much responsibility for the creation of the movement as I did.

The abbreviation D.A.T. refers to a digital analog tape.

Dynamics are textural and expressive components of the dance. As Doris Humphrey puts it, dynamic textures in movement are "smooth and sharp" plus "variations in tempo and tension" (Preston-Dunlop 268). Dynamics can be motivated by a variety of sources. Doris Rudko calls them "the expressive life of the movement" and explains that they can be motivated from feelings and emotions or simply kinetic (Preston-Dunlop 268).

Kinetic refers simply to motion. It is anything producing or caused by motion (Funk and Wagnalls Standard Dictionary).

A phrase is a series of individual movements that, when combined, reveal a complete idea. In my choreographic process the word phrase encompasses the concept of motif, which can be viewed as an organizational tool for the choreographer's imagination. Many phrases became motifs when they were integrated into the product and, as motifs, they helped me to further explore the themes I drew from Morrison's texts.

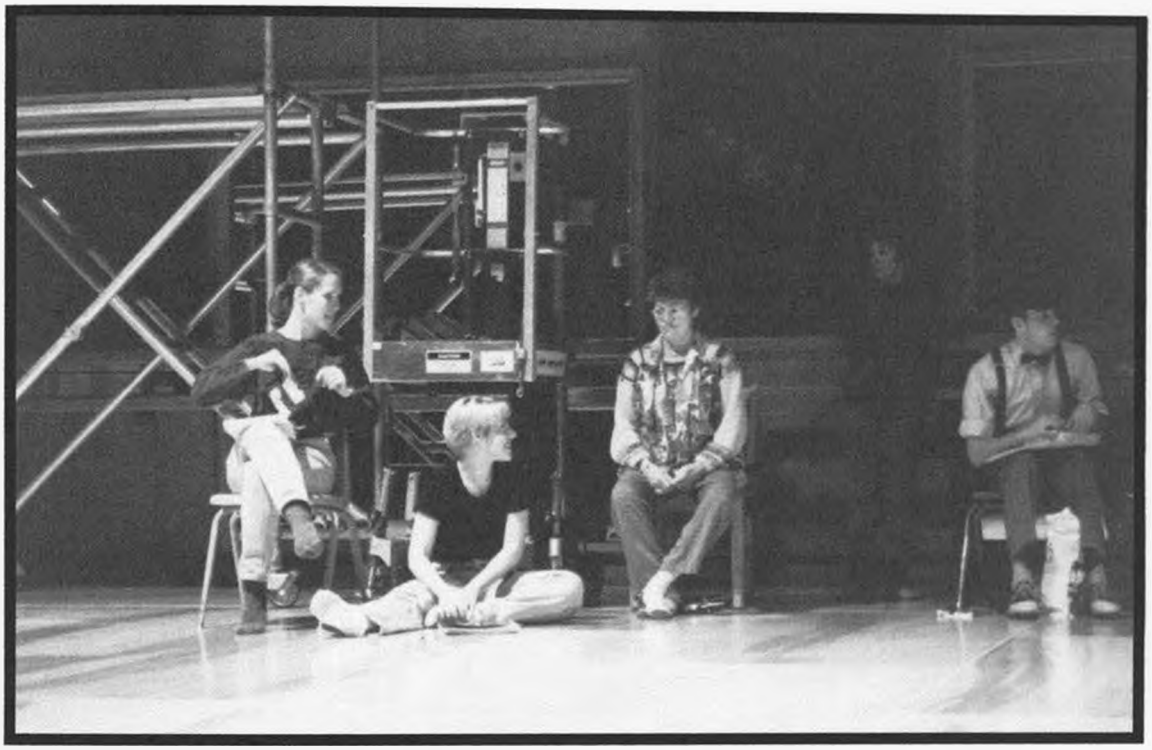
Play refers to exercises in openness and creativity on both the part of the choreographer and the dancer.

Setting is a way of arranging movement phrases in a specific order so that they become repeatable.

Shmoozing is an exercise usually beginning on the floor with the breath that is designed to gradually prepare the body for motion. I usually introduced the theme of the rehearsal during the shmoozing so that the dancers could get their minds and bodies around the concept right away.

Structured Improvisation, according to Dorthy Madden, is "a creative device in which a certain idea with guidelines and cues (with or without narrative content) is set up, which is to be carried out by the dancers in their own terms; used in performance or in the process of choreography" (Preston-Dunlop 345). In my rehearsal process structured improvisation was developed as mode of play. Stimuli for this play came from my readings of Toni Morrison's texts, as well as from my exploration of themes appearing in these texts such as identity, absence, femininity, and flight.

Tech week, in the context of the Spring Student Dance Concert, refers to the week prior to the concert in which the technical elements of the concert are finalized. In this particular concert, tech week began on a Friday evening with load in (preparing the stage space for performance and brining in any additional props or tools necessary for the execution of the concert) and ended with a full dress rehearsal complete with make-up, costumes, lighting and sound.



Chapter One
The Concert

I love having classes in the "conference room" in Chapman, because at that long table you can almost see everyone's face. In that setting it is much easier to read people or at least it seemed that way one clear cold morning in early January. We were waiting for class to begin -- just a few chairs occupied and the rest basking empty in the gray glow of the early morning light -- when someone brought up the topic of our theses. Initially I wasn't planning on just offering up my ideas for topics, but someone drew me out of my eight a.m. introspection with a pointed question. "What are you doing for your thesis, Cari?" It was the first of many times that I would hear this harmless, and yet completely uninformed response, to my thesis topic. "How cool, so you just get to make up a dance?" I say harmless, because in that room, in that unmistakable white light that can only reflect off frost and gray skies, I like to think that *I* could understand where the first person who misunderstood was coming from. Maybe I can say that in retrospect, because I am not sure at that point if I fully understood what showing my work in the annual Spring Student Dance Concert really meant.

Our first meeting was on a Friday afternoon in early December. We were a group of students interested in choreographing work for a concert that still seemed distant on the horizon. We all met the qualifications for choreographing, one term of Dance Production and two terms of Dance Composition. At that point there were eleven of us in the room and two interested people out of the country. Energy was low, Christmas was around the corner and no one was really interested in thinking about the reality of auditions which would occur a mere two and a half weeks after we returned from Winter Break. So we just took inventory -- saw each other (who was interested and in doing what) and then we planned to meet again in January.

January 8th, 8:00 a.m. Twelve of us gathered around a table in the Faculty Lounge of the Dance Dept. Suzanne* (all names have been changed), our faculty advisor sat at the head of the table trying to make herself heard above the hum of the microwave as it made short work of a frozen muffin. I didn't hear much, but somehow none of the distractions and background noises could keep the words, "Auditions are in two weeks" from ringing in my ears, unfettered and crystal clear. This was it, it was really going to happen.

Besides a time commitment (sporadic early morning meetings during Winter Term and consecutive 8 a.m. Friday morning meetings beginning Spring Term), producing the Spring Student Dance

Concert meant operating collectively with eleven other people on many different levels. This year's concert was unusual, because it was completely funded by the UO Dance Department. Previously the budget came both from a student run organization called Dance Oregon and from the UO Dance Department. With this seemingly slight change, came a whole realm of new responsibilities and considerations. For instance, while in the past Dance Oregon had worked with a budget comprised of the revenue from the previous year's concert, this year we had to design a budget ourselves and propose it to the Dance Department. There was no pot of money stashed away for us to work with so we had to agree on what was feasible in terms of how much revenue the department expected to make off the concert and how much they would provide in excess of that predicted amount to help us with essentials. More importantly, this year's concert was very unique because there was no designated producer outside of the group of the choreographers. Even though the choreographers had always been responsible for aspects of producing the show, in past years there had always been someone who was designated as the student producer and then delegated production responsibilities to the individual choreographers. This year, with no designated producer, the eleven choreographers, with the help of Suzanne, actually co-produced the entire concert.

When I hear someone respond to my thesis topic with the question, "So you just get to make a dance?" I can't help wanting to open up the file cabinet that has become home to all the things that I am responsible for in order to create a concert in which this hypothetical dance will be viewed. How I wish that I could actualize the blurry image people must have of me walking into a room and saying, "Well, here it is -- my piece." It is an easy mistake to make and, to some degree, I can understand it because I made it myself. I had no idea that I would constantly be setting and meeting deadlines for advertising, photography, programs, posters, lighting previews, technical needs, music, and so on. All these deadlines came on top of my own timeline for creating this dance. Now that I have experienced this process I feel confident answering the question "So you just get to make a dance?" with a description of the intricate process of putting together a concert.

As one of the eleven choreographers participating in the Spring Student Dance Concert, I had several distinct production responsibilities. I was paired with one of my peers to work on two separate projects. The first was to find a photographer for both the publicity shots of the eleven choreographers as well as for the concert itself. This job included researching different possibilities ranging from student

volunteers to professionals, pricing each photographer and the different printing options, and then dealing with the photographer that the group chose when he or she came to do the individual shoots. In general, this task was not too terribly daunting, but it's easy to forget about seemingly unimportant details when you have so much on your mind with your own cast and choreography. In addition, with this particular group of choreographers there were a variety of needs to meet in terms of photography. Some people wanted color prints to reflect their costuming while others preferred black and white. When it came to developing, individual requests ranged from wanting to have a set of prints made from the negatives at WalMart to requests for mountable 8x10's. Meeting everyone's needs and staying within a limited budget required much more leg work and research than I intended, but by the end of my search I had the lingo down and I was prepared to barter with the best.

My second production responsibility was also a team effort and covered creating the programs and posters for the concert. For this particular task we were required to have regular weekly meetings with Lola, a graduate student responsible for departmental public relations. On Wednesday mornings we (the publicity crew for the show and Lola) met in one of the faculty member's offices to discuss press deadlines and publicity issues. We were then responsible for setting deadlines for the other choreographers based on our own deadlines. Such issues as show order, titles of individual pieces, title of the show, spelling of names, and poster design came under our jurisdiction as we tried to publicize these three nights chock full of dance.

"Ideas anyone?" We all sunk down in our chairs, knowing the pressure of the vinyl on our backsides was much easier to confront than the pressure of coming to some sort of consensus on a title for this concert. Marie, the one posing the ominous question, was sitting to my right. She prodded me knowingly.

"I was thinking 'Precipice'....you know dancing on the brink of the Millenium and all that stuff we talked about last time. And, well, some of us are on the brink of graduation...." I trailed off and reached for the vinyl comfort of my slouch once again.

"I like the idea, but not the word," Autumn chimed in. "Is there another word that sounds better for that idea?" We all got glossy eyed. This was going to be a long morning. "I was kind of thinking about, well it's cheesy, but what about 'Momentum'."

"I like that." I perked up, glad to be off the hot seat, and looked around to gauge others' responses.

"I like it too," Marie chimed in. With little effort we all agreed to "Momentum" for the title of this year's Spring Student Dance Concert. It wasn't until I had left the department for my coffee break before class that I had a chance to think about this title in terms of these eleven people and this event. At Coffee People I sat down and began to scrawl a few lines in my journal about the decisions I was beginning to make in my own piece.

"I begin to falter, but the sound of the words gives me momentum." I printed the words neatly amongst the scribbles of halting thoughts and lifted my pen a moment to think about the process of producing this concert. In many ways we are learning as we go. We are bound to make mistakes, to fumble, but the power of the group and our commitment to this concert give us the momentum to ride out the faltering. "Momentum" -- It is a perfect sentiment for this group of individuals feeling our way through the creation of something incredible and gaining speed and strength at every new turn. I would come back to this word "momentum" again and again as I worked to create the poster for the concert.

Besides my responsibility to the creation of this concert and to the other ten choreographers who were a part of it, I also had a commitment to my own dance that extended beyond the choreographic process and into a technical realm that an uninformed observer of the final product could easily take for granted. A dance is, for all practical purposes, a production. It requires (under most circumstances) musical accompaniment, lighting, costumes, and occasionally sets or props. As I approached creating a dance for the first time my initial instinct was to dream up a dance that had everything, from elaborate lighting to an original score. Between that original instinct and tech week, I spent hours upon hours in the studio working with movement that transcended lighting, costuming, musical accompaniment, and other elements of theatrical design. To both keep the in-studio experience alive and arrive at an aesthetically complex final product required a lot of periodical reality checks.

The last thing I wanted to do on the morning after my birthday (April), a Saturday mind you, was roll out of bed and put on dance clothes so that I could be at Gerlinger Annex by 9 a.m. for a photo shoot and lighting preview. But the two years since I took the Dance Production Class certainly afforded me enough time to completely forget the intricate workings of Dougherty Dance Theatre, a performance space

that literally transforms our two third floor dance studios into a stage. As I wiped the sleep from my eyes I was barely able to make out the fuzzy outline of a lighting plot. Numbers, arrows, and letters swam before my eyes as I tried desperately to recall which direction was upstage and whether level ten was the brightest or the darkest. I sensed it would be a long afternoon. For about an hour we sat in a dark room and tried our best to envision our pieces in terms of lighting. It is difficult when you are still very much in the process of creating this organic movement experience to suddenly communicate in numbers and letters and in words like "warm" and "cool".

"I can't see her yet," I hollered to Claudia on the headset while I watched the stage with an eagle eye anticipating a change from the cold impersonal dress to the view of Ann's body moving within the dress.

"Watch closely," she responded. "We're going to fade this slowly from the side lights to the front warms so that she'll become more visible in the dress." I watched closely. And slowly, almost imperceptibly the cool fabric, bathed in an antiseptic blue light came to life. Claudia heard me catch my breath and smiled. "Like it?"

"I love it, what is it?"

"It starts with fifteen and seventeen at five and sixteen and eighteen at three and then cross fades to six at full." I groaned. This was going to take a lot of thought.

The Spring Student Dance Concert affords students in the Dance Department a wonderful opportunity to show their work in a performance space that they do not have to rent out. However, even though the technical crew is trained, it is solely comprised of students. Since it is a learning experience for all concerned, when it comes to technical aspects of the concert the choreographers must necessarily be very familiar with the space in order to effectively communicate their needs. This knowledge of Dougherty Dance Theatre is what makes the completion of the Dance Production class a necessary component for staging a piece in this concert. Even with the production class under my belt, nothing could prepare me for the specificity and detail that I would be required to provide in order to achieve the effect I wanted for this piece. My decision to create a twelve-minute dance piece, already ambitious on a choreographic level, created a level of production I had not anticipated. "It takes roughly an hour to set the lighting cues for a five minute piece. Anything over that is likely to take two," Sally told us at one of the choreographer's

meetings. Two hours, at least, to set the lighting cues for my piece, plus those cues come from me. I had to know this piece inside and out and I had to know what I wanted. In addition, I had to be able to communicate these needs efficiently so that during tech week my dancers weren't standing around for hours while I fumbled through a haphazard list of things I wanted to see. I had to know when the key moments were in my dance and I had to understand what was essential about them in order to translate those "notes to self" into actual looks that sounded something like, "one at five, C-2 at ten, and sixteen and eighteen at three." In a twelve minute piece, by a first time choreographer, this was tough! "So you just get to make a dance?" Wouldn't it have been fabulous if the answer to this question were "yes"?

Chapter Two
The Score



Chapter Two
The Score

We met in the parking lot outside Beall Hall on a clear Sunday morning. He parked his bike, threw his backpack over one shoulder, cocked his head to the side and grinned. "So what are we going to do today?" My face must have looked pretty blank, because his smile widened and he motioned for me to follow him through the double glass doors that led into the School of Music. I sensed that I was on unfamiliar ground. Although the Dance Department is a division of the School of Music, this building was certainly a distinct entity with a culture and code of ethics all its own. I was a little uneasy, but that's what this internship was all about, forging new relationships and learning about a new territory that may or may not become integral to my choreographic process.

Down the two sets of carpeted stairs to the basement of the building, we walked slowly making small talk – the weather, nice in autumn; breakfast, neither of us had had time to eat. When we reached the double metal doors to the studio he explained to me that we did not have a definite reservation for the studio and that we may encounter another student working on her senior composition project.

He punched in the code, pulled open the heavy door and Cassie swiveled around in her chair stationed at the computer across the room. "Hey," she said. Her eyes said, "what are you doing here?" Jeremy explained the situation while I teetered in limbo at the doorway. We were beginning an internship that would meet weekly at this time, he told her. She nodded and he continued. Could we just watch her work today? She agreed.

"I'll talk you through the set up wile we're watching," he said to me. I took my first step across the threshold and took in my surroundings. A baby grand piano, a family of microphones, and a horseshoe consisting of tiny colored lights, dials, buttons, a computer screen, a keyboard, two speakers, a television monitor, and an alien mask stretched over the Styrofoam mold of a head wearing headphones. As I took my place next to Jeremy in one of a smattering of old school desks I felt like the co-pilot in the cockpit of an airplane.

"I would love to push every button to see what it does," I whispered to Jeremy. He smiled.

"Resist the temptation," he replied matter-of-factly.

On that particular Sunday I spent most of my three hour studio session watching Cassie manipulate the various electronic instruments in the studio while Jeremy provided a step by step narrative designed to familiarize me with the equipment: its functional use and its capabilities. By the time we were

through I had more ideas than any single project could possibly encompass and I was thrilled to begin working.

I was only required to learn how to use words like "patch cable", "DAT", and "analog". I didn't imagine, on that first tour through the studio on a Sunday morning, that this is where I would begin the process of bringing ideas into fruition and of making choices about what this particular work was going to say. My internship with Jeremy from the Electronic Music Program (Future Music of Oregon) was designed, initially, to give me a feel for what was possible in terms of creating a score for my dance work and to aid me in developing effective communication skills should I choose to engage in a collaborative effort with a musician later on in the process. What actually transpired was a collaborative creative effort that, while at the same time teaching me some of the basics of electronic music composition, also yielded a five and half minute score to be used in the eventual performance of my choreographic work. From learning how to dislodge the tip, ring, sleeve, cable to making choices about how the word "absence" should sound, the creation of what would become known as the "Jazz Score" was really the first step in the creation of this piece as a whole. So, how did this creation come about?

In the beginning, I expressed an interest in recording readings of several passages from various works by Toni Morrison. I told Jeremy that I anticipated using these rough recordings in the rehearsal process so that it was not always necessarily my voice that the dancers were responding to and so that I could watch the respond on a body level to the text without having to constantly look down at the book to find my place. It was just that simple. For the rest of the time we were in the studio together I anticipated just being able to watch Jeremy work on his own compositions. I hoped that this would give me enough information and to eventually create a fruitful working relationship with someone else, should I even decide to have an original score created for my piece. With that rough structure in mind I spent the next couple of Sundays just listening and watching while Jeremy worked on several of his own compositions. At the beginning of each meeting he asked me to turn on the equipment and we went through the names of each individual component as the rows of tiny colored dots lit up one by one. In the days between each meeting I was reading Morrison's work and researching like crazy.

On the third Sunday that we met I brought Laura into the studio with me. I had already approached Laura about potentially dancing in this work and it was her urging that finally brought me to

Morrison's sixth novel, Jazz. During the summer, Laura and I had shared an apartment and a variety of inspirations and ideas. A double major in English and Dance, she seemed the perfect candidate for sharing in my kinetic approach to text. In addition, she had studied and discussed Jazz in a classroom setting and had pointed out several of the key recurring themes in the text to me. On that Sunday morning I would ask her to read a passage from Jazz and another from Beloved. I had selected each passage for various reasons. Both had interesting word rhythms and an almost haunting sense of self-discovery. Later I would decide to focus on the passage from Jazz to create my score, but for now I only wanted to hear how another person read these words. I was unspecific about the vocal intonation and accents, I simply wanted her to read.

"I'm going to turn off the air and most of the equipment in here so that it doesn't affect the recording," Jeremy told us. "So that means that it's going to get a little hot and sticky in here....I hope I don't smell too bad." He smiled as he waved the fabric of his nondescript white T-shirt first away from, and then towards, his torso. We joined his gentle laughter and watched as he silenced the comforting whooshes of the air conditioning and the hum of the machines. Laura, standing at the microphone, looked up from the text uneasily.

"Oh brother," she said. "How am I supposed to do this?"

"You'll be fine," Jeremy reassured her and then sat at his place in front of the computer, sliding levers and turning knobs with the ease of a professional. I closed my eyes and tried to silence my heavy breathing. Jeremy signaled for Laura to begin reading.

We had to do a few takes. Several of the recordings began with hysterical giggling; others had stumbling tongue twisters in them. For the first couple of readings, every time Laura got to the sentence in Jazz that read, "When I find it, will it wave to me?" (159) she collapsed into laugher. And yet, at the end of the hour Jeremy and I exchanged a private smile. We had something useable. In the week that followed, Jeremy and I would spend time apart, each of us thinking of the passage Laura had read. "I would like to make something out of it," I told him as the metal doors shut behind us that Sunday.

"Yeah." He looked distant or in thought or both. "Yeah."

When we met the following week we agreed that we would go beyond the expectations of this internship and begin working on a completed score. The focus changed from making rehearsal tapes (something we never actually did) to creating an actual score. For me, the product of this decision would

be mine to use or not depending on the path the choreographic process took. For Jeremy, this composition would become part of a collection of works that he would present at his senior concert on Monday, November 30th. We were already in the heart of Fall term so there wasn't much time, but at this point we were committed to a collaborative effort and whatever extra work it may entail. Where to begin?

Once we had agreed to start working on a joint composition I had a lot of decisions to make. I spent the next few weeks living and breathing the passage that we had chosen to focus on from Jazz. What was this passage about? How did it fit into the context of this novel? What personal connection did I have to it?

I turned, for probably the one thousandth time, to page 158. The neon yellow tab that marked the page was almost unnecessary. I think my fingers would have found that page, marker or not. Black stars, purple parentheses, and blue underlining decorated Morrison's carefully chosen words.

> Only now, he thought, now that I know I have a father, do I feel his absence: the place where he should have been and was not. Before, I thought everybody was one-armed, like me. Now I feel the surgery. The crunch of bone when it is sundered, the slice flesh and the tubes of blood cut through, shocking the bloodrun and disturbing the nerves. They dangle and writhe. Singing pain. Waking me with the sound of itself, thrumming when I sleep so deeply it strangles my dreams away. (158)

This is where the composition would begin. I added another black star after the word "away" to separate that chunk from the remainder of the passage. I already knew that I wanted to manipulate the text – change the word order, separate words and phrases from the passage in its entirety, repeat words and create spaces between phrases. But I also knew that I wanted to frame this manipulation with a coherent reading of two sections of the text. This aforementioned portion of the passage would introduce the score and would be recorded in its entirety with no manipulations. I traced my finger along the lines that followed, searching for a conclusion. The passage Laura read extended on to page 159, at some points almost gory description, at others childlike in its poignant refrains. My finger arrived at the words, "This arm" and stopped. I drew a black star next to the capital "T" that marked the beginning of the sentence and another after the "m" in the "Amen" concluding the passage. The sentences in between would serve as the second of the parentheses enclosing the score. They read:

> This arm that never held itself out, extended from my body, to give me balance as I walked then rails round and slippery with danger. When I find it, will it wave to me? Gesture, beckon me to come along? Or will it even know who or what I am? It doesn't matter. I will locate it so the severed part can remember the snatch, the slice of its disfigurement. Perhaps then the arm will no longer be a phantom, but will take its own shape, grow its own muscle and bone, and its blood will pump from the loud singing that has found the purpose of its serenade. Amen. (159)

Morrison's words became the primary focus of my dreams. Again and again I would return to the same passage, read it again, each time placing importance on different words and phrases. When Jeremy and I met again I would be ready.

I had several ideas for the bulk of the score, all of them drawn from the novel as a whole. In addition to manipulating the text I wanted to work with several distinct sound ideas. At this point I wasn't sure what was available to me so I approached Jeremy with my mental notes. The first idea I had was to work with the constant background of a scratchy record. I chose this sound for several reasons. Firstly, I wanted to play with the recurring theme of the Victrola that appears throughout the novel. The one arm of the record player complements the metaphor of the arm in the passage I had selected. Secondly, I wanted to create a music box melody that would overlap with the scratchy record to create the impression that this melody was on an actual record. The third component of the score would be a trumpet solo. I was envisioning this solo as an improvisation on the music box melody and I hoped to have the trumpet solo played live in the performance.

Before I even began to manipulate the text, Jeremy and I started to search for the sounds I wanted. The scratchy record sound came from the sound effects library programmed into the K5000W (a technically advanced version of everyone's favorite toy, the Casio keyboard). We recorded the sound from the keyboard onto a disk so that it would be readily available to us in Sound Designer, the computer program we used to compose the piece. Once in Sound Designer, this sample could be manipulated; the volume could be adjusted, the sample could be repeated for a set amount of time, and the quality of the sound could also be changed. In the initial stages of this process, Jeremy looped the scratchy record sample to extend over a period of approximately 10 minutes. I was not sure at this point how long the finished work would be so we simply tried to get a large enough sample to work with. I told him that I wanted to

play with layering textual elements and other sound elements over this sample so we used it initially as a building block for exploration.

The next step was creating the music box melody. We started by playing on the keyboard again. Jeremy showed me a variety of different qualities that I could play with through the sample library built into the keyboard. I tried out various bells and one sound called "Music Box". I decided that the sound of the "Music Box" was exactly what I was looking for, but I wasn't sure how to go about creating an actual melody with this sound. The easiest thing to do would have been just playing a familiar tune on the keyboard with the music box quality programmed in, but I was adamant about having a melody that was unfamiliar. I wanted the familiarity of the sound of a music box without the immediate connection an audience might have to a popular melody such as "Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star" or "All the Pretty Little Horses."

"So you'll make up your own melody," Jeremy said matter-of-factly as I sat puzzling over the row of keys and blinking lights.

"Yeah right." I groaned. I played the piano years ago and walked away with a snippet of "Fur Elise" committed to memory and no other real musical skills attached. "I don't know the first thing about writing songs." Jeremy just smiled.

"Just play around for a sec," he encouraged as he turned back to the monitor and brought up the file we had begun creating in Sound Designer. I played maybe three notes and he stopped me. "Let's do it again I'll record." I played a couple of notes again, feeling incredibly self-conscious, while he recorded them on the computer. It sounded nothing like a music box melody, or any melody for that matter, but he insisted that it would be a piece of cake. I was perplexed.

As I watched, Jeremy arranged the notes on the computer screen. In some places he adjusted the duration or the spaces between notes, in other areas he changed the actual note, moving it up or down on the scale to round out the finished melody. When he played it back for me I was pleasantly surprised. From a smattering of notes, played at random, he had created a distinguishable melody line. In the next couple of hours he elaborated on this original theme to create a finished piece that included harmonies and repetition. This finished music box melody would be repeated throughout the duration of the piece and would slow down the way a real music box would when it winds down.

I do not mean to insinuate that this melody was created instantaneously. It took us the better part of one three hour session to create it and even after it was "finished" we were constantly going back to fix minor details throughout the creation of the entire score. It was, however, amazing to watch the ease of creation that electronic music, which utilizes computer technology as a springboard for creativity, allows. On a computer screen the process of composing took on a very different feel and, although I know Jeremy's familiarity with musical instruments and composition were essential, it was amazing what was possible when he combined this knowledge with his understanding of computers and electronic sound equipment. However, creating an entire composition on the computer did pose several problems later on when I wanted to create a trumpet solo that followed the basic melody of the music box.

Originally, I wanted to have John play the trumpet solo live on stage, but in order to be able to present this piece in his senior concert; Jeremy wanted to have it on CD. This meant that John would have to come into the studio one night to improvise a melody just so we could record something for Jeremy to present. This "rough recording" of the trumpet solo was to take place on a cold Wednesday evening in early November. Laura, John, Jeremy, and I met outside the studio at seven ready for anything. Jeremy came holding a print out from the computer of the actual notes in the melody we had created for the music box. John brought his trumpet and the disclaimer that he was not currently playing on a regular basis. Laura was there to re-read the sections I had chosen to use as the opening and ending of the entire composition from the passage in Jazz. This would be the first of many work sessions outside our scheduled internship. Once Jeremy had decided to use this piece in his senior concert we began to set our sites on a product instead of merely being satisfied with a work in progress. As a result, the three-hour per week studio sessions became insufficient and the late night/early morning meetings became more and more essential.

On this particular night we began the session working with Laura and the readings we wanted to re-record while John stayed out in the hallway to get a feel for the piece he would be playing. Halfway through our work with Laura, the problems began to surface. John pointed out the fact that many of the notes and chords on the computer generated sheet music were just plain wrong or impossible to play on a trumpet. Jeremy didn't have the time or background to fix it completely and I certainly was of no help in this situation so we asked John if he would play with it and make it work. I know that John still cringes

when he hears the finished product and that he wishes, to this day, that he had the opportunity to re-record the solo he created that night. However, I am eternally grateful that he gave himself the permission to just play with the little we gave him to work with and, after several recordings, I am very pleased with the "off the cuff" quality he created in this section of the score.

"It's not too bad," he admitted to me on opening night of the Spring Student Concert after he heard the entire piece accompanying movement for the first time. "I clam a few notes, but I've just been playing regularly for awhile now and I just wish I could try it again."

Rough on the edges was the feel I was going for in this composition as a whole. I explained to John that I understood that he could play the solo better, but what I wanted was the sound of a musician playing a simple melody while engaging in the very difficult process of taking chances. There were times when he had to make up notes and chords to replace those in the sheet music that were wrong and at other times when he made choices about how to connect individual notes that differentiated his melody from that of the music box. To someone not present that November evening, the trumpet solo in the "Jazz Score" would sound like just that, a short trumpet solo. To the educated ear, the music box melody might be clear and the connection to the theme of jazz music found in the novel might be recognized. But for me, the trumpet solo does not only complete the journey of the melody from a computer generated music box to the heart wrenching serenade of a single trumpet, but it also evokes the memory of a series of experiments in risk taking that began that Wednesday night.

My primary role in the creation of this score came with its own risks and a fair amount of homework. I told Jeremy early on that I wanted to manipulate the text – isolate words, abstract phrases, play with repetition and phrase/word groupings. Once we had done the initial recordings of Laura reading from Morrison's work I began to look very closely at the passage I had selected from Jazz. Now, when I open my copy of this novel to pages 158 and 159 I see a slew of lines, stars, blocked parentheses, and numbers. "What do you want to use?" Jeremy had asked me. "Which phrases? Words?" I had to be able to answer these questions, and soon.

He explained to me that we would begin by transporting each word or phrase from the DAT recording of Laura's reading to a file in Sound Designer. Then we would assign each word or phrase to a key on the K500W. (This, of course, is an oversimplified explanation of the process). Once this was

accomplished I could have free reign over the "play on words." I had a very distinct sense of how I wanted the textual manipulation to unfold and so I spent hours playing with the alignment of words and phrases in my spare time and finally settled on fifteen different pieces that I would manipulate in three sections, each section escalating in intensity. I also knew that this portion of the score would be layered over the scratchy record sound and the music box melody so I had to take that into consideration when I thought about the duration of the phrase or word and the temporal spacing between words and phrases.

The fifteen components of the textual manipulation are as follows: 1. "shocking the bloodrun and disturbing the nerves," 2. "feel his absence," 3. "Singing pain," 4. "Waking me with the sound of itself," 5. "self," 6. "I am not going to be healed," 7. "absence," 8. "I am going to freshen the pain," 9. "It's a phantom I have to behold and be held by," 10. "held by," 11. "This part of me that does not know me," 12. "extended from my body," 13. "the slice of its disfigurement," 14. "Perhaps then the arm will no longer be a phantom," 15. "and its blood will pump form the loud singing that has found the purpose of its serenade." The numbers attached to the words and phrases correspond to the instrument numbers in the Sound Designer file. I numbered each piece in the novel so that I could quickly find its corresponding instrument when I was creating the score. I chose each word or phrase based on its connection to the mood of the piece and to the overall themes of absence and identity. Though I consider each of these fifteen pieces key to the completed score, there are several words and phrases that figured more prominently in my composition. "Absence," "self," and "It's a phantom I have to behold and be held by" each play a key role in rounding out the composition as a whole and conveying what I felt were the primary themes in this particular passage.

I encountered many a frustrating moment working on the textual manipulation section of the score. For the most part I worked from my gut instincts as a reader and my kinesthetic instincts as a dancer. Much like movement manipulation, creating this section gave me many challenges in clarity of intent. What did I want? What was the feeling? What was the structure and the progression?

I ended up creating three distinct sections of textual manipulations. Each individual section was designed to explore a different aspect that I saw in the overall passage. Together, the three sections were designed to escalate in intensity and conclude with a sense of catharsis. The first section begins after the music box melody is approaching the end of its second repeat. In this section I introduced the themes of

absence and self. I played with eight of the fifteen separate textual components to create what I felt was acknowledgment – the beginning of an awareness of loss and its correlation to one's own sense of self and identity. The section begins with the word "absence" and ends with the phrase "it is a phantom I have to behold and be held by." Both pieces of text provide a strong framework for the rest of the textual manipulations, creating a pull between the incomprehensible and the familiar – essentially between self and other. Drawing on Philip Page's critical analysis of Jazz in Dangerous Freedom: Fusion and Fragmentation in Toni Morrison's Novels, this first section of textual manipulation introduces the disruption absence causes to the process of identity formation. In his chapter entitled "Traces, Cracks, and Wells in Jazz," Page states, "Cracks or breaches are disruptive, but the disruption allows us to know the entities being separated and to refocus on the gap itself..." (165). Section one of my manipulation, therefore, focuses on the introduction of this "gap" through the metaphor of an absence that is extended from one's own body.

In section two of the textual manipulation I wanted to capture the anger and pain the speaker in Morrison's novel feels with the growing awareness of this absence, or "gap." This section begins with the phrase "I am not going to be healed" repeated twice without hesitation. In this particular section I wanted to play with the speaker's unwillingness to ignore this gap, the missing link in his identity. Morrison makes it painfully clear that, for this particular character, self-awareness can only come through the excruciating acknowledgement of the severed part and the resulting absence. As Page puts it, placing importance on the "gap itself and the structure of the breaching" affords many of Morrison's characters the opportunity to "continue the constructive process of identity formation" (165). This section is almost painful to listen to. I chose to play with the some of the more graphic images and metaphors found in the passage such as, "shocking the bloodrun and disturbing the nerves," "the slice of its disfigurement," and "singing pain." Following in the footsteps of the preceding section, this portion of the textual manipulation concentrates on the pain associated with the initial awareness and deepens the wounds of discovery.

By creating the pain of section two, I was able to find the release, and subsequent catharsis, of the third section. Beginning with the phrase "this part of me that does not know me" and finishing with the eloquent play on words found in the phrase "it is a phantom I have to behold and be held by," this section offers a new perspective on the relationship between the painful awareness of this gap and the process of identity formation. The phrases "perhaps then the arm will no longer be a phantom" and "and its blood will

pump form the loud singing that has found the purpose of its serenade" figure prominently in the assertion that through focussing on the pain of separation the structure of the absence can "take its own shape, grow its own muscle and bone" (Morrison 159). Page sums up this process of identity formation, which figures prominently in Jazz, with the beautiful phrase "earned selfhood" (164). Not until the speaker has earned this sense of self he can truly be held by the phantom that is simultaneously "extended from my body" and, at the same time, "this part of me that does not know me."

"I wish we could get Laura back in here to re-record some of these words and phrases," Jeremy grumbles as he tries, for the third time, to isolate the word "absence." Because of its location in the sentence and the way Laura read that sentence, the word becomes "dabsence" when separated from the rest of the text.

"I know that in terms of the sound you would prefer to have it be more clear, but I don't want Laura to read phrases and words in isolation." He looks at me, puzzled. I try to explain it. "I want to keep Morrison's work whole. It shouldn't be easy for me to isolate one word or phrase. It should be like severing a part of your body. I want it to feel awkward." He nods and goes back to the keyboard.

"Dabsence, dabsence, dabsence." He shakes his head as the word echoes over and over again, but I nod.

"Perfect."

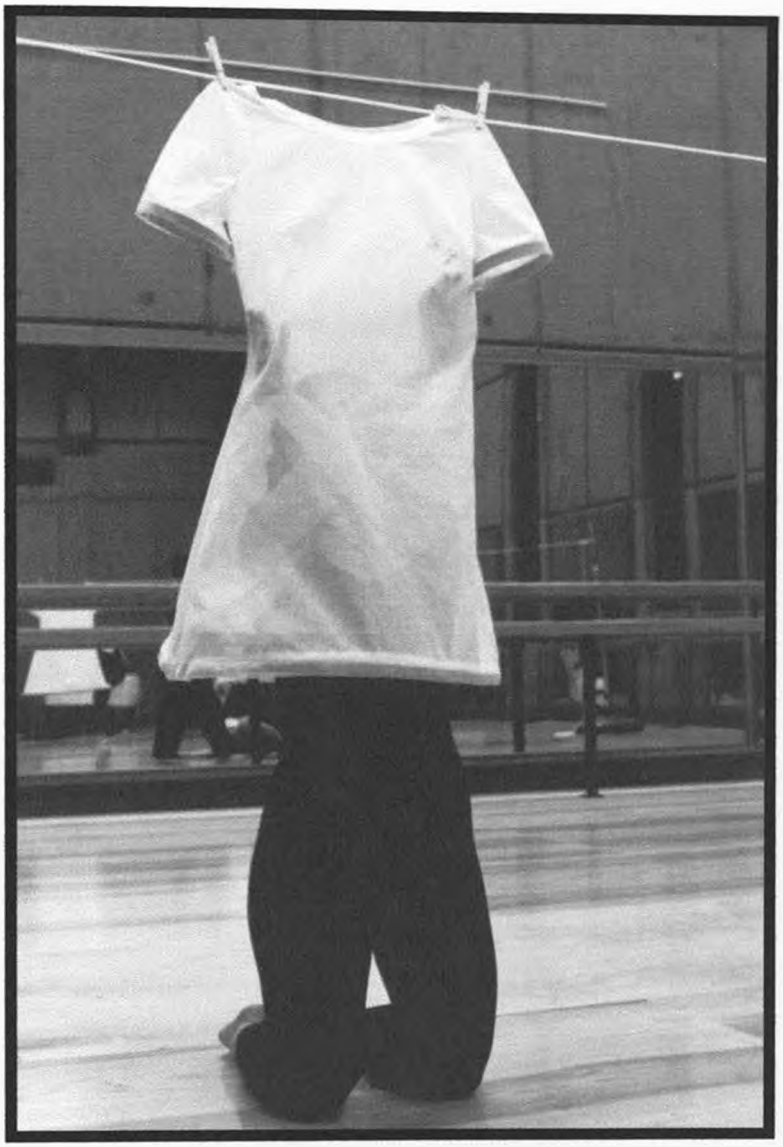
At this point the composition is almost complete. The last element we add will be the trumpet solo. I tell Jeremy to use his own judgement about where to cut off the music box melody, but I also explain that, much like the process of isolating some to the individual words, I wanted it to seem awkward. I want the listener to be expecting it to continue. He chooses the perfect note and draws a line with the mouse across the sound waves on the screen, slicing the rest of the melody off and discarding it. The scratchy record continues for a few seconds and then is joined by the solitary lullaby of the trumpet solo. The last note is held and then fades back into the comforting sound of the constantly revolving record.

On Monday, November thirtieth, I attended Jeremy's composition class in electronic music. I had just left that same room in the wee hours of morning, Jeremy hadn't left at all. As he presented his work for the class I was awed and inspired by his creation and I was more aware than ever of my own luck. The opportunity to work with someone like Jeremy is rare and special. When it came time for him to share our

work with the class I stood nervously in front of the class and read form a page of college ruled paper torn from a spiral bound notebook.

"The creation of this piece presents the dual challenge of bringing literary themes and images to life and, at the same time, constructing a score for dance. The impetus for this piece comes from the image in Toni Morrison's Jazz of a man struggling to reconcile his own identity with the discovery of a father he has never known. The scratchy record sound comes from the recurring image of the Victrola in the novel and the music box was created to reflect a sense of longing and remembering. The trumpet solo is a variation on the music box melody and reflects a matured version of this longing. The manipulation of the text is based on my own literary interpretation of Morrison's words."

I was only required to learn how to use words like "patch cable", "DAT", and "analog." I was only supposed to learn what "MIDI" means and how to make sense of the scribbled lines on the computer screen that corresponded to particular sounds. What I took away with me was a partnership that extended beyond the realm of communication and into the world of creation. I also took with me a CD that held in its doughnut shaped body a sound score that I would return to throughout the choreographic process. Internship is what is typed on my transcript, but I know that this term full of Sunday studio sessions and late night bursts of creative energy was something more.



Chapter Three
The Costumes

> There's a recurring, fleeting transformation from a body moving to a flickering female image. I think that because the dress stands away from the body the image is never totally integrated or unified, so one goes back and forth in seeing movement-as-movement, body-inside-dress, dress-outside-body, and image-of-woman/dancer, which is not the same thing as seeing or not seeing your work in terms of your being a woman. (Dempster 32)

Yvonne Rainer, a post-modern choreographic genius, talks about the costuming in Trisha Brown's work "Glacial Decoy" and the clarity she unknowingly brings to my own work is phenomenal. I untangle myself from the cluster of different coverings, here a comforter, there an afghan, and fumble for the bookshelf. Morrison's texts are lined in a neat row on the top shelf. They're not alphabetized, but it doesn't matter because I cup my hands around both ends of the line (Tar Baby and Paradise, hard back) and remove the entire collection keeping the spatial configuration perfectly intact. I'm not quite sure what I am looking for as I flip through the pages and scan the words for some clue. This passage from Bodies of the Text has reminded me of some image from Morrison's work. I am envisioning this row of bodiless dresses and I remember that the character that interacted with these empty dresses felt a mixture of awe and fear. Not much to go on. I find the image of Denver seeing her mother kneeling in prayer with a dress kneeling next to her and the dress' arm around her waist in Beloved. It is not quite what I'm looking for. Realizing that this search could take hours I finally lay back down and pick up Bodies of the Text again, re-establishing the layers of coverings one at a time. I will not stop searching, but in the meantime an embryo of my costume design is already growing rapidly in my mind.

After lots of dreams and discussions, I finally had the opportunity to meet with a highly recommended costume designer from the Theatre Department who I was hoping to commission to actualize this rapidly growing and shifting idea. I sought out someone who I felt would be capable of bringing life to my artistic vision and I was both nervous and excited as I sat at a table in Coffee People, sea green Gel Xtreme pen poised over a blank page in my composition book. "Costume meeting – Monday 4:00 Coffee People" I scrawled on the top line and then adjusted my chair to face the door so I don't miss her entrance. She was small in stature with huge dark pools for eyes. Sharp, inquisitive....she had a lot to offer, almost everything. Except.....well, except the fact that her current design project for the spring production of "Our Town" left her with no time to devote to this project. As she left the table, gathering her bag, her jacket and scarf, and the apologies she dipped into my coffee mug and then chewed on for a moment, I felt my

stomach sink into my knee caps. I had half a page of notes, at best, and another dead end. "Call me if you have any more questions," she called out as she pushed the orange metal chair into the table. I stared blankly at my notes.

At the top of the page I'd written "27th St." and then circled it and drawn a line through it. Under that I wrote "JoAnn's, River Rd." and then just words – "piping, steel meshing? (boning), corsets, muslin, cotton blends, weave-strength, synthetic fabric, shoulder width, pattern". I was back to square one.

Over the course of my Spring Break I obeyed the crossed out symbol on "27th St." (a fabric store almost across the street from my apartment complex that the designer deemed much too expensive) and set out on my own to tour the fabric stores of the Eugene/Springfield area. It was a short tour. It turned out that practically the only fabric store still in existence in the area (with the exception of the taboo "27th St." and department stores with fabric sections such as WalMart) as JoAnn Fabrics on River Road. I, however, had to visit every vacated cement structure with the word Fabric on it to finally conclude that JoAnn's was in fact the place to go. Then one lazy Tuesday, on my way home from the dentist, I managed to come across one unturned stone, a nondescript structure embellished by the words Factory Fabrics. Between my ventures to JoAnn's and trips to Factory Fabrics, I was able to acquire some knowledge of the world of material by the end of the break. In addition, I had the pleasure of speaking with a man from Craft World about how to go about making the dress stand away from the body and, to my delight, he had intimate knowledge of the construction of hoop skirts. Still fresh from his own experience, he was able offer some fabulous advice. When I told him I wanted something heavier than boning (the substance traditionally used in corsets) he suggested that I use the metal banding that holds lumber together. "Where could I buy something like that?" I casually probed. He explained that his friend had access to a lumberyard, but that I could probably go out to Jerry's and find some.

"They usually just throw that kind of stuff away," he informed me. "They'll probably give it to you for free." He was right. On my very first trip to Jerry's I was escorted into the lumberyard by a young man with the appropriate tools and shown to the trash bins at the end of each aisle.

"How much do you need?" he asked. I had no idea.

"Uh, I just want to see how it works so maybe just a few feet," I managed to stammer. He found a decent piece, extracted the appropriate tool from his belt, and cut me a section. "What are you using to cut that?" I was thinking that this tool might be beneficial to me if I decided to use more of this banding stuff.

"These?" he asked examining the sharp-nosed cutters in his capable palm. "These are band cutter…or I guess most people just call 'em tin snips." It wouldn't be long before I would have a pair of my own.

By the end of Spring Break I had a pattern, a strip of sample metal banding with the promise of more if I decided to use it, and my eye on some material that I thought would work. I was still in desperate need of a designer and had no idea how to go about creating a prototype. It was then that I made a dreadful mistake. From somewhere in a far corner of my memory I dredged up the image of a young girl who proudly created a stuffed bunny and doll on her Mommy's sewing machine. Feeling more than a little confident, I announced, to whoever would listen, that I would design my costumes myself and then create a prototype from that design. "How hard could it be?" I reasoned to myself. It wasn't until later, much later, that I went back to that inspiring corner of my memory and found that the bodies of the bunny and the doll where sewn inside out. Too late….

I borrowed a sewing machine, drew up a costume budget based on what I knew, threw together a design, bought my materials, and then spent the next few days staring at a pattern and begging people over the phone to please come help me. I promised pizza, beverages, sweets, anything to lure someone to my apartment so that I could see what they meant when they simply said, "press down fold and sew darts." Darts?? When two people called to cancel on the day of these little "help sessions" I began to cut the fabric…frantically. "Look at the front of the pattern, " one of the enlisted helpers told me over the phone. "What does it say? Does it say easy?" It did, I replied. "Well then, " she continued, "you should be able to do it no problem." Yep, I thought, I can do this…no problem.

"9:40 a.m. Kitchen Table Ulcer," are the words printed across the top line of the journal page dated 4 –12 – 99. "Last night I forgot to turn the dress inside out when I was sewing across the shoulders so now the darts are on the wrong side. I had a restless night's sleep and woke up at 6:30 without my alarm – a bad sign. At 7:00 I was up trying my luck at the sleeves…it wasn't pretty. By 8:00 a.m. I took a break to navigate yet another foreign 'Notions' aisle. This one was a Rite Aid. In the early morning light, with

absolutely no one else in the store, a young dark haired man scanned the same wall I had just stared blankly at for ten minutes and concluded that they 'must be out of seem rippers.' Cursing audibly, I left. By 8:30 I was back at home holding up the dress and shaking my head at the iron," I wrote. Here I was trying to construct this icon of femininity, something I've worn all my life, and yet I couldn't get inside it, couldn't build it. "I can't help thinking about another icon of femininity," I wrote, "... home ec. class." When I entered Junior High, the power pants suit was big for women and home ec. had gone out of style. Sewing classes were still offered, but not required. This, I thought then, was a good thing. I'm still big on having the choice, but at thirteen years old and head strong I could easily ignore the potential benefits of learning a craft that kept me clothed for half my existence up to that point. My entire childhood, my mother spent numerous hours in her sewing room. "It's so ironic, I almost have to laugh." How could I have known then that I would be sitting at my own kitchen table one day wishing nothing more than to have learned to sew?

It was a sunny Tuesday afternoon when I finally convinced one of my dancers to come over for, if nothing else, reassurance. "You don't have to know how to do it, just tell me it looks right and I'll believe you," I pleaded. Finally she took pity on me and relented, or maybe it was just out of fear that if I didn't get this darn dress sewn she may have to dance naked. Either way, she came and she encouraged me until, in the fading light of that glorious spring afternoon, I was able to slip the body of the dress over her head. I held my breath. I exhaled again. It was perfect. The metal banding, the fabric, it was exactly what I wanted, and, to top it all off, I had created it myself (and almost destroyed myself and the borrowed sewing machine in the process).

"Sometimes a good imagination can be the toughest thing to live with," she said shielding the sun from her eyes with her free hand. "Some of the most frustrating projects are the ones when you are desperate to bring your imagination to life."

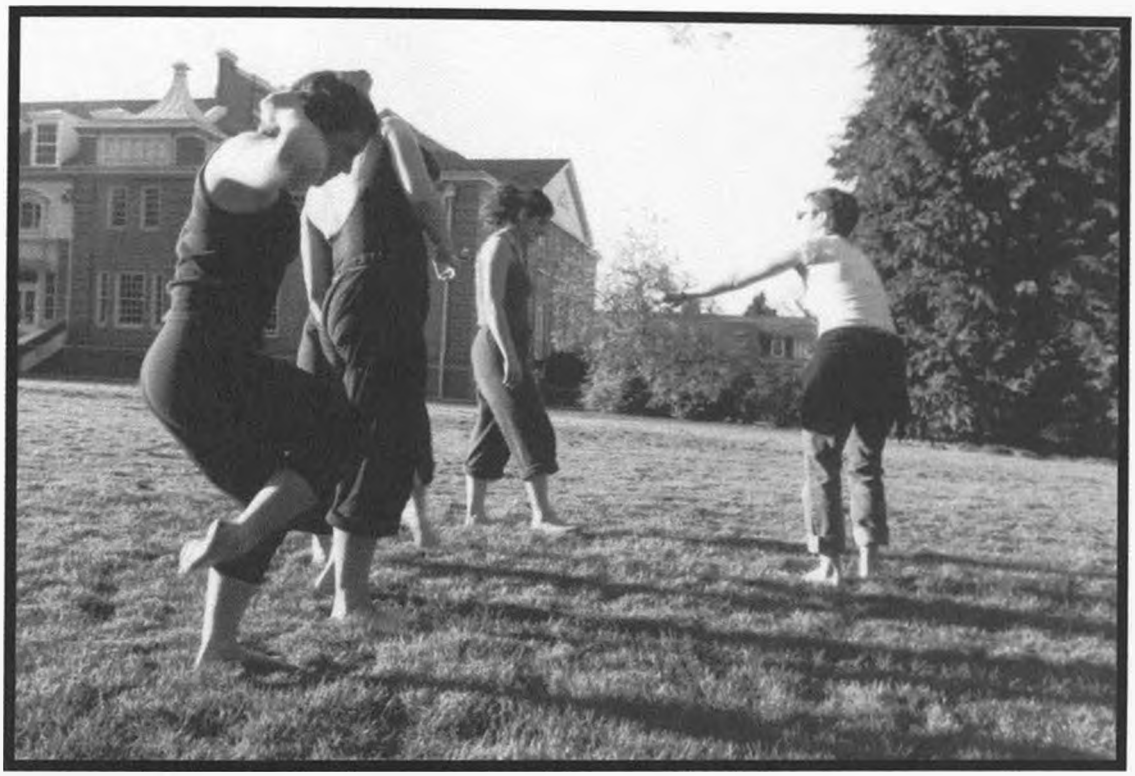
"Mmmmm.....but when you succeed, even if it's only once out of every fifty attempts, it is the most exhilarating feeling ever," I retorted.

"Agreed." She smiled. "You're pretty proud of that dress aren't you?"

"Oh yeah." From the words of Yvonne Rainer, to my imagination, to paper, to actualization the creation of this costume was easily one of the highlights of this creative process. The feeling of

accomplishment is beyond words. Oh, and did I mention I don't sew? It literally took me hours to thread the bobbin the night a friend brought the sewing machine over!

That first dress, the prototype, is hanging from the curtain rod in my bedroom as I type this. There are still some seams that need to be finished by hand and I have yet to complete the collar – an afterthought in terms of the design -- but a wonderful woman from the Theatre Department Costume Shop is sewing the remaining four bodices and I am busy clarifying their role in this piece for the five dancers. I will be responsible for the finish work on these remaining costumes – the sleeves, the collars, and putting the metal banding in. I could not have made each dress myself, at least I am somewhat aware of my limitations, but I have already decided that the dress Laura will be wearing when the lights come up on the stage opening night of the concert will be the dress that I constructed with my own two hands. It will be up to her to complete the cycle. I have carried the dress this far, from idea to actuality, and now Laura will make it part of the dance.



Chapter Four
The Rehearsal Process

"Hello?" At the sound of her voice I can't help but smile. I cradle the phone between my ear and my shoulder wishing I could be with her right now.

"Hi mom."

"Hey Chickabee," she says and then, "Are you in the bathtub again?" I try to suppress my giggles.

"Darn it, I was trying not to slosh too much." She laughs. "What's new with you guys?" She tells me about the house they are building and the dinner they had with my grandparents last weekend. "What about your painting? Are you working on anything new?" She starts to answer me and then stops mid-sentence.

"Sweetie, how did auditions go?" Only a mom can keep track of all those details.

"I'm so glad you asked." I have trouble finishing sentences as I try to explain to her how excited I am about the cast I have selected. I try to describe each dancer to her one by one. "You know Mom, she was in that piece with me with all the metronomes." She tries to follow my fragmented thoughts and finally gives up. "I have the cast of my dreams." I manage to complete a thought and I sense her smile.

"I'm so glad it worked out," she says.

On Sunday, February seventh -- just over two weeks after the Spring Student Dance Concert auditions were held -- we gathered at my apartment for a potluck dinner and I was able to see my cast all together for the first time since I had written each of their names down on a sheet of paper after auditions ended. I had typed out a letter that very night to distribute to each of these five dancers. "Lots of the work I am planning to do and the improvisational structures I want to establish stem from a feeling state. With that in mind I'd like to have you over for a little dinner party sometime during the week of Feb. 1 – Feb. 8," I wrote. And here they were. It was the first of many times that I would be overwhelmed by the tools I had at my fingertips and one of many occasions that would find me at a loss for words – standing, not *in* my body, but just outside it wondering what she was getting herself into. I could not express to them, as they munched on homemade bread, fresh veggies, a handmade apple pie, manicotti, and a macaroni salad, how intimidated I was by their individual creativity and accomplishments as movers and as people. This fragile sense of self would come back to haunt me later as tried to detach myself from my work and let it become their story.

The very next day, a Monday, I began the two and a half month rehearsal process. Or, more accurately, we (Lis, Marie, Melissa, Ann, Laura, and I) entered this process hand in hand. What follows, is not a description of the making of a dance work, but a collection of images from various times and places that were pieced together to form the framework of a dance piece. Sometimes what is written is taken directly from my rehearsal outline or my journal, other I have recreated the scenarios from memory. The piece itself was filled from the inside out by the dancers. This chapter is about that filling.

I began the rehearsal process by using structured improvisation to generate movement and develop relationships between the dancers. Fresh from months of intense research, I was especially drawn to one particular chapter in The Voices of Toni Morrison by Barbara Hill Rigney. This chapter, entitled "Hagar's Mirror: Self and Identity" gave me the impetus for the structure of my first rehearsal which was about exploring names on a body level. Throughout Morrison's novels individual physical markings are almost as important as the names themselves in the process of constructing identity. In "Hagar's Mirror" Rigney discusses the power of physical markings in Morrison's work and images of Sethe with her tree-shaped scar and Pilate with her navel-less stomach instantly spring to mind. The "verbal equivalent" (40) of these physical markings is, as Rigney later points out, the name. She writes, "...the name, which, also like marks, does not necessarily designate an individual self so much as a segment of a community, an identity larger than self" (40). The importance of names and of a communal identity shaped the proceedings of this first rehearsal. In addition to introducing a prominent theme in Morrison's work, exploring identity in this way seemed a wonderful way to get acquainted – for the dancers to become aware of themselves and each other and for me to get inside their movement choices for the first time.

For this particular rehearsal, I chose several different means of exploring names. I began by reading from Morrison's text. Next I led the dancers through a "shmoozing warm-up." I wanted to get them moving on a very internal level so they would have a chance to tune into their individual bodies and find out what needed to be warmed up or what parts were sore. After the dancers shmoozed, I led them through an improvisational structure from Dance Improvisations, called "Name Accumulation" (Morgenroth, 8). Finally, I led the dancers through a movement improvisation of my own creation that allowed them to more fully explore the space and a wider range of dynamics. In other words, they were no

longer engaged in the slow, internal, floor oriented movements typical of shmoozing. What follows is an outline of the rehearsal.

I began by having the dancers sit in a circle and really see one another -- not just look at each person, but take the time to see beyond each body to what lies inside. I had them take turns saying their own names and one another's names for a few minutes and asked them to sense, on a body level, how it felt to vocalize each individual name. After several minutes I read a passage to them from Tar Baby that I felt emphasized both the importance of naming in the novel, as well as the connection that the naming process has to the formation of identity. Morrison writes:

> He didn't like to think too far in advance anyway, but he supposed he'd have to think up a story to tell them about who he was and what his name was. Oh, he had been alone so long, hiding and running so long. In eight years he'd had seven documented identities and before that a few undocumented ones, so he barely remembered his original name himself. Actually the name most truly his wasn't on any of the Social Security cards, union due cards, discharge papers, and everybody who knew or remembered it in connection with him could very well be dead. Son. It was the name that called forth the true him. The him that he never lied to, the one he tucked in at night and the one he did not want to die. The other selves were like the words he spoke – fabrications of the moment, misinformation required to protect Son from harm and to secure that one reality at last. (139)

With that passage still fresh in their minds I asked them to find a place in the room to lay down. "Begin in a comfortable position on your back," I told them as I began to read from my own notes. "Find your breath and really tune into the cycle of your breathing. See the path it is taking through your body in infinite circles." My voice wobbled with audible insecurity. Having your voice as the impetus for imagination and, eventually, for movement can be very intimidating, but I pressed on. I asked them to find their connection to the floor, to actually be aware of which parts of their bodies were in contact with the floor, and finally to discover how the floor was a part of the cycle of the breath. "Now see the internal architecture of your body." They continued to lie still on the floor, their breath, the only sound in the room besides my own voice. "Really see your bones and your muscles. Wander through the cavities of your body; find your global joints, your rib cage and the cavity for your heart. See your cranium and the space between your tibia and your fibula." I wanted them to begin moving, to connect the initial breath cycle

with the mental pictures of the inside of their bodies to find motion. "Now let that breath bring that internal architecture to life and begin to slowly move, maintaining that connection to the floor and continuing to scan the insides of your body" I told them. "How does this internal architecture move? How does it collapse and expand? Widen and narrow? Release, fold, contract, sway?" They were really beginning to move now. Arms and legs slithered across the expanse of hard wood floor and rib cages undulated to the chorus of inhales and exhales. It was time to connect this internal sensation of motion with the concept of names. "Keep moving and exploring," I encouraged, "and as you continue to shmooze, think about how it felt to say your own name and to hear others say your name earlier in this rehearsal." I asked them to begin building this name into the internal architecture of their bodies. I asked them to show me, with their mobile bodies, how each letter moved within them. "How does your name move?" I asked. "Is it in all capitals? All lowercase? Is it spelled backwards? Is it your whole name or just your first name?" The cues I was giving them had visual dynamic responses – they changed the movement as each individual dancer began to hone in on what was unique about her name through the process of moving it. After several minutes of play I began to say each of their names one by one just to see what the motion of recognition looked like. As each name was called the owner registered the acknowledgment on her face, as well as in her body and each moment of recognition was unique. Finally, I brought the shmooze to closure by bringing the dancers back to the internal architecture of their bodies, back to the cycle of the breath, the connection to the floor, and finally to stillness.

I had planned for a brief discussion period after the shmoozing structure had come to closure. When the last dancer found stillness I gathered them back in close and shared the paragraph in Tar Baby that follows Son's discussion of his own name.

> Through the window on the ground below he saw the back of a man stooping at some cutting or digging chore. It was the black man he had seen off and on around the grounds. He stared at his back. Yardman, she called him. That was Yard-man's back. He knew backs, studied them because backs told it all. Not eyes, not hands, not mouths either, but backs because they were simply there, all open, unprotected and unmanipuable as Yardman's was, stretched out like a smoke-house cot where hobos could spend the night.

"When you are dancing, your bodies do not lie," I told them. "By tuning into the movement of your name, you were each able to tell me something about yourself that could not be put into words. This, I believe, is what Morrison is getting at when she talks about Son's name and then has him look out the window to see the honesty of a back that belongs to a man called by the wrong name." The dancers shared their own insights. We talked a little about nicknames and just spent some time learning about one another before moving on to the next exercise.

When I decided that I would dedicate this portion of the rehearsal to names I found the exercise in the "Preliminaries" section of Joyce Morgenroth's Dance Improvisations called "Name Accumulation." This exercise, in which "each dancer makes up a short movement phrase to be accompanied by saying his or her name" (8), seemed like a perfect addition to the rehearsal I intended to conduct. In addition, this particular exercise was geared towards creating a group familiarity – something I wanted to start establishing right from the get-go. Each dancer would make up a series of movements to accompany the vocalization of her name. We would go around the circle and each dancer would perform, not only her own movement phrase, but also the phrases of those preceding her until we went around the circle one full revolution. At the end, I did all the name phrases in order for my own memory to the delight of the dancers who had to constantly remind me of the next movement in their individual phrases. Though it started as a warm-up exercise, the "Name Accumulation" game played a primary role in shaping future movement explorations. I would use these short movement phrases later as I began to create movement to be manipulated by the dancers in the actual piece. More importantly, the dancers' explorations within this game caused my focus to shift from the identities of Morrison's characters to the identities of these five dancers. But for now I would move onto the final portion of this particular rehearsal – a structured improvisation exercise that I called the "name waltz."

"I want you to envision that your name has a physical, three-dimensional shape. That shape is up to you. It can be big or small, round and loopy or completely square," I told the dancers. Once they had had time to create a shape for their names outside their own bodies I asked each dancer to begin moving as if she were dancing with this name. "You can move as slowly or as quickly as you want. There are no limitations to the type of movement you do, the only stipulation is that you maintain a relationship to that name and the space its shape occupies," I told them. "You may begin anywhere in the room." As they

began to move it was small and quiet at first and then they slowly began to expand into the space around them -- taking more risks and finding the intricate contours of the shape they created for their names. At one point I added the possibility of coming into contact with another dancer and exchanging names. Ann and Marie began an intimate dialogue of sorts that caught my eye and made me think about how mere letters differentiated two completely unique individuals. I began to let my vocal instructions be impacted by what I saw. "What do you want to say about your name? Really define its shape," I said. "If you are dancing with someone else's name or watching others dance with their names see how it impacts the shape of your own name." They really went for it, discovering movements that were very much part of them and yet directed externally to this name they were dancing with.

The entire structure lasted about twenty minutes, fairly long for an improvisational exercise. Two days later I recorded my thoughts in the first page of my journal.

February 10th, 1999

It has been two days since we were in the studio and my mind has been going ninety miles a minute thinking about what happened among six women during that hour and a half. Who are we? What do we have in common and what is unique only to us as individuals? I think one of the most telling moments in the rehearsal was the "Kung Fu Masters of the Universe" moment. What happened in that moment that changed the dynamics? What caused five women who were moving slowly and being, as Ann put it later "serious", to suddenly begin giggling, hitting each other and literally performing karate moves on one another. How does that sense of play originate and how does it become so powerfully unifying? Maybe play is a part of what identifies this particular community. When I saw this "Kung Fu Masters of the Universe" moment I began introducing words that I felt this community of women shared; words such as daughter, mother, woman, sister, dancer, roommate, soulmate, girl, and so on. Later when we discussed the structure as a group Ann identified that particular moment (when I vocalized those words) as inspiring the contact between herself, Lis, and Marie. It was as if suddenly the individual identities began to fit together like puzzle pieces – at least with these three dancers – to become a common identity.

The success of this rehearsal in introducing the concept of unique identities within a common group identity shaped the next few rehearsals. Shmoozing, familiarizing, relating, and discovering became common themes as we explored a variety of movement experiences together. At our third rehearsal I hit a wall. I wanted to change the pace a bit. A large percentage of what I was seeing come from the dancers was qualitatively similar. They were moving slowly, intentionally, thoughtfully. They were exploring, but the visual sensation was one of a steady gooeyness. I wanted them to experience more of a dynamic range. Continuing my emphasis on words and text, I created a short series of movements that could best be described as expansive and energetic and then brainstormed a list of words that would give the dancers different ways to move the individual sections of the phrase. This phrase would get them running, walking, jumping, and twisting. Once they had learned the series of movements I gave them a list of four words that corresponded (roughly) to the four primary sections of the movement phrase. These words were designed to create specific dynamic ranges and to challenge the dancers to explore the rich potential of individual movements.

"Yearning, Elation, Acceptance, Freedom." That was the first list. The dancers traveled across the floor on a diagonal pathway one by one, each interpreting the words differently with their bodies. "Good," I called out periodically from my vantagepoint at the front of the room. "Nice choice." By the time we had reached the third of the four word lists I noticed Lis trying to hide behind Marie.

"Lis, what are you doing?" I asked as I saw the tears well up in her eyes.

"You didn't say 'good' to me," she stammered through tears. "It's just that this is all new and I don't know if I'm doing it right or if it looks O.K. or…" she trailed off and Laura hugged her while she wiped her tears.

"Lis, maybe you didn't hear me. I did say good things about your choices, but I'm sorry if you felt unsure." I approached her and touched her arm. "Are you O.K.?"

At the top of my journal next to the date, February 16th, I wrote, "Lis cried at rehearsal and I learned about making value judgements…and about being fragile." Improvisation, I learned, can be a very vulnerable experience, especially when it is used in the choreographic process. In this particular instance I should have never brought the word "good" into their play, because it made some choices seem more valid than others – a concept that should never enter the realm of invention. Suddenly I put each dancer on the

spot and asked her to take chances alone in front of me and the rest of the group. On top of this challenge, I began to use judgement words such as "good" to encourage the dancers. Unless one is capable of detaching herself from her choices, this situation can not help but be both intimidating and incredibly personal. It is no wonder Lis felt overwhelmed. It is at this point that I began to restructure my definition of improvisation and to rethink the way in which I was using these improvisational structures in my choreographic process. The dancers and I began to inform one another.

"How are you using these improvisational structures?" one of my advisor's asked me. "Are you generating movement? Are you using improvisation to manipulate movement?" I had expressed to Trisha how uncertain I was beginning to feel about the outcome of these rehearsals. Possibly I was giving them too much freedom, Trisha suggested. "They want the clarity and then they can play with it," she said.

"I don't want to limit them and I'm afraid..." I couldn't finish. I was thinking of something Morrison had said in an interview with Nellie McKay. "Obviously, I can force the characters to do what I want them to do, but knowing the difference between my forcing them and things coming out of the givenness of the situation I have imagined is part of knowing what writing is about" (143). Morrison could just have easily replaced the word "writing" with "choreography." I had them exploring and now I need the "givenness of the situation" to take them to the next level. With more questions than answers, I returned to my journal.

February 16th, 1999 Coffee People 9:15 p.m.

You'll stop sometimes and wonder, where did that come from? Did their movement tell me? Did I tell them or did they tell me? Trisha told me that today. "And it's o.k. not to know the answer," she said with a frazzled smile. "You won't always be able to tell whose voice is speaking." Or whose body? In the best of dialogues there are constant dangling modifiers, incomplete sentences and sometimes volumes of words without a single comma or colon or semi-colon or period. And there are those phrases that just have to come out before you can even take a deep breath.

How do these dialogues move?

In the six days before I would see my dancers again I spent hours in the studio (and, of course in my living room) creating a phrase for each individual based on my impressions of the improvising they had done thus far. I spent time playing with different styles of music, trying to get inside their individual movement preferences and develop themes that would both highlight the individual and bring out the commonalties of the group. I also constructed a phrase from the movements we created in the very first rehearsal when we played the Name Accumulation game. Finally I created four rolling phrases and one travelling phrase to use as transitional material. By the time Sunday rolled around I was ready, or so I thought.

I began our fourth rehearsal with a discussion of the word "absence." I wish I could say that at this point I was already thinking about the way the finished piece would interact with the spoken score, but I wasn't. What I can say is that I was inspired by something Toni Morrison said. "Morrison describes her own work as containing 'holes and spaces so the reader can come into it,'" Rigney writes in The Voices of Toni Morrison (25). It wasn't until much later, when I was coaching Laura on her solo that I would fully comprehend the power of absence in this particular journey. I would open up Sula to find that, once again, I was responding to something only Morrison could put into words. "..he had left nothing but his stunning absence. An absence so decorative, so ornate, it was difficult for her to understand how she had ever endured, without falling dead or being consumed, his magnificent presence" (134)

"What is your immediate reaction to the word absence?" I asked the dancers. "Is it positive or negative? How do you respond – with what senses? What is the color of absence?" We spent time bringing life to absence with crayons. I acknowledged that it would be difficult, but asked them to try to let their reactions shape a visual interpretation. It was hard. When they had finished struggling with the "presence of absence" we played the Name Accumulation game again with one slight change. I asked them to think more about the spaces between the letters in their names as they created their short movement phrases. "The absence or presence of one letter can distinguish between two very different people," I pointed out as they spent time creating today's name dance. "What is the interaction of absence and presence in your name – in its shape, in its sound, in the way it feels and moves?"

As we went around the circle I was impressed with the maturity with which each dancer approached the task. New things were coming out, new discoveries being made. Initials, individual letters,

nicknames, and varying vocal qualities provided a rich score to accompany the new name phrases. Excited, but pushed for time, I pressed through the game at a rapid rate. At last I was ready to introduce the phrases I had created from their inspiration.

"Even as you are learning this material pay attention to your impressions and perceptions. Think more about recreating it than simply repeating it and, in that recreation, pay attention to the uniqueness of your own body moving," I advised. I was nervous about giving them movement, something I had tried to stay away from up to this point (with the exception of the earlier rehearsal that didn't go over so well). And yet I still couldn't answer Trisha's questions about my role in the process. I was taking a risk, and I knew it. We didn't have time to connect the movement phrases with our discussion of absence in that particular rehearsal, but later I would try to string all the experiences together. For the first time I felt like the choreographer and it was downright scary.

February 21st, 1999 Coffee People 3:22 p.m.

I tried to really listen to the questions they asked me and to learn from them. Initial impressions: I think I need to challenge them more within the material (rearrange the pieces? change directions? integrate another person? develop a story line?) I also need to get them to approach flying [A theme I was drawn to in my research of Morrison's work]. Either to explain the relevance of flying (in Morrison's work) or teach them that relevance through movement. Which one??!! Grr.....

Flying is the absence of weight. It takes complete acknowledgement of one's body weight before gravity can be defied.

"I will fly away on my own wings" (Song of Solomon, 3).

"If you surrender to the air, you could ride it" (Song of Solomon, 337).

"...a thing to do with the wings, a way of holding the legs and most of all a full surrender to the downward flight" (Sula, 120).

"Wanna fly, you got to give up the shit that weighs you down" (Song of Solomon, 179).

There was so much to think about, so many pieces and, instead of getting more focussed, my horizons were constantly expanding. A month and a half later Trisha would point out that I was still

digging in with the show only weeks away. "I wonder when you'll start going for a product," she said looking puzzled. In the next rehearsal I would begin putting things together and, in the same breath, I would begin wrestling with maintaining a balance between process and product. I took the explorations of flight, absences, and names into each rehearsal hoping to find the dance. Many times in the weeks that followed the scale tipped in one direction and I would spend another sleepless night agonizing over what I would see on opening night of the Spring Student Dance Concert. But on this night, the night of our fourth rehearsal the process of creation would finally fly.

On the evening of February 22nd I came to rehearsal with a sheet of paper, my journal, five small rectangles of colored paper, and a box full of tiny cards with one word printed on each (Angel Cards). At the top of my paper I had typed a quote I stumbled upon in my research. In her discussion of flight in Morrison's novels, Rigney quotes Helene Cixous saying, "Flying is a woman's gesture – flying in language and making it fly" (27). Below that I had retyped the four flying quotes from Song of Solomon and Sula that appeared in my journal and added a fifth quote, also from Song of Solomon – "Without ever leaving the ground, she could fly" (340). Each of these five quotes also appeared on one of the five colored rectangles that I distributed to the dancers. With their individual flying quotes in hand, I had one last gift. Each dancer selected an Angel Card at random and then we took time to meditate on the word we selected. "Let all of this be a part of this evening's rehearsal," I said. Then I crossed my fingers and dove in headfirst.

I asked them to use their individual flying quotes to create transitional material. "Any memory gaps you have, fill them with what you find in the passage," I told them. "When you work by yourself, play with gravity and the sensation of your own body weight," I added, "so that when someone is supporting you, you have something to compare the sensation of flying to." They showed their original phrases (the ones I created for them individually) to each other in partners – Marie and Ann, Lis and Melissa. "As you are watching listen to what your partner is telling you through their body. From the phrase, choose one movement or segment of movement that stood out to you and elaborate on it based on your own interaction with your text." I circulated throughout the room to answer questions. After about twenty minutes of play they were ready for the next step.

"You have lots of pieces now. You have the name accumulation phrase, your individual phrases, the excerpt from your partner's phrase, even your original name phrase and yesterday's name phrase are fair game. Now I want to give you the time and space to play with them and create your own through-line. What connects these movements in your mind? Even within the phrase I gave you find ways to make it your own and don't be afraid to explore." I sat back and watched the beginning of the piece unfold before my eyes.

February 22nd, 1999 Home – Ecstatic and Reflecting 11:12pm

Oh my gosh, where do I begin? So much happened tonight. So…I'll backtrack. Today (the day) was pretty awful. I woke up feeling incredibly fragile and stayed pretty much on the verge of tears all day until, at four o'clock when I met with a costume designer from the Theatre Department to talk about my costume budget proposal and she told me she didn't have the time to design them for me. I saw an old friend for the first time since our falling out and I began to feel like I couldn't breathe. Suddenly "on the verge of tears" became a salty waterfall. Nobody saw my tears, except those strangers on the street that were probably wondering how my face got wet when I was carrying an umbrella. Right about then I was wishing that it were any other day but Monday, because Monday means an hour and a half rehearsal that depends on me. On top of everything, I hadn't planned rehearsal yet and I was wrestling with a lot of indecision about where to go with the unconnected "pieces" of material I threw at them yesterday. Canceling seemed like my best option. Thank heavens I didn't go for my best option!

As I read and re-read what I had written about flying I decided that I definitely wanted to give them some information about this. At first I freaked out because I wanted to connect it to names, identities, femininity, etc. But then I gave myself permission to let that come. Wow, boy did it ever! So many things came together tonight that it's so hard to know where to begin or even how to put it into words. I guess I can see three main things that happened tonight that I really want to capitalize on.

#1: A transfer of knowledge. So tonight everyone, without exception, made decisions and took ownership of the movement. They found ways to understand the movement, not from my perspective, but from their own, using the tools I provided them. Whenever possible I encouraged them to trust their instincts and decisions and to return to their angel card or their flying quote when they got stuck. One of

the most exciting moments of the whole rehearsal, for me, was when I saw Lis and Marie taking ownership, not only of the movement, but also of their own decisions regarding transitions and gaps. I know it was difficult for them not to be told what "it" is or what was right or wrong. Marie was extremely concerned about a forgotten transition in her phrase. I kept telling her to use her own sensibilities to fill the void, but she was extremely hesitant. Even after I commended her on her choices she said, "You're never going to tell me what it really was, are you?" I sighed and told her what the original sequence was and then I quickly added, "Your decision is much better and more important to my process." She smiled. I knew she wouldn't be satisfied until I gave her what she was looking for, but from then on as I watched her explore I could literally see a trust and acceptance developing in her choices. Yay! Lis also struggled through an awkward transition and pressed me for answers. I tried to stress that I didn't want her to be frustrated, but I also didn't want to answer the question for her. Finally she showed me the problematic area and we worked through it together. Ironically, however, the more times we worked on the overall structure the more that particular transition changed – go Lis! They truly made the language (and the movement) fly!

#2: Relationships. This was a really spontaneous area for me, because although I had decided ahead of time on partners, I could not have predicted the outcome to save my life. The interplay between intimacy and individuality within the pairs was incredible and what was even more incredible was the unplanned emergence of Laura's relationship to the group. Obviously I'd thought about setting up Laura's solo and a different relationship to the group as a whole, but I was really nervous about how I was going to go about doing this. I mean, logistically speaking, I had planned for lots of rehearsal time to be spent working in duets. With five people, that gave Laura a lot of down time. What should I have her do? I began by having her do her phrase for me a couple of times and we talked a little about her flying quote which was the only one that didn't leave the ground. Then I asked her to watch with me. I told her to kind of do what I've been doing all along which is to record my impressions – to think about what stood out in terms of gestures and movement as well as in terms of feeling states. I still wasn't sure where I was going with this, but I also realized that I was isolating Laura and so I asked her to pay attention to how it felt to be on the outside observing.

When I saw all the phrases together for the first time (including Laura's) I almost cried. Laura's role became so apparent. As we ran it again I gave Laura permission to see or not see her surroundings.

The reaction and Laura agreed, was not forced. At one moment Laura turned and put her hands up like she was pressing on a glass pane. In front of her Marie was balancing Ann on the soles of her feet. To get the lift just right the two were required to share an intensely intimate moment in which their focuses were solely on each other. Laura, completely isolated from this interaction, registered the absence visibly on a body level. The effect gave me chills. "Believe me, it's not hard," Laura said as I shared with the group what I asked of her. "I literally feel it," she said. Yes, she did feel it and her body did not, could not, lie...It conveyed the isolation in its very neuromusculature.

#3: Oh, I forget. The real point is that tonight was amazing!

At that point I felt confident that things were beginning to come together. In the next rehearsal I allowed myself to repeat the structure of our first rehearsal. I tuned back into naming and the process of forming an identity. Then I used the concept of name signs in sign language to stimulate a collaborative effort in creating movement phrases for each individual. I explained that in sign language, the name sign is a special gift. It combines the first letter of your name with the sign for another word applicable to you. For instance, mine combines the letter 'c' with the active sign for dance. The name signs we were creating, I explained, should fit the individual's movement signature. This, I anticipated, would be yet another piece to add to the dancers' growing repertory. With this success and the initial frustrations of the rehearsal process behind me I began to gain confidence and so, instead of taking time to really work on what I had already established, I just kept right on going forward.

On March 13th I introduced yet another new concept. This one had to do with creating a separate identity for a body part and then using that body part and its created identity as an impetus for creating movement. Although wildly successful with the dancers, this idea (which I continued to play with for several more rehearsals) only took me further away from any semblance of a cohesive product – a dance. It was a rich experience with a lot to see and learn from, but with Spring Break behind us and the concert looming on the not-so-distant horizon I began to panic. On the evening of March 23rd I sat at Café Paradiso and listened to the beautiful voice of Mare Wakefield. In my journal, I wrote: "I have spent many a sleepless night thinking about where this thesis is going – how horrible to have to pin things down and yet

important." This decision to begin "pinning things down," to create a piece, initiated the struggles of a first-time choreographer with a lot at stake.

When the rehearsal process became the choreographic process my inability to seize the role of choreographer with both hands became painfully obvious. This was like nothing I had ever experienced before. To write a paper I could rely on myself as a writer. To create a dance I had to trust both the dancers and myself. "This is really and truly their piece from beginning to end," I wrote in my journal on April first and then added, "But it is HARD. Lis has allergies, Marie's hip is bothering her and it's springtime. And then Marie wants to know about staging and Lis' worried about repetition. UGH!" I turned to Morrison for comfort and found instead that pain was to become a part of the process. In Sula, I found this:

> Pain took hold. First a fluttering as of doves in her stomach, then a kind of burning, followed by a spread of thin wires to other parts of her body. Once the wires of liquid pain were in place, the jelled and began to throb. (148)

How I wished then that I could stay in this exploration forever and keep trying out new ideas. Or, I wished that everyone had been right when they thought I just got to make a dance. When Pauline Koner talks about the dance making process in The Modern Dance: Seven Statements of Belief she hits on this realization exactly. She says:

> It is easier to be a 'nothing' person or a 'thing' person than a people person. It is harder to dig, to try to fathom an experience of your own, to understand the truth of it, and to create something out of it. This is a longer process, a more difficult process – and it can be agonizing. (81)

"Agonizing" – what a perfect description. I purposely created a bond with my cast of dancers that would make the process of creating a dance from these explorations very personal and, at times, extremely painful. Hindsight is a wonderful thing, but without the luxury of it at that moment, I began to create the dance henceforth titled "The Body She Inhabits."



Chapter Five
The Piece

"So what is this piece about?" She turns to me, blue eyes inquisitive...demanding. She is my advisor and she is also so many other things – counselor, parental figure, confidant, teacher, friend. And now, at this very moment, the challenge of an answer glistens in her polished white teeth. I cringe. Thus far I have prided myself in my ability to avoid all definitives. Earlier this week I collided with one – a title, but I came out it relatively unscathed and, in fact, rather pleased with myself. So I offer up that information hoping one hurdle bulldozed is enough to finish the race.

"The title is 'The Body She Inhabits'." I hear the words come out of my mouth and shudder at the meekness. I am stalling and she knows it. My hands fly up to inscribe the air around me, to conjure up answers, to suggest despair. Finally, I bite the bullet and open my mouth again. "O.K., so my intent has definitely changed. I was, well at first I was coming from a very introspective place – I still am doing that, but when I offered that experience to my dancers and saw the outcome I began to see something different." I pause.

"Yes?" she prods. I feel like I should be stretched out full length on a black leather sofa in dim lighting – a shrink's office in a sitcom.

"So the piece is....about information." I begin to falter but the sound of the words gives me momentum. "It's about sources of information outside of you that inform you about yourself."

"Like?" She's jotting this down – oh, horror of horrors – it doesn't get much more definitive than that.

"Like relationships, absences – and presences, and....natural forces like gravity." I am still focussed on being horrified that she is documenting this fumbling, but I have the momentum now and it is doing the talking. I am doing the sweating. If I can release into the fall, take the plunge, I can ride the upward swing and carry myself.

At some point in the rehearsal process I began to realize that, although I had created tons of movement, I could not visualize what it would look like on stage as one cohesive statement. This realization felt nothing short of complete panic. I had so much to convey, so many pieces, and yet no semblance of A PIECE, one that could stand on its own in a concert of eleven new dance works. In this panic I should have made the smooth transition from using improvisation as a way to generate movement to utilizing improvisation as a tool to explore movement already created. What I actually did was to become

increasingly aware of the outside elements that would make this repertory of movement chunks a finished work. These elements include lighting, costume, sets, and most importantly the hypothetical audience. "How do you want the audience to feel?" Trisha asked me at one of our meetings. I can't explain why, but I took her statement to mean that I had to begin stepping outside the role I had defined for myself within the rehearsal process in order to begin creating a product – the piece. As a result, what could have continued as a group exploration, turned into me trying to set a piece that was never really my own. I began to give concrete directions – Ann go here, Lis go there. These directions were based on what I thought were concrete ideas that would help me to see the piece as a whole. The problem was that I didn't really know how to see the piece as a whole until the dancers showed it to me on May 13th....dress rehearsal.

I tried many times in the weeks between my initial panic and dress rehearsal to reconnect to the sense of play and exploration that originated the movement motifs of the piece. At times I was successful. When I introduced the row of dresses to the rehearsal process we spent some time exploring them, relating to them (from the outside as well as the inside). "They are very familiar in many ways," I told them. "When I look at them I see paper dolls, ring-a-round-the-rosie and summer frocks." And yet there was this undeniable metal that gave them a frame, or body, of their own. "There is also something strange about them, something unfamiliar," I told the dancers. Whenever they went to the clothesline in the piece I asked them to see the dresses differently. At first they would seem strange and then maybe with time one could begin to see a person in them. Finally, the decision to crawl inside of these dresses came from this process of understanding them. I tried, as often as possible, to relate this dichotomy of familiar and unfamiliar to the words they were hearing in the score. What is it like to approach something or someone that is simultaneously a part of you ("extended from my body") and yet also foreign ("this part of me that does not know me.")?

The score itself presented its own problems for me as a choreographer. I knew early on that I wanted other audible components in the completed dance besides the "Jazz Score" that Jeremy and I had created. As I watched the dancers in rehearsal I was struck by the beautiful accompaniment that every day sounds such as footsteps, doors opening and closing, and even the sounds of basketballs bouncing in a nearby gym gave to the movement. As I toyed with the idea of using sound effects in my final score I stumbled upon the soundtrack to the movie "High Art." The entire soundtrack was a collection of original

compositions by Shudder to Think and, more importantly, it had the feel that I was looking for – an odd lullaby of familiar sounds. Still intrigued by the idea of using actual sound effects in the piece, I approached Philip, an expert in the field of electronic music, about finding actual sound effects. He pointed me to the BBC Sound Effects Library and then agreed to help me piece together two separate chunks from tracks in this library. I had several pieces now – two short works by Shudder to Think, the sound effects, and the "Jazz Score." What I needed was to be able to visualize how this collection of pieces, including silences, would be configured to accompany the movement. With the deadline for submitting our music for the concert right around the corner, I had to make some hasty choices.

In my journal I have several loose sheets of notebook paper with different versions of detailed score outlines. Next to each component I had times written out – 15 seconds, 1 minute and 32 seconds, and so on. The duration of each pre-recorded section was already set, but I had to guess on the sections of silence based on how long I thought each section of movement would take. This is where I ran into my first set of problems. With the push to create a finalized score to accompany the dance I began to feel like I had to set whole sections of movement and be able to time them so I could complete my outline. When I received the completed score I began to do the reverse of what I had done to create the score – I tried to make the movement fit into the sections I had created for it. In one particular section of the dance, I told the dancers simply to "come together faster to begin the next phrase in unison." In a piece that had never been about "five, six, seven, eight" this approach to staging the piece was dangerous and, at times, disastrous.

If I strayed from my original intent of exploration before, I was completely estranged now. The more I tried to make these separate pieces become a dance, the more they became a series of fragmented and unconnected ideas. The more I forced things to come together, the more they fell apart. I knew that it wasn't working. The energy in rehearsals was at an all time low and yet I couldn't pinpoint the problem. In a desperate attempt to regain focus, I stopped using the finished score in rehearsal.

During this time of repose, my advisors helped me immensely by pointing out the movement motifs in the piece and then challenging me to clarify each motif within the framework of the piece as a whole. They also challenged me to capitalize on movement based relationships that arose out of these motifs. A primary example of one such movement relationship occurs early in the piece when Ann moves

her fingertips rapidly on the floor and then moves them up her body and into the spaces in front of her while she turns to see Marie. When she has moved out of this moment, Marie picks up the "itsy, bitsy spider" motif and repeats it standing. When I lost the opportunity to have a full group rehearsal for an entire week I took advantage of this time and worked individually with each pair (Lis and Melissa, Ann and Marie) and with Laura. In these private hour-long rehearsals I was able to point out these, and other, movement relationships in the series of phrases that open the dance. When the dancers began to find these moments and capitalize on them new kinetic bonds were established. These bonds would become essential when the rehearsal process became performance. When I began to reintroduce these early motifs later in the process of creating the dance, I watched the dancers approach them with new information and conviction.

In the last couple of weeks of rehearsals before tech week began, I reintroduced the finalized sound score to the rehearsal process. Much like the chance moments that inspired the movement material throughout the dance, the addition of the score created unpredictable and chilling moments. The visible movement and the audible sound (especially the word manipulations), both powerful entities on their own, came together in a manner that was unobtrusive and, at times, downright mesmerizing. When Laura re-entered the stage space and carved her arm through the space between Lis and Ann for the first time the word absence wrapped around both their bodies and pulled them together. Although each run of the dance was slightly different in its timing, by allowing the two entities (movement and sound) to unfold simultaneously I was able to see the beauty of chance assert itself time and time again. More importantly, by trusting in these unplanned connections (both in terms of movement and in emotive relationships), I was able to begin seeing the pieces come together as a whole.

The dancers began to respond to the score on different levels and as things began to gel I realized that even the word "father" in the spoken portion of the score had found a home in this dance. This patriarchal figure, seemingly out of place in a dance about five women and their individual perceptions of self, now made sense in light of the realization that embracing awkwardness was a part of the journey. "A severed arm is not exactly a pleasant experience," a faculty member told me after observing one of my rehearsals. I began to acknowledge that this piece was not about what was pleasant, but instead about the way pain and awkwardness and unfamiliarity are integrated into identity. The character in Jazz who speaks

in the score is learning to embrace a foreign entity, a father he has never known, in order to become whole. Laura would not, and could not, be this character, but she could understand the unfamiliarity of this absence and the process of excepting this absence as a part of her. How could I get her to translate this knowledge into movement?

As I kept putting all the pieces together to create a dance, I found myself reminding the dancers of their intent. Why, I wondered, could I not see the things I told them manifest in their movements? "I want Marie to enter with a sense of playfulness," I told Trisha at one of our meetings when she challenged me to clarify why each of the four dancers who entered the stage space from the wings came on the way they did.

"Playfulness can mean one thing to me and something completely different to you," she reminded me. "You are giving them acting cues and they aren't actors....they're dancers."

I mulled over this warning for many a sleepless nights. How could I put into movement what I only knew as emotional intent? I'm not sure I ever really succeeded in answering this question. I tried many different approaches and finally just gave it back to the dancers to ponder. Luckily, with a cast of experienced dancers, this was a feasible challenge. Even when they were performing I wanted them to be real and to see each other, to know when they were pulling away and when they were drawing in and why. This was crucial, for the dancers as well as for me.

After a particularly grueling rehearsal late in the process I turned once again to my journal and confessed that, "after last night's rehearsal I have come to the conclusion that I am not cut out for the role of choreographer." I would make a decision, give directions, and then apologize. From inside the choreographic process I could not see why these directions were not working.

For nearly a month a rehearsal process that was built on the fundamental concepts of play, permission, and trust, became about transitions, specific movement, and performance corrections. Although entirely valid in many choreographic processes, in my process these new elements were approached from my defunct theory that "this is what I had to do to make a dance." My rehearsal notes became outlines of time chunks and the corresponding movement chunks we would work on. My post rehearsal reflections became frustrated testimonies to my own inadequacies and then disappeared all together. What happened?

In an interview with Thomas LeClair, Morrison pinpoints the importance of allowing each experience in the process of creation to influence the product, whether or not they are ultimately visible in the final product. "While I'm writing, all of my experience is vital and useful and possibly important," she says. "It may not appear in the work, but it is valuable. Writing gives me what I think dancers have on stage in their relation to gravity and space and time. It is energetic and balanced, fluid and in repose. And there is always the possibility of growth..." (120). As I began to give directions such as, "After you do one repetition of that phrase, Lis go to Melissa and do the flying lift," I was beginning to focus on the product and ignore the experiences that got us to this point and "the possibility of growth." I tried to correct my oversight by giving the dancers emotive reasons for the transitions. "You go to Melissa because you want to protect her," I would tell one Lis and wonder at the puzzled gaze. My directions were contradicting each other. The dancer in Lis wanted to find the movement cue to go to Melissa and to feel comfortable with the specific movement that would get her there. The human being in Lis could interpret the feeling of wanting to protect Melissa in many ways, but could not yet connect the two separate entities. I began to create forced interactions and transitions.

During the same meeting in which Trisha questioned me about the audience's feeling state, she pointed out the quality of awkwardness that she found intriguing in my work. She meant awkward, not as bad quality and not in relationship to the moments that were becoming forced, but as a very human quality that was being explored through movement. "They are literally tangled up sometimes," she pointed out. It was this realization that would allow me to stay somewhat on track as I waffled between process and product, collaborator and choreographer.

"Don't be afraid to be human and to be awkward in this piece," I told the dancers at the next rehearsal. "This piece is not about performing as much as it is about self discovery." At the dress rehearsal Lis would remind me of this statement as I asked the dancers to tune into what this piece was about for them. Keep it real, she advised us. Yes, keep it real.

In my hurry to fill the shoes of a choreographer I lost touch with some of the more beautiful human moments in this piece. On Tuesday, May 11th (the first full technical run of the piece) I quickly walked through the dance with the dancers highlighting the last minute changes I had made to individual entrances and exits for the sake of clarity. When I saw them perform the piece that night I did not see the

clarity I was hoping to achieve. By giving them these specific changes and then not connecting them to the sense of exploration that gave birth to this piece I simply made the dancers frantic. "I feel so frazzled and worried about what comes next that I can't even do the movement anymore," Laura informed me after the first run of the piece that night. "I feel completely unsure and horrible." What seemed perfectly clear in my mind was just plain overwhelming to the dancers at this point in the journey and I couldn't understand why.

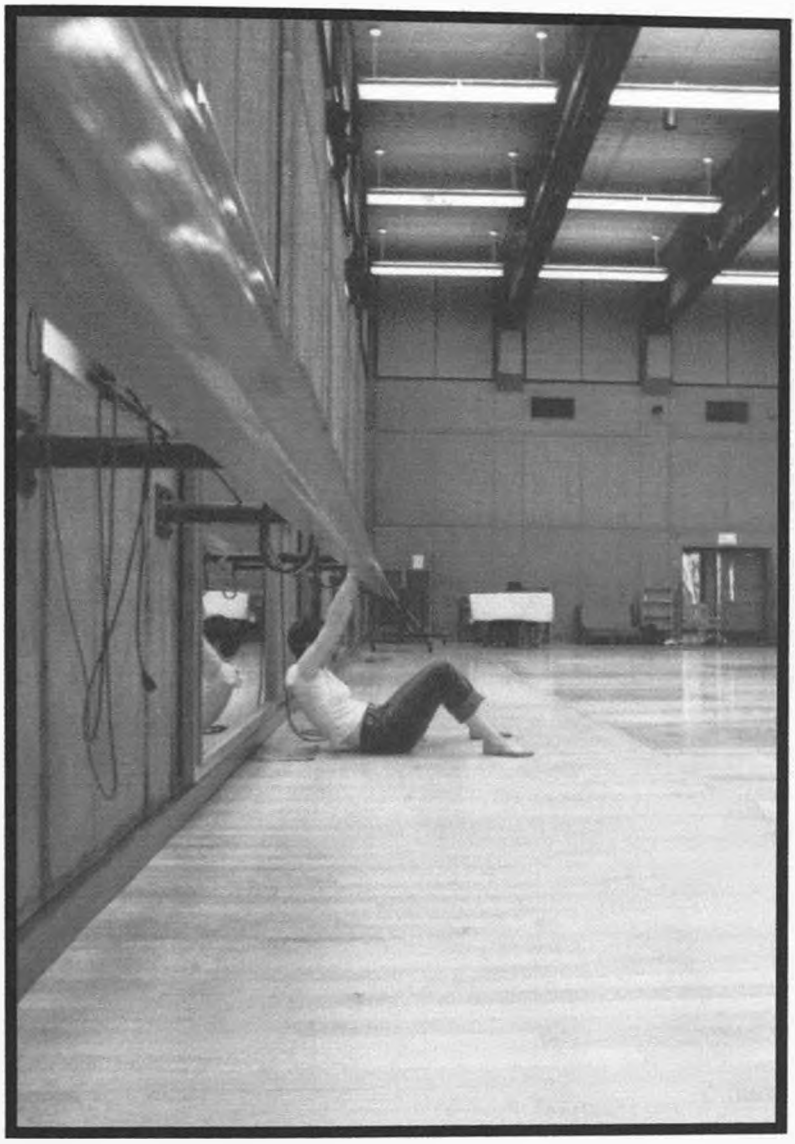
On Wednesday night (May 12th), the full dress rehearsal of the show, I was just as unsure as the dancers had been the night before. All night and all day I had been going through possible scenarios in my mind of what I would say, what final changes I would make. The problem was that the feedback I was getting from my advisors had inspired me and now I wanted to change things. These changes, I thought, will make it better, make it what I want, but I was afraid of overwhelming them again. Maybe I would only make this one change or give them that one last performance note. Maybe I would get them a shmoozing warm-up and then we would draw Angel Cards. The possibilities were endless and this was it, the last night that the piece would be run with just a handful of observers before a full audience composed of the general public would be invited to see it.

I held off until the last minute to talk to my dancers. We were hanging the dresses on the clothesline backstage at intermission and I was trying to get the spacing just right between each dress when I began to feel my legs turning into Jell-O. I had no idea what would come out of my mouth when I gathered them together into a close circle for our pre-performance talk. Surprisingly, when I finally did open my mouth nothing came out. I closed it, swallowed, closed my eyes and took a deep breath. What was this piece about?

"Tonight I'm not going to make anymore changes," I told them. "Instead of worrying about where to go next or what to do next, take this opportunity to go back in your mind and remember the process that got us to this place. When you are out there on that stage don't forget that you are dancing with four other women. Give yourself permission to continue playing with the movement in your own body, but keep the feeling of the group alive as well. Find the moments over the course of this journey that have made you come together and that have informed you about the people around you. Merde!" I untangled myself from the tight circle of arms, and torso, and toes and slipped away through the downstage left wing, blowing

them one last kiss as I left. My part was over. I had to trust that the dancers would take the piece and run with it.

Chapter Six
Post Performance Reflections



Chapter Six
Post Performance Reflections

> I believe it is important not only to look at the narrative, iconographic gestures, symbolic images, and social relationships within the choreography, but also to recognize how meaning is literally embodied in the dancer's physicality" (Albright 50).

It has been almost one full week since the curtain came down on the last performance of "The Body She Inhabits." I still cannot look objectively at the dance we have created, because I am still very much inside of it.

I have received lots of feedback – some requested, some spontaneous. A colleague from my Senior Seminar Class attended the performance on opening night. Afterwards I caught her in the hallway. "So, what'd ya think?" I asked holding my breath.

"I like it," she said after an excruciating pause. "I didn't get it, but I liked it."

"It's open for interpretation," I said, smiling. During the next two nights of the show I received lots of interpretations and just as many "I don't get it"s I think one of the most rewarding things to hear, as a choreographer, was that the piece made people both think and feel. One dance student and friend stopped me on the street to tell me that the dresses reminded her of the fragile, antique material of her grandmother's dresses. Drawing on this theme of childhood and fragility, she offered her interpretation of the piece.

"I saw each of the dancers working to bring her past, her childhood, into this other place. The arm was just another example of learning to accept and embrace and move on," she told me. "I liked this piece because I felt like you had something to say."

When I asked audience members (some friends, some casual acquaintances) what they saw, felt, and heard I got a variety of responses. Whereas one person described the feeling of the piece as warm another called it "disturbing", yet almost without fail everyone commented on the text. "It was definitely my favorite part," a co-worker exclaimed after the concert had ended. "It was just so powerful." Interestingly enough when I asked what words people heard in the score, the word father never surfaced. Even after I probed further, only a couple of people could even recall hearing that word at all. It's funny the things you worry about sometimes.

When I watched the dance each night I saw five amazing women taking risks and making statements through the things already "embodied in their physicality." It was this personal growth that I

responded to and encouraged each night when we came into our group huddle backstage at intermission. Each night, when I returned to the audience and waited for the curtain to open and the first lights to go up on stage I imagined the dancers backstage – doing the "cleavage dance" and talking about the missing Andy for their Raggedy Ann dresses. And yet no matter how hard I tried to focus on how much fun they were having I never stopped holding my breath in the half minute between the curtain opening and Laura's light coming up.

I thought the realization that this piece could never be performed again and, in fact, does not exist beyond the bodies of these five dancers would provide ultimate relief when the last hanger was picked up and the gym doors locked behind me on Saturday, May 15th. Instead, I left Gerlinger Annex that night feeling empty. I had succeeded in creating a close knit group of dancers who loved performing this dance. I had succeeded in letting go of this piece and trusting the dancers to breathe life into it on stage. What was left was a long process of hurting and healing and learning and more hurting. It is this process of painful realizations that I write about in these final pages of my last paper as an undergraduate.

It would not be fair for me to end this document without acknowledging my struggles and my mistakes. As I tried to bring my ideas to life and to maintain trust and cohesion to my cast I pulled away from the people who had supported me and aided me in my creation all along. Every day this past week I have cried at least once as I begin to confront struggle after struggle and to realize how many important relationships I almost lost along the way. And it is not over yet. There are some things I have done and said that I will never be able to take back or make up for. I can only hope that the people I love the most know that I never intended to hurt them and that I can begin to learn and grow and to find new approaches to these situations in the future.

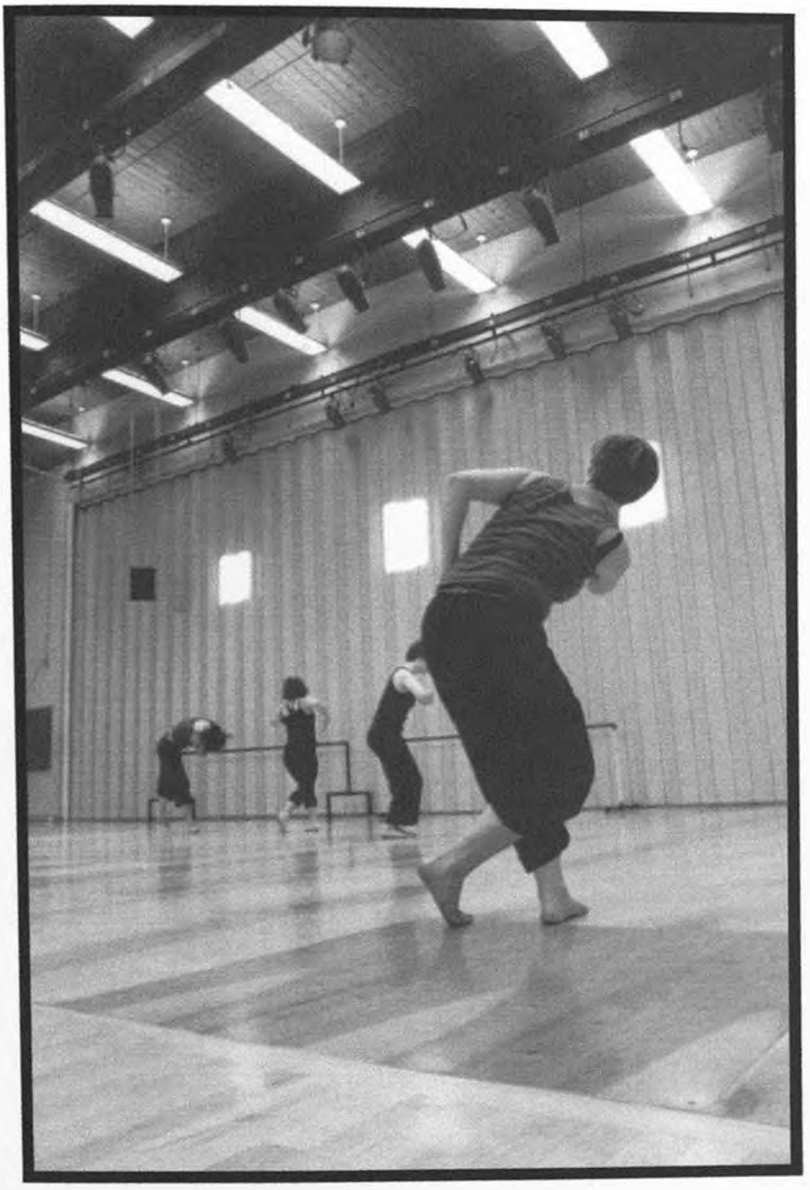
At times I think that the ultimate goal is to not care about what other people think of my art; to be detached enough to hear criticism and strong enough to see it for what it is. Then I realize that to achieve this goal is to cease to be human. I want to be human and with that, I now know, comes both agony and elation. And yet the ongoing process of standing in my body is as rewarding as it is painful. As Morrison so knowingly states:

> ...all of the characters have serious limitations, as all people do: trying to come to terms with each other, give up a little something, behave

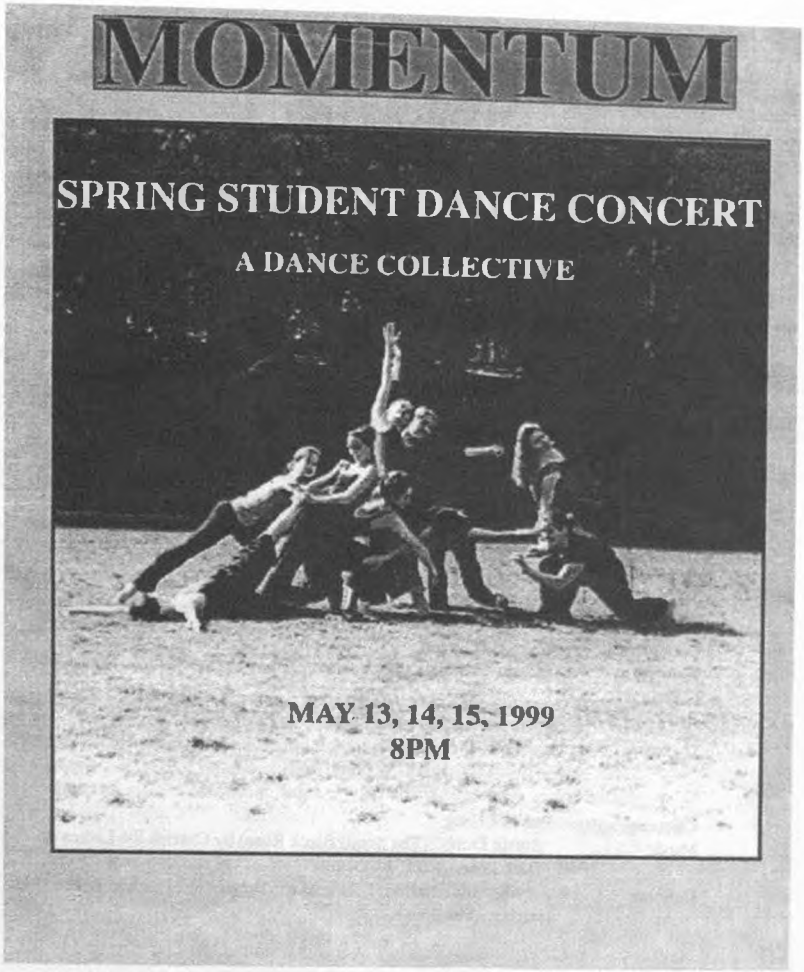
> properly, and live in the world decently, maybe even love something, just trying to pick something out that's worth holding on to and worth loving. (Ruas 101)

By acknowledging my own limitations I have discovered things about myself that no other process could have illuminated. These discoveries I owe to my dancers and to the community of extraordinary individuals who molded and impacted my journey.

I have been reminded many times throughout this process that this dance is not the be-all-to-end-all work in my life and that outside Gerlinger Annex there is a great big world waiting to be explored. I have also been told that creating one's first full scale work of art is similar to giving birth and that this labor of love is one I will continue to reflect upon ten years from now, twenty years from now, even fifty years from now. As I stand here at the end of this journey, I realize that it is only the beginning and I hope to find truth in these words of wisdom.



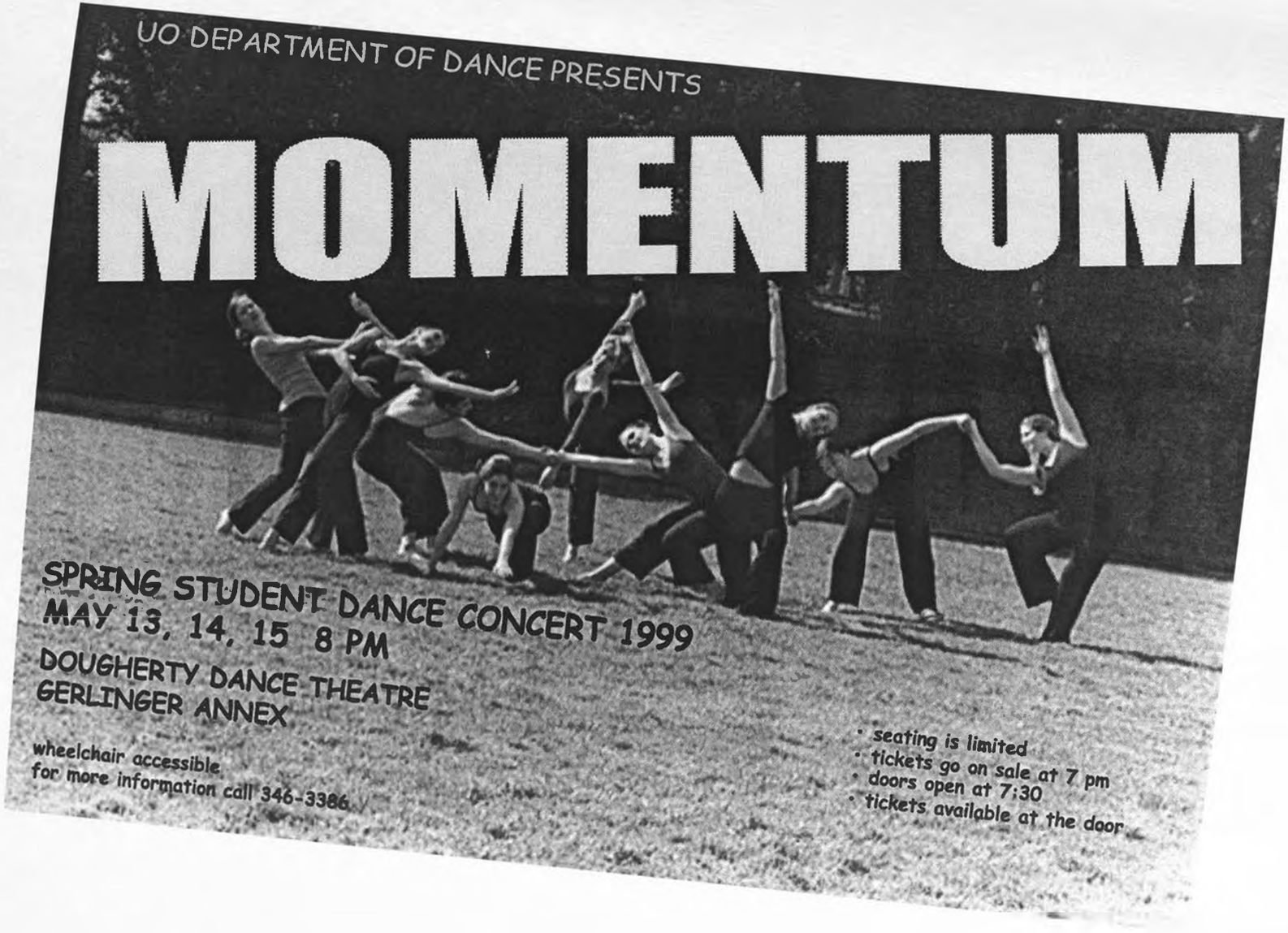
Appendix



THE BODY SHE INHABITS

Choreography	Cari K. Cunningham (in collaboration with dancers)
Music	"opening" by Shudder To Think
	"Jazz Score" by Cari Cunningham and Dustin Plumb
	text by Toni Morrison
	read by jennie e. pitts
	trumpet solo by Jeffrey Springman
	"end frame" by Shudder To Think
Costumes	Cari Cunningham and Beth Kloss
	*Costumes were made possible by a generous grant from the Robert D. Clark Honors College
Dancers	Sarah M. Baker, Sara Jarrett, jennie e. pitts, Julie Polhemus, Dawn Tuman

I would like to extend my deepest gratitude to Jenifer Craig, Sherrie Barr, and Frances Cogan for their unwavering support and much needed feedback and to my family for unconditional love.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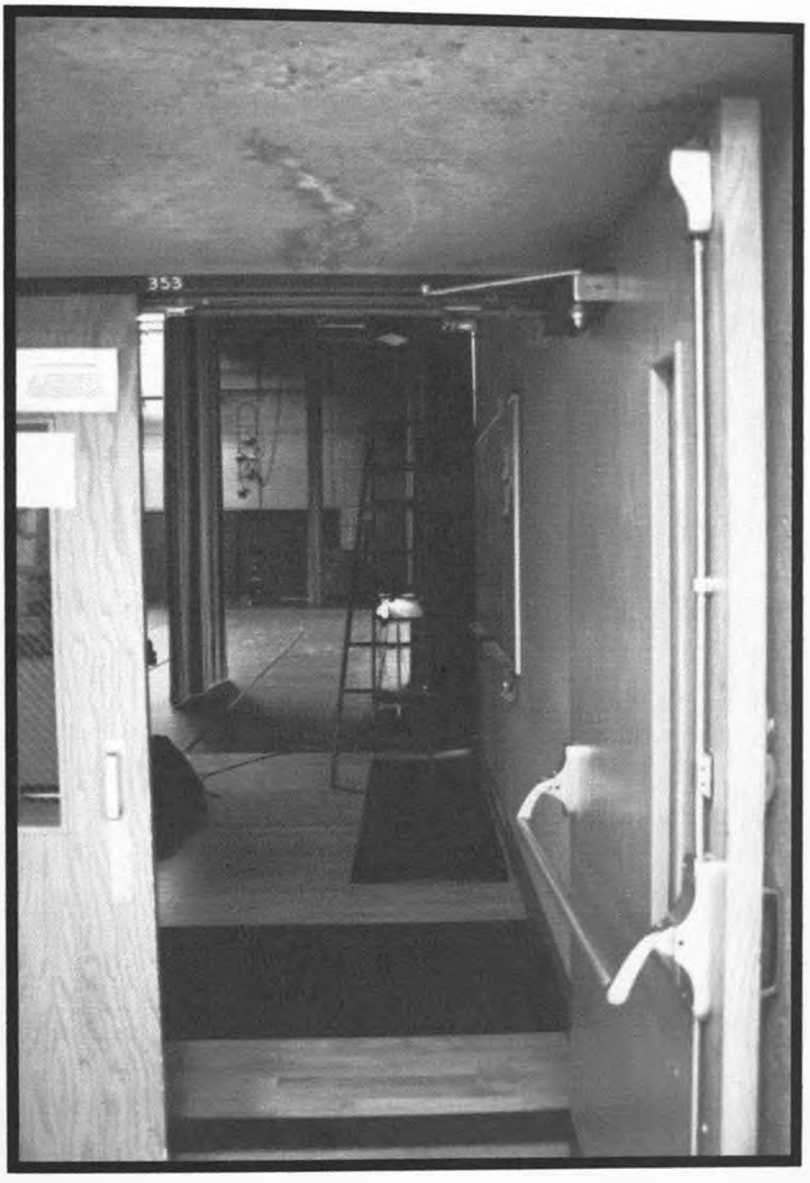

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