

**A CHOREOGRAPHER'S PROCESS:  
A PERSONAL STORY**

by

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# ABSTRACT

In the field of the choreographic arts, there appears to be no one set process of creation. Choreographers appear to agree that the creative process is a mystery and achieved differently by individual choreographers. This study attempts to determine whether the four elements of the creative writing process (discovering a subject, sensing an audience, searching for specifics and creating a design) as defined by Murray (1968, 1990) and redefined by Mamchur (2004) are present and recognizable in the choreographic process in order to suggest that choreography could also be taught in a similar and structured way enabling choreographic students to create expressive work in much the same way that writing students do.

**Keywords: choreography; writing; subject; audience; specifics; design;**

**Subject Terms: writing process; choreographic process;**

**discovering a subject; sensing an audience; searching for specifics; creating a design;**

## **DEDICATION**

I wish to dedicate this thesis to my mother, Pauline, an inspirational teacher and a lover of the 'choreographic arts'. Also my husband, Irwan, who understands creativity, scholarship and above all is one of the best dancers I know.

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# INTRODUCTION

## **Purpose**

The purpose of this study is to determine whether the following four elements of the creative writing process (discovering a subject, sensing an audience, searching for specifics, and creating a design) are present and recognizable in the choreographic process and useful in describing and analyzing the process of art making in the area of choreography.

## **Methodology**

For this study I will determine whether the four elements of the creative writing process (discovering a subject, sensing an audience, searching for specifics and creating a design) as defined by Murray (1968, 1990) and redefined by Mamchur (2004) are present and recognizable in the choreographic process in order to suggest that choreography could also be taught in a similar and structured way thus enabling choreographic students to create expressive work in much the same way that writing students do. The purpose of this thesis will be to investigate whether the process of choreography, the art of making dances, has resonance with or is made up of a group of specific component skills, as is the writing process. The writing skills that I will be examining stem from the work of writer and educator Murray (1968, 1990) who identified seven component writing skills and these were collapsed to four by writer and educator Mamchur (2004).

Mamchur based her 'writing process' on Murray's (1968, 1990) and folded his work into four stages. According to Apps (2007):



By collapsing Murray's quintessential seven-stage model into four stages, Mamchur identifies *four* fundamental skills used by successful writers: discovering the subject, sensing an audience, searching for specifics and creating a design. Consequently, Mamchur's, four stage model is more adaptable and transferable to other artistic disciplines as it speaks more directly to the heart of the process. (pp. 13,14)

A writer using Murray's (1968, 1990), and Mamchur's (2004) redefined model is given the tools to investigate her process thoughtfully and carefully while constructing her work. It is not a linear model in which each element is viewed as a step, rather it is a model of fluidity in which the artist is constantly reviewing her choices and revisiting each element to explore, improve and perfect her work.

Discovering a subject is the component of the process in which the writer or artist is seeking inspirational subject matter and selecting something meaningful to make his writing or art about. In discovering a subject, the artist may be on a journey of self-discovery, uncovering his personal truth, which has been influenced by all he has observed or experienced. Discovering what to focus on or present may be an exploration, examination or investigation that has been inspired by a curiosity or fascination with issues, problems or events. Once discovered, the subject is developed, shaped and clarified with the help of the other components.

Sensing an audience is the element of the process in which the writer or artist is going beyond creating for herself and is seeking to be understood and share her artistic discoveries. She is endeavoring to make a connection with someone. Sensing an audience is the part of the process in which the artist is discovering how to engage an audience, how to be present, how to welcome, and invite an audience to share in her artistic experience. In seeking someone with whom to share her work, someone who will

understand what she has to say, the writer or artist will also try to evoke an emotional and critically engaged response and endeavor to move her audience.

The writer or artist will begin the process of searching for specifics after having discovered a meaningful subject, and focused on an audience. Searching for specifics is the element of the process in which the writer or artist chooses the details or the refinements, which will make his work authentic. Specifics may be found while researching, interviewing an expert or through the writer examining his own personal experiences. It is through the articulation of the details that the writer creates and communicates a believable subject.

Creating a design is the element of the process in which the writer or artist gives structure and order to her work. The writer or artist will plan out her ideas by creating some kind of outline. The planning of the design is not left until the end of the process but evolves from the beginning as the artist revisits each element, discovering her subject, sensing her audience and searching for specifics. As the work progresses, a form is taking shape and the design is a shell, holding the pieces together externally but also providing an internal map which leads the reader or viewer to uncover meaning and clarity.

The four elements of the creative writing process are not separate but co-exist. Discovering a subject may initially be in the mind of the writer but sensing an audience is also present at the same time. In creating a piece of writing, the writer is constantly exploring each element of the process and revisiting them. The four aspects of the writing process may occur simultaneously and can be seen as of equal importance.

Two methods were used to determine whether or not Murray's (1968, 1990) and Mamchur's (2004) creative writing process had any relation or resonance to the choreographic process: archival library search and arts-based research.

Using archival library research, I examined the writings (books, letters, journals, and interviews), and choreographic works on video or in live performance on and by creative writers and choreographers, which according to Apps (2007), "describe how they speak to or frame their process" (p.19), in order to ascertain if the writing process is similar and found in the choreographic process. These archives were examined referencing the creative writing process as defined by Murray (1968, 1990) and redefined by Mamchur (2004). Given the scope of this research study, it was not possible to investigate or examine how the components of the writing process may apply across the broad artistic movements that have existed over time. The archival research was limited to and focused on a number of practicing artists of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries as the notion of choreography as a means of individual expression, enrichment, and education as we know it today only started to emerge from the period of the early twentieth century. (Sachs, 1937) Selection was based on the recognized expertise of the writer or choreographer and her having expressed notions of the processes of discovering a subject, sensing an audience, searching for specifics, and creating a design. Arts-based research provided the research methodology for the choreographic works (on DVD) entitled 'Earth Dances' consisting of two pieces called 'The Orb' and 'Mother Earth' choreographed and danced by the researcher.

The practice of arts-based research as described by Sinner, Leggo, Irwin, Gouzouasis, and Grauer (2006) can encompass several methodologies and methods of

inquiry and “as inductive research, arts-based educational inquiry utilizes the elements, processes, and strategies of artistic and creative practices in scholarly investigation” (p. 1234). Specifically, I have employed the methodology of performative inquiry, which falls under the broad category of arts-based research, which is defined by Sinner, Leggo, Irwin, Gouzouasis, and Grauer (2006):

A/r/t/ographers may emphasize visual inquiry, performative inquiry, narrative inquiry, or musical inquiry, among others, yet they may also use other forms of qualitative research within their work such as oral histories or autobiography. Yet fundamentally, a/r/t/ography acknowledges the practices of artists, researchers and educators as places of inquiry and uses those practices to create, interpret and portray understandings. (pp. 1227-1228).

A/r/t/ography emphasizes a practice with which to interpret, examine, reflect and portray understandings by combining research with art making in a scholarly manner. Asking questions and seeking answers about one’s artistic process, through this ‘living inquiry’<sup>1</sup>, will allow the artist the deep reflection necessary to probe into one’s artistic process and reveal knowledge of the artistic process.

Within the over-arching reach of arts based research is the methodology of performative inquiry, which according to Fels (2008), “is an exploratory venture through which learning emerges, it is a research methodology that recognizes that through inquiry through drama, music, dance and/or other performative mediums of exploration and expression, we come to understand ourselves in relationship to others and the contexts within which we live and create” (Fels, 2008). This methodology provided a framework for exploring the creative process with choreography.

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Meyer, K. (2006). Living inquiry: A gateless gate and a beach. In W. Ashton and D. Denton (Eds). *Spirituality, Ethnography, and Teaching: Stories from Within*. NY: Peter Lang.

As choreography is my primary mode of artistic expression, arts-based research, and specifically performative inquiry was used as the means to take an insightful look into my choreographic process while at the same time investigating and comparing it to the writing process elements. While engaging in the choreographic process, I recorded my experiences and examined my process using the structure of the four elements of the writing process. I created choreographic work, which uncovered new perceptions and knowledge about my choreographic process.

## **Writing Instruction**

According to Stice, Bertrand, & Bertrand (1995), “Between the mid 1960’s and the late 1970’s, ‘creative writing’ appeared as a curricular issue (in elementary schools) because many students were not being exposed to composition before high school” (p. 213). Until then the traditional way of teaching writing tended to focus on the mechanics of writing such as spelling, grammar and punctuation. The shift from emphasizing the finished product to teaching a writing process was initiated by the work of writing educators such as Murray (1968), Graves (1983), Caulkins (1986) and Emig (1971).

Murray (1968), one of the first to outline a ‘writer’s process’, in his book *A Writer Teaches Writing*, outlines ‘The Writer’s Seven Skills’, which he identified by observing “the lessons professional writers have taught themselves” (xi). He wrote his book because he was asked to create a new approach to writing from an author’s perspective for the New England School Development Council in 1965. After interviewing, observing and testing his ideas with hundreds of teachers and in hundreds of classrooms he arrived at a process consisting of seven steps, which stress prewriting to discover your subject, sense

your audience, search for specifics and create a design and then writing, developing a critical eye, and rewriting (Murray, 1968).

Others built on Murray's work and in the late 1970's Graves (1983) noticed through research, that children seemed to go through three general stages in writing: prewriting, writing and post writing. The term the 'writing process' was coined and began to be used to describe this new way of teaching writing. Further according to Stice (1995), "The previously well-known practice of having children turn in a single draft on an assigned topic to be graded and corrected by the teacher was no longer considered good teaching" (p. 213).

Caulkins (1986) and Emig (1971) also developed similar ideas that emphasized process. Caulkins (1986) developed the idea of 'the writer's workshop' and stressed the teacher facilitating the student in discovering a subject that was meaningful and important to them in order for them to do authentic writing. Caulkins (1986) states, "Beneath layers of resistance, we have the primal need to write. We need to make our truths beautiful, and we need to say to others, "This is me. This is my story, my life, my truth. We need to be heard" (p. 5). Emig's research also confirmed the idea that writing instruction could be broken down into steps to be most effective and marking up a student's paper with red ink did little to improve their writing ability. In her work she outlined prewriting, composing, revising and proofreading (Emig, 1971).

Having taken writing and creativity courses from writer and educator Mamchur (1999), (2007), I noticed the transferability of her 'writing process' to choreography. I seemed to be unconsciously using similar but unidentified elements for choreographing

dance works. As mentioned, the writing model as defined by Murray (1968, 1990) and redefined by Mamchur (2004), will form the basis for this research.

## **What is Choreography?**

For the purposes of this thesis the choreographic process will be defined as working through the process of designing or arranging a body or bodies in structures in which movement occurs and a creative building of movement phrases to create a dance or concert piece. This choreographic work is viewed as art and has something to impart to an audience. It is not performed for the mere enjoyment of the movement by the choreographer but constructed and planned as a presentation in which to convey meaning, artistic inquiry and expression and to connect with and move an audience.

According to Martin (1963), choreography or “dance can be seen to be a basic, fundamental element of man’s (sic) behavior and one which is motivated by impulses and intuitions to express that which lies inside and is too deep for words” (p. 8).

Choreography and movement are a means to inquire and express with our bodies and to communicate. All cultures have choreographed movement and the universal urge to dance can be seen through out the ages as expressed by all human beings. Ancient people first used choreographed movement to bridge the gap between themselves and their creator and to communicate, supplicate or offer thanks. Choreography has always played a part in human social interactions and celebrations (Martin, 1963) (Sachs, 1937).

Choreographed movement is something that has far more value than just being an enjoyable pastime at social functions. Writer and historian, Sachs (1937), comments on the importance of choreographic movement when he states:

The dance is the mother of the arts. Music and poetry exist in time, painting and architecture in space. But the dance lives at once in time and space. Rhythmical patterns of movement, the plastic sense of space, the vivid representation of a world seen and imagined – these things man creates in his body in the dance before he uses substance and stone and word to give expression to his inner experiences. (p. 3)

Choreographed movement as an artistic creation can be seen to be one of the foundational arts for humanity, an art form that has served humankind as a means of communication and as an outlet for feeling and expression. H'Doubler (1940), a pioneer in movement education, shares her view of the historical significance of dance:

The difference between the dances of the past and those of the present are but differences in outer form: in period, location, temperament, education, and taste, which together determine the cultural values of any age. Basically concerned with the primary issues of life, dance has been inseparably connected with the expression of the cultural development of any period, and in turn has exerted its influence on the social patterns of the past. Likewise, it can serve us today in our quest for richer living. (pp. 45-46)

Dance and choreographed movement may be viewed as being an integral part of life, something that has always been and will continue to be, perhaps changing in form and pattern but essentially recognizable and serving similar functions no matter the time or age.

## **A History of the Choreographic Process and Choreographic Instruction**

According to Humphrey (1958), “Man (sic) has composed dances throughout the ages, from the earliest prehistoric era to the present time, but it was only in the nineteen thirties that theories of dance composition were developed and taught” (p. 16). Up until this time, the ballet had dominated the Western dance world for nearly four hundred years and employed formalized steps and story lines, which did not stray from an



established formula. The notion of a need for a choreographic process had not emerged. The support and funding of court choreographers and dance masters depended on their pleasing their royal patrons and so staying with the tried and true made the ballet rigid and limited but still a popular art form. (Audsley, 1960) However, just prior to and at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, with the advent of major changes in the world, war, upheaval and the loosening of tradition, new ideas started to creep into the arts. New styles of dance, currently known as modern or expressionist dance, began emerging. The development of a choreographic process became a possibility.

Many choreographic artists from the early nineteenth hundreds such as Duncan (1878-1927), danced in new and freer ways but did not leave any process of creation behind (McDonagh, 1970). Choreographers of the thirties, such as Graham and Humphrey developed their own unique styles of moving and ways of developing and creating their work. Humphrey (1958) notes:

I like to think that choreographic theory and the study of it is a craft, and only that, for I do not claim that anyone can be taught to create, but only that talent or possible genius can be supported and informed by know-how, just as an architect, no matter how gifted, must understand the uses of steel, glass and stone. (p. 19)

Such early European innovators as Francois Delsarte (1811-1871), Emile Jacques-Dalcroze (1865-1950), and Rudolph von Laban (1879-1953), who all developed theories of human movement and expression, provided the foundation for most systems of modern and post modern concert dance. Francois Delsarte (1811-1871) was a French-American musician and singer. He developed an acting method that taught that connecting the real or actual inner emotional experiences of the actor with what they were portraying would bring an authenticity to their work. He systemized a set of

gestures and movements based upon his observations of human interaction. To develop his method, he closely studied and examined the voice, breath, movement dynamics, and the expressive elements of the human body.

Jacques-Dalcroze (1865-1950) was a Swiss composer and musician known best for developing Eurhythmics, an approach to music education involving whole body movement. He developed 'Rhythmic Gymnastics', which he believed would enable his students to hear accurately and respond spontaneously to music. This unique movement work concentrated on the body as the original instrument and involved natural movement such as walking, lunging, and skipping to learn to beat time to music.

Perhaps the most influential person, whose theories have had a lasting and formative effect on modern dance and movement education, was Rudolph von Laban. Born in Austro-Hungary, (1879-1953), Laban was a dancer, choreographer, and movement experimenter. Laban's ideas and movement theories are now used as the basis of most dance and movement programs at universities and public schools in North America and Europe.

Winearls (1958) explains how Laban came to create and conceive of his theories:

Beginning with studies of ballet, of the work of Delsarte, of many kinds of folk dance, of the laws of mathematics and geometry, Laban evolved a means of "dissecting out" the basic elements, which create and control every kind of movement of which human anatomy is capable. (p. 8)

Modern dance and its technique were developed as a reaction against the ballet at the turn of the century (Audsley, 1960). Its pioneers, Duncan, Fuller and St. Denis, all American women, took the ideas of Laban and Dalcroze, added their own personal style and beliefs about movement and performed, for their time, very free and daring public performances. They danced barefoot and without corsets and embodied the liberation of

women, which was just beginning as a social reform. Vigier (1994) examines Duncan's beliefs:

Isadora's concept of dance was far removed from prevailing stage dances of the music-hall type with "kicks and frills" she had rejected early on in her career, and with the ballet, which she saw as calculated steps and patterns performed by deformed bodies for the enjoyment of balletomanes. (p. 45).

Duncan is often cited as the founder of modern dance because she was one of the first to recognize and state publicly that choreography and dance were for everyone and that to dance was a fundamental activity and should be experienced in order to be a fully alive person.

In the thirties, the next wave of innovators in modern dance, such as Humphrey and Graham moved modern dance in new directions to explore more social and political themes. Their students, Cunningham, Taylor, and Tharp, to mention a few, have continued to make modern dance a place to try out new movement ideas and a way of making commentary on our ever changing world through the body's expression.

Today, choreographic instructors may base their technique on variations of Graham, Humphrey or ballet basics to ensure their dancers have a trained and well-developed body, capable of moving in many styles. But what of our public school movement and choreographic instructors? This is where most children experience their first exposure to choreography and movement. Generally, public school instructors are not concerned with teaching rigid, although necessary, technique to produce a professional dancer. They are concerned with giving students early experiences that foster a love of moving, a movement vocabulary, some history about choreography and

dance, and the ability to learn about how their body can move and how they can create their own movement pieces.

Space, weight, time and flow, the four main aspects of Laban's movement framework, offer a useful structure for organizing movement lessons and instruction. However, the art of making dances, the choreographic piece, seems to be elusive and lacks a clear process beyond the analysis of what movement elements should and could be present in a work. There has not been a systematic approach to the teaching of choreography.

Ashley (2003) observes, "Students often take the passive role of dancers but not the active role of choreographers or creators and are just led through set steps, timing and spacing" (p. 1). The distinct or exact stages of the choreographic process are often hard to identify for both the growing and emerging choreographic artist. Looking to Murray's (1968, 1990) and Mamchur's (2004) creative writing process may be a new and fresh way for students to learn to be choreographers. Choreographer and dance pioneer Halprin (1969) suggests that through effort and encouragement we can promote our creativity in movement:

Although every human being has creative intuition, we cannot change its nature nor its potential strength. We can, however, use what we have through 1) learning to respond to it, 2) encouraging its growth and, 3) never ceasing to put it to the test. (p. 50)

The goal of choreographic and movement instructors is to go beyond having students merely mirror or copy the instructor's choreography. Choreographic instructors want to mentor students to enable them to create original works of their own, to convey their own meaning. Supplying a concrete process such as the four elements of the writer's

process to choreographic students may assist them in tapping into their own creativity and provide them with a clear method to lead them through the creative process.

Choreographer Halprin (1969) shares her views on the creative process:

The essence of artistic creation is a mystery. But we can know about its effects. Skills and craftsmanship can be learned; discipline we can force upon ourselves. Although we have an abundance of these learned techniques, they must not become formulas that substitute for genuine creativity. We must have something more...something of the unknown attribute. (p. 50)

Many would agree that the know-how, the physical technique, the principles of movement and spatial design can be taught but the act of creation seems to be accomplished quite individually by different choreographic artists. Employing the writer's process to choreography may provide the structure to enable choreographers to discover their own unformulated ability.

## **Why Choreography is Important**

Choreography can be seen as an established and respected art form in existence from the beginning of humankind's existence. Choreography is something to be fostered and appreciated as a means to express and share artistic themes, ideas and beliefs using the physical body as the medium.

Movement educator H'Doubler (1940) believed that movement and choreography should be an essential component of a complete education for every child. She presents a compelling argument for the inclusion of movement education in the curriculum:

It is to be expected that not everyone will be a great dancer, and that dancing, of course, will be experienced as a complete art form more by some than others; but, as every child has a right to a box of crayons and some instruction in the fundamental principles of drawing and in the use of color, whether or not there is any chance of his becoming a professional

artist, so every child has the right to know how to achieve control over his body in order that he may use it to the limit of his ability for the expression of his own reactions to life. Even if he can never carry his efforts far enough to realize dance in its highest forms, he may experience the sheer joy of the rhythmic sense of free, controlled, and expressive movement, and through this know an addition to life to which every human being is entitled. (p. 66)

There is a necessity for the recognition of the body and the importance of its exploration as a place and source of vital information in order to assist children on their own path to becoming wholly educated persons. Gardner (1990) states, “In most cases, the values and priorities of a culture can be readily discerned in the way in which its classroom learning is organized” (p. ix). Unfortunately, looking closely at the organization of our classrooms and what is selected as curriculum, subjects such as choreography and movement education are often neglected, undervalued or not seen as a priority.

Teaching movement and choreography is a way for students to connect to the physical part of themselves while simultaneously developing their mental, social and emotional sides. Choreography as part of movement education is an art form, which may help people express their inner selves, show the beauty of movement and be enjoyed by the viewer.

According to movement educator Gilbert (2006), “Movement is the key to learning” (p. 7). She believes that students cannot sit still for very long before the blood and oxygen flow to their brains significantly slows down, thereby slowing down the learning process. She advocates bringing dance into the classroom, and suggests that movement will stimulate learners and increase their kinesthetic intelligence. Quoting from her book, *Brain Compatible Dance Education*, Gilbert (2006) sees movement

education as “creating dancers, but also collaborative workers, critical and creative problem solvers, articulate communicators, and healthy, involved members of the community” (p. 8). Besides creating strong, flexible bodies, movement education may also encourage learning an extensive movement vocabulary and working on concepts that increase the body’s sense of itself. Movement education provides unique opportunities to collaborate and use one’s imagination through the creation of the student’s own choreographic work.

Art educator Walker (2001) teaches:

The Art Making Process consists of recognizing or finding big ideas, problem solving by seeking out concepts, techniques or practical processes, establishing a knowledge base and creating the opportunities for the artist to make personal connections and boundaries and a means to explore ways of working while risk taking, playing, and experimenting. (p. 3)

Choreography is art making which involves expressing and exploring one’s own feelings, ideas and identity with the body. Best (1974) states, “artistic expression is thought to be a release of feelings through the artist’s particular medium, a sort of emotional catharsis” (p. 4). The value of such things as artistic expression and the release of inner feelings in artistic creation cannot be measured but undoubtedly seem worthy of fostering in education. H’Doubler (1940) teaches that it is the responsibility of educators to ensure that choreography and movement continue to function as a vital experience for self expression and the discovery and understanding of our bodies. She believes that, “The inclusion of dance in the general education program is the one means of giving free opportunity to every child for experiencing the contributions it can make to his developing personality and his growing artistic nature” (H’Doubler, 1940, p. 59).

Physical expression and physical communication seem essential to integrating a person with all parts of her being as a learner. Gilbert (2006) reiterates this idea when she states, “Sensory–motor activities build the brain. A fully functioning body reflects a fully functioning brain” (p. 32). Adding to this notion choreographer de la Tour (1970) stresses that educational movement has value because it is a vital and essential form of human expression. She informs us that, “Dance taught as a springboard for the learning of other subjects will help the student to know his subject with his whole being ---mentally, physically and intuitively” (p. 165).

De la Tour (1970) emphasizes choreography as a creative tool and movement as a means of communication and expression:

I believe the modern child will improve the quality of his life through educational dance. All agree that all art media used creatively improve the quality of our lives; but only the medium of movement, the art of dance, can use the whole of man as the creative tool by which he expresses himself and is therefore able to communicate his uniqueness, to identify himself and realize his relation to other beings, nature, and the universe. (p. 167)

Choreographic educators and instructors in our schools and universities feel that choreography is an important part of the fine arts or physical education curriculum. They believe the experience of movement should include an expressive and artistic side and that it is the right of all children to be in touch with and learn how to move their bodies (H’Doubler, 1940). According to movement educator Gilbert (2006), “All human beings first learn through movement. Movement must be an integral component of the learning process throughout the lifespan” (p. vii).

Snowber (2002) reiterates this by stating, “The body has the capacity to be a huge teacher in our lives, ... and the data of the body can be a place where the soul can sing



and the bones can dance” (p. 20). “Much of our relating in the world is experienced through our body, yet seldom do we take this as a serious place of study” (p. 22).

It would seem in practice that we are becoming a society of ‘disembodied’ people. By this I don’t mean that people are not running marathons, biking, and mountain climbing for physical fitness and enjoyment. But rather, that as a society, it seems the value of physicality only encompasses health, fitness and improving the body image. Few people seem to be viewing the body as a place to learn about themselves or as a means of artistic expression. Taking the time to listen to the body and read the signs the body reveals seems a relatively unknown element. The fast paced society we now live in has created a culture of the mind. We watch and take in streams of endless information in the form of electronic media and use this same electronic media for recreation and work. The physical body is often ignored. Writer and philosopher Abram (1996) reflects on this by observing that we are, “Caught up in a mess of abstractions, our attention hypnotized by a host of human-made technologies that only reflect us back to ourselves, it is all too easy for us to forget our carnal inheritance in a more-than-human matrix of sensations and sensibilities” (p. 22).

Klein (1997) writes about the important connection between our body and mind and explores our seeming disconnections in the modern world. She adds to Abram’s observation and reflects on the isolated self inside our bodies:

Modern urban people often live with a subliminal sense of being caught inside their own silhouettes—that is, of inhabiting a body that is cut off from nature and independent from other human beings. At the same time, modern life presents us with so much information, so many choices, and urges us to attend closely to the multiple feelings associated with these, that we are dealt a great deal to hold in the very small space that is our body. (p. 140)

It would seem imperative that the physical part of our beings should not be neglected in the school setting but honored and recognized as an integral place for learning. Not just the muscles, bones and physical fitness aspect but an awareness of how our bodies are a means to communicate, connect with others and explore who we are. Do students not need to be taught to read their own and others movement as text? Do they not need to see the body as a legitimate source for gaining important information about themselves and others?

Abram (1996) believes that all of our senses have equal value in conveying and receiving information:

The experiencing body is not a self-enclosed object, but an open, incomplete entity. This openness is evident in the arrangement of the senses: I have these multiple ways of encountering and exploring the world – listening with my ears, touching with my skin, seeing with my eyes, tasting with my tongue, smelling with my nose – and all of these various powers or pathways continually open outward from the perceiving body, like different paths diverging from a forest. (p. 125)

The perceiving self is not limited to visual or auditory means, which are the traditional means of passing on knowledge in our school cultures. Ideally, the process of discovery and exploration of our world to learn and acquire knowledge will encompass all of the senses. Educating students in understanding their own body, as a vehicle for expression and artful meaning making may be achieved through teaching them the art of choreography.

As choreographer Lewitsky (1975) observes:

Motion defines life – because we think, learn and store information kinesthetically – because we need to express nonverbal feelings in motion – because motion is one of the ways we perceive, conceive, create, select, and communicate. Aren't these some of the values we extol when we refer to a civilized and educated society? (p. 18)

# **A CHOREOGRAPHER’S PROCESS: ARCHIVAL RESEARCH**

## **Introduction**

According to Murray (1968), “The act of writing is complicated, but in the tidal conflict between the artist’s freedom and the craftsman’s discipline there is a consistent pattern of work which can be identified and passed on to the student writer” (p. 1). Murray’s writing process (1968, 1990) outlines how a writer may focus on specific elements of the writing process to find a subject, make a deep connection with an audience, and create order and meaning through carefully chosen specifics and a well structured design.

Just as writing is a valuable way to communicate, a given means of expression, enabling students to better understand and know themselves and a skill that every educated person is encouraged to explore, so choreography may be seen to have the same essential applications. In the same way that the writer constructs her work, the choreographer may also build works of movement that tell personal and communal stories and express visually to an audience a choreographer’s ideas, thoughts and feelings.

Using Murray’s (1968, 1990) and Mamchur’s (2004) collapsed four step writing process as a choreographic process, with the tools of discovering a subject, sensing an audience, searching for specifics and creating a design, may provide choreographic educators with four clear and valuable elements with which to guide students to produce

their own choreography. The writer's process could provide another new and fresh approach to the choreographic methods already in existence.

Choreography conveys imagery, emotions, ideas, or a story with the body. The imagery has meaning and can be interpreted by an audience, as does a poem, novel or play. How have successful choreographers created their work? How have they discovered their subject or idea? What decisions did they make regarding the specific movements to include that would have meaning for others and above all convey what they needed to say but also make an emotional connection with their audience? Finally, how did these choreographers create a design or structure to make their dance piece coherent, organized and dynamic?

Does the choreographic process follow the same process that successful and published writers use? Have choreographers paralleled the four elements of the creative writing process (discovering a subject, sensing an audience, searching for specifics, creating a design) and are these elements present and recognizable in their choreographic process and useful in describing and analyzing the process of art making in the area of choreography?

The following archival research will be an examination of the statements or descriptions by writers and choreographers on their creative processes. This thesis is not attempting to determine all of the places that subject, audience, specifics and design arise. It will focus on the existence of reference to discovering a subject, sensing an audience, searching for specifics, and creating a design within the literature, including letters and journals, written by writers and choreographers to determine if there is a resonance between the two processes of writing and choreography. Writers and choreographers

were selected on the basis of the availability of documentation of their processes and their recognized expertise and contributions to their particular artistic category since the concert dance of Duncan when a clear alternative to formal classical ballet began to be performed.

## **Discovering Your Subject**

Discovering a subject to write about, or to make any kind of art about seems to be the first necessary decision the artist will make. Taking a closer examination of what writers and choreographers say about discovering their subject, we find there are many paths to this starting point for their art making but also many similarities.

Writer and educator Murray (1968) teaches:

The writer knows what he has to say determines how he says it. He takes part in a constant search for subject, for he has discovered the strength of his writing will depend directly on the vigor of his thinking. Content and form, form and content – which comes first? The answer has to be content. Form is not an empty jug into which the writer pours meaning; form grows out of meaning, so much so that many writers come to believe that form, in a very real sense is meaning. (p. 2)

This first crucial element, finding your subject, will organically determine the form the work will take and create the boundaries and outline from which the artist will work. As the writer develops her ideas for her subject, the shape or design of the work will also develop and become more defined. Further Murray (1968) adds:

The writer gets ideas by spending part of his time in a state of open susceptibility. One person has said that a writer is a man with his skin off. He is particularly aware, uniquely receptive to impressions and ideas. He reads, he listens, he looks, he tastes, he touches. He is in contact with life in an uncritical way, accepting life. (p. 2)

The writer is more than a mere bystander or a good observer of the life around her. She is a detective, a witness, and a beholder. She notes, recognizes, and recalls and stores her facts and impressions. She makes connections and inferences that later will be put to good use in her writing. Through her observations of everyday life, conversations she hears or reading material on many topics, she discovers a subject that is meaningful to her and which ignites the creative spark from which she will produce a unique interpretation of her subject.

The writer may gather his material from many sources and will discover his subject through all of his senses. But the material for his subject is something that he knows about intimately and has some kind of emotional connection to in order for his work to strike a cord of authenticity with himself and his audience.

The subject is first discovered after the writer has had time for her subconscious and deep thought processes to reflect and shape her input, sensations and observations. What emerges as important and relevant subject matter will be determined by what the particular artist values and wishes to illuminate for an audience. The subject matter also hinges on what the writer may find intriguing, culturally relevant or feels necessary to make a political statement about. In essence, the subject will be something she cares about and will also depend on her viewpoint and background, which may include, gender, age, place of residence, financial or political status and ethnic origins.

Discovering a subject for the writer is achieved by a thoughtful percolating of everything that has been scrutinized, inspected and examined before it can be refined or clarified, before it is intuitively ready to emerge as art. We can also surmise that looking inward to find one's subject may mean delving for material that may come from one's

past and will be waiting unconsciously to be uncovered. Canadian writer Kogawa speaks about finding her subject for her novel, *Obasan* (1986):

Well, I had been asked many years before to write about the internment experience and had not been able to ... I did not want to address my Japanese-Canadianness or the people or any of it. It was horrific for me just to even think about all that stuff, it still is. I had spent my childhood convinced that the way to live was to be as non-Japanese as possible. I felt a kind of revulsion at the whole experience of ethnicity. I was prompted to write by some sense of “obedience” to the pen. The pen or the hand seems to have its own language, logic, wisdom, direction. So with *Obasan* there was that kind of “nonknowing” direction that I simply followed. (p. 147)

From Kogawa’s statement, we can infer that the writer may have something so important to say that she is compelled to record it when the time is right. The writer may uncover her past and use it as subject material when she has acquired more maturity or perhaps more perspective on her subject. She may be ready to allow herself a cathartic release of some psychological burden through writing about it.

Writer Woolf (1954) also concurs that writing is there waiting to be untapped and may be released inexplicably. She records in her diary:

One thing, in considering my state of mind now, seems to me beyond dispute; that I have, at last, bored down into my oil well, and can’t scribble fast enough to bring it all to the surface. I have now at least six stories welling up in me, and feel, at last, that I can coin all my thoughts into words. (p. 74)

Having examined the words of writers, I now turn to what choreographers have to say about discovering their subjects. Do choreographers use similar methods for finding their subject? Dancer and choreographer Graham (1991) recounts that the stimulus for her discovering a subject may come from many sources:

And then there is inspiration. Where does it come from? Mostly from the excitement of living. I get it from the diversity of a tree or the ripple of the sea, a bit of poetry, the sighting of a dolphin breaking the still water and moving towards me ... anything that quickens you to the instant. (p. 8)

Graham (1991) felt past experiences have a deep influence on choices for art making. She agrees that one's subject may come from outer inspiration or from deep within us but she goes even farther than this by positing:

For all of us, but particularly for a dancer with his intensification of life and his body, there is a blood memory that can speak to us. Each of us from our mother and father has received their blood and through their parents and their parents' parents and backward into time. We carry thousands of years of that blood and its memory. How else to explain those instinctive gestures and thoughts that come to us, with little preparation or expectation? (pp. 9-10)

Choreographer Tharp (2003) adds to this notion of memory as an aid to discovering your subject. She believes that everything that happens to us is a possibility for our art making:

There are as many forms of memory as there are ways of perceiving, and every one of them is worth mining for inspiration. Memory, as we most frequently think of it, encompasses every fact and experience that we can call up at will from our cranial hard drives. (p. 62)

Choreographer Hawkins (1991) agrees that the subconscious self and one's past is where the choreographer's ideas come from. She states, "The success of the choreographer's creative work is dependent upon the imagination transforming inner experience into motion" (p. 59).

Further to support this notion of subject surfacing from the subconscious, choreographer Humphrey (1959) answers her own rhetorical question by stating:

Where do ideas for dances come from? From many sources: experience from life itself, music, drama, legend, history, psychology, literature, ritual, religion, folklore, social conditions, fantasy; and from such vague promptings as moods, impressions .... It is probably rare for a choreographer deliberately to make a choice of a theme by rational means. He is more likely to be seized by an enthusiasm, which wells up from the subconscious and demands to be born. (p. 32)



Writers and choreographers can be seen to look inward as one way of discovering their subject and draw upon what they know already and are brave enough to allow themselves to discover to use as material for their art. But writers and choreographers are also keen observers and recorders of their worlds. They register the world with all of their senses in order to produce art, which is reflective of all that is and the many dimensions, possibilities, and ways that human beings live and interact. Writers and choreographers seem to filter what they experience through their senses and then reflect back in their art what is true for them. Murray (2005) adds to this idea by asserting:

Before writing the writer scans the world and that process continues through the writing of each draft. As we learn to use one sense, the writer learns to develop other senses. The writer needs to develop the seven senses – sight, hearing, touch, taste, smell, memory, imagination. (p. 183)

Philosopher Sheets-Johnstone (1999) supports this multi-sensing way of coming to understand the world. She posits that it is primarily through every sense of the body, but particularly the movement of the body, that we learn about our world and make sense of it. In her book, *The Primacy of Movement* (1999), she tries to dispel the notion of the brain and its functions being the focus for learning. She alleges:

The purpose of *The Primacy of Movement* is essentially to reverse direction, to shift the perspective from which both epistemological and metaphysical – and scientific and historical – studies commonly proceed. It is to demonstrate that movement offers us the possibility not only of formulating an epistemology true to the truths of experience, but of articulating a metaphysics true to the dynamic nature of the world and to the foundationally animated nature of life. (p. xvii)

Sheets-Johnstone (1999) holds that investigating the animate side of our humanity will reveal and bring to light new and exciting information about human beings. She claims that:

Movement is indeed “the mother of all cognition” ... It is the foundation of our conceptual life, that is, the foundation of an ever-growing store of corporeal concepts, concepts such as ‘inside’, ‘heavy’, ‘light’, ‘open’, ‘close’, concepts having to do with consequential relationships, and so on. (p. xxi)

As the body develops and grows from infancy, through childhood, and adolescence, our physical experiences greatly aid in the maturation process. We benefit from direct physical learning and become skillful through practicing all manner of activities with our bodies. This practice can encompass gross motor skills such as walking, running, and jumping whereby the body is learning about space and its abilities and capabilities. Or fine motor skills, such as the ability to manipulate small objects such as tools for building or pencils and brushes for writing or drawing. The movement experiences we have through out our lives form the basis of how we interact with the world.

Dance educator Gilbert (2006) understands that our brain and how we perceive the world is dependent upon our body’s experiences. She believes that it is vital to move through all developmental patterns as babies, young children, and young adults in order to develop our brains to their fullest potential. She posits that the correct movement experiences will allow for the opportunity for our brains to develop in cell explosion, synaptic connections, dendrite expansion and keep our brains plastic and open to new learning states. She teaches that:

In order to learn, we must first have a sensory-experience then reflect and make connections. Finally, we must take action based on the experience. ... A fully functioning body creates a fully functioning brain. (p. 9)

The job of a writer or choreographer is to make connections and then present them in new and exciting ways in his art. Being aware of our bodies and the immensely

important influence the body has on all cognitive functioning and creative endeavors will only further enhance a writer or choreographer in his decision-making and selection of inspirational subject matter. Being present, paying attention and consciously listening, watching, hearing, smelling, tasting and touching with our bodies and in relationship with others will give both writers and choreographers much real material to discover an authentic subject.

Writer Tan, in her book, *The Opposite of Fate: Memories of a Writing Life* (2003), adds to this notion of using real life as a subject by discussing how she used her mother's real life events to write the book, *The Kitchen's Gods Wife*. She remembers:

While I was writing my second book, she made sure to give me some motherly advice. "This time," she said, "tell my true story." And with her permission-actually her demand – how could I refuse? How could I resist? After all, the richest source of my fiction does come from real life as I have misunderstood it-its contradictions, its unanswerable questions, its unlikely twists and turns. (p. 211)

As writers draw from their real lives, dig down into their memories, and take moments that were unforgettable or life impacting for their material so have choreographers drawn from their real life circumstances to create powerful choreography. The Vancouver based dance group, Kokoro Dance, has produced many such memorable pieces. Co-founder and choreographer, Hirabayashi has used the real life experiences of his family effectively to portray the abstract concept of injustice by drawing on his Japanese heritage and the story of his grandfather's internment during the Second World War. In a dance piece entitled *Rage*, first performed in Vancouver in 1988, Hirabayashi explores his cultural past and the unfairness suffered by his grandparents. The audience is drawn into his subject because of the potent images and articulation of extreme feeling Hirabayashi transmits in his movements. This was also a multi visual piece in that

Hirabayashi incorporated historical photographs projected behind the performers to add to the imagery and had live taiko drummers, which mirrored his 'rage' in their intensity, volume and resonance.

Another Vancouver based choreographer, Pite, also finds her subject in personal emotion. Her piece *Lost Action*, first performed in Vancouver in March 2006, deals with the emotion of loss. This poignant piece successfully shows many ways human beings experience loss, be it in death, separating from a partner, or the loss of face in our daily lives at work and with friends. Pite says of her work:

In confronting the subject of impermanence and loss, I wanted to look at physicality and configurations that relate to anger, aggression, grief, defeat, surrender—as well as the desire to protect, to rescue and defend. What does it look like when we try to hold down an image, to hoard a movement, to save a certain quality or stop its disappearance? (p. 10)

The imagery in this work was utterly convincing in that it spoke to the innate feelings that all people share about death and loss. Pite masterfully discovered a subject that all people will relate to on some level and created a work that 'showed' people at their best, being compassionate and empathic, and at their worst, being competitive and cold. *Lost Action* is a work that clearly expresses her theme by showing the losses we may incur but also portraying the ethereal quality of our lives and briefness of our time on earth.

Having chosen to work in the medium of movement or dance, choreographers are especially attuned to the body's awareness of space, time, weight, the sense of touch, and the body's movement capabilities and rhythms. Through moving the body in seemingly random ways to others, in improvisation, choreographers may also discover a subject. It would seem to be like a writer who writes in a free associative manner. A writer may

discover a subject in the outward flow of his words as he is writing. He is uncovering layers of himself which may have remained hidden or unknown up to that moment. Likewise, a choreographer may move her body, letting her body direct and reveal the movement. This endeavor to find expression and material through improvisation is spoken of by many choreographers. (Blom & Chaplin, 1982) (Minton, 1986)

Blom and Chaplin (1982) cite choreographer Nikolais, as he describes his highly intuitive approach to choreography, which employs elements of improvisation. Nikolais shares how he develops his ideas:

I prefer to drop a simple, single idea into my brain and let it rummage around for several months, with no particular efforts toward consciousness on my part. Then, two or three weeks before I begin to choreograph, I attempt to cast up the results of the Rorschach process. Then I like to choreograph swiftly and within a short span of time. I feel that in this outpouring I keep the channels of my subject open. (p. 9)

It is through improvisation that educator Snowber (2002) has developed her concept of body narrative. She explains the importance of attending to the body to discover your subject:

Attention to the body gives us the space to open new rooms, for others and for the passion living inside us. As a writer and dancer I have combined the art of autobiographical narrative and dance, developing a choreographic process called “body narratives”, largely using the art of improvisation, I repeatedly dance the narratives of my own life and the questions and responses from my students as a way of accessing, developing, chiseling, editing, and creating material. As I listen to my own body data, I am given the impetus for the paint on my canvas, the notes of my instrument, the sounds of my flesh. (p. 23)

Snowber believes that through improvisation, a choreographer can draw on her real life experiences and current situation and in the act of freely moving reveal and discover personal truths and hidden feelings stored in the body to use as authentic material for choreography. The notion of a choreographer discovering her subject through

movement and the honesty of the body, and acquiring revelations from what has been stored and then released, opens up the need for acceptance of how much of our experiences are hidden in the body. The body retains forgotten memories and experiences and choreographers seem to have tapped into ways to release these memories in improvisational movement. A choreographer is able to use her whole body to explore a subject, uncovering feelings and memories, and then interpreting this material for an audience to understand and resonate with the emotional content.

Blom and Chaplin (1982) describe how a melding of improvisation and choreography create movement pieces. They explain this process by stating, “Improvising and choreographing become one as the processes (creating movement and critically crafting and forming it) work together. As the movement is flowing out, it is being shaped and developed by intuition interlocked with skill into a finer and finer organic, aesthetic whole” (p. 7).

Writers and choreographers also need something on which their ideas or subjects hang together in a meaningful and solid way. Tharp (2003) aptly calls her underlying idea her ‘spine’. She says if you stay true to your ‘spine’ your work or piece will have a consistency and hang together. She reflects:

There’s an obvious reason why, as a choreographer, I am constantly groping for a spine. Dance is preverbal; it doesn’t have the writer’s advantage of using language to establish meaning and intent. The vocabulary of dance is movement, not words. So I need something more in the form of an idea, an image, a memory, a metaphor to make my intentions comprehensible to the audience. (p. 145)

Tharp advocates finding a broad idea and refining it down so that a choreographer has a clear picture in her mind of what the basic premise is to be for her work and sticking to it. The idea selected by a choreographer can be seen as the basis from which

all the related ideas and details will stem. Straying from the spine will only disconnect the audience from the message a choreographer is trying to communicate.

A choreographer or writer will also strive to choose a subject that she cares about and believes in. H'Doubler (1940) supports this idea when she shares:

For a dance to be composed there must first be something to dance about. And this something must be so valued that its worth is its value of expression. It may be occasioned by an event of outer or inner life. It may be discovered in the outside world of actual happening, or appear seemingly clearly formed from the deepest resources of the mind. (p. 120)

Choreographers or writers who are struggling with defining an idea for a work might start to clarify their ideas by asking questions. This is one way of discovering, refining, and defining what a choreographer or writer might want to say. Choreographer Bausch (2008) relates:

It's difficult when I choreograph because at the start there's nothing there - no music, no set, no books or script - there's just life and the dancers and my self, and the desire to find the right thing to express what I feel today, what I really want to say, which cannot be said with words. One way of working is, of course, to create movement phrases to give to the dancers, but also what I often do is begin with questions. (p. 32)

Exploring the big questions of life may be a rich source in which to find your subject. Why are we here? Who created us? What is the meaning of life? Many writers and choreographers have found these questions to be a starting point to explore their own beliefs and to work out their own answers to these questions.

Howe (2000) in an essay on German dancer and choreographer Wigman, relates that, "Wigman was concerned with purifying her art form and exploring the individual's relationship to humanity and to the universe" (p. 136). Wigman was considered an expressionist/modern dancer but also a mystic dancer. In Sorell's (1975) translation of Wigman's writings, Wigman asserts:

We may call a dance mystic when it is symbolic of cosmic powers in its expression and form, when the personal life experience of the choreographer yields to the dance visualization of the incomprehensible and eternal. The mystic dance presupposes the choreographer's personal maturity. It will emerge only from a state of spiritual awareness. It will renounce anything of theatrical nature. It will keep itself ready for grand proportions and will be at once austere, lofty, and monumental. The mystic is the pure medium for a pure idea, sacerdotal in nature. (p. 93)

This belief that the creation of dance works spring from the internal self that is connected to the spiritual is not to be thought of in the religious sense or associated with any one religion. It is, instead, a choreographer knowing that the exploration of our origins, or what motivates us in life, is an intriguing and compelling subject to mine for material.

Dancer and choreographer Duncan also turned to the body, the inner self, and the questions of our existence to find her reasons and impetus to make movement. In her autobiography *My Life* (1928), she speaks of this process:

I spent long days and nights in the studio seeking that dance which might be the divine expression of the human spirit through the medium of the body's movement. For hours I would stand quite still, my two hands folded between my breasts, covering the solar plexus. My mother often became alarmed to see me remain for such long intervals quite motionless as if in a trance – but I was seeking and finally discovered the central spring of all movement, the crater of motor power, the unity from which all diversities of movements are born, the mirror of vision for the creation of the dance. (p. 84)

Writer and choreographer Vigier (1994) also believes a choreographer's subject may arise from listening to the body. She reflects:

What do we hear when we think through the body, when we listen quietly to the voice inside the flesh as it speaks in its strange tongue that the tongue in the mouth can't capture? The body as a tongue that says what cannot be said otherwise, the place of subtle and silent speech. (p. 236)



Listening to the body is spoken of by choreographers as a process which enables them to discover new understanding of the subject they may want to express. This is not achieved through thought processes such as analysis or a dissection of facts. Rather it is a meditative process that reveals truth through the body by waiting for it to speak. This may appear esoteric or mystical but our brain, nerves, skin and flesh are all connected and form our being. Tuning his or her attention to what the flesh is feeling or telling us may provide vital subject matter for a choreographer. This process is achieved through being present in the body and consciously listening and feeling to hear the body's voice.

Graham concurs that the body has a spiritual element. In her book *Blood Memory* (1991) she states profoundly:

The body is a sacred garment. It's your first and your last garment; it is what you enter life in and what you depart life with, and it should be treated with honor, and with joy and with fear as well. But always, though, with blessing. (p. 7)

Many choreographers recognize the attraction and pull of the mystical theme and have turned to myths and stories of creation or spirituality for their subject matter.

Duncan (1928) traveled to Greece in the early 1900's and studied the ancient sites to gain inspiration. She incorporated ancient Greek costume and copied poses from vases and temples to recreate how the ancient Greeks danced, which she believed to be the purest form of dance.

According to McDonagh (1970), dancer and choreographer St. Denis was inspired to take much of her subject matter from eastern cultures and religions, which at the turn of the century, held a mystique for most people in the western world. She danced the Egyptian goddess, Isis, and borrowed from Indian and Asian dance to create her own blend of exotic dance expression that was also successful at the box office.

Students such as Graham and Humphrey, who came out of St. Denis' school, Denishawn, were also drawn to themes with underlying spiritual or mythic qualities. Graham (1991) choreographed such works as *Primitive Canticles*, *Incantation*, and *Ceremonials* all in 1931. And according to McDonagh (1970):

She later began to develop a line of choreography, which dealt with the specifically American mythic heritage. The first of these works was "Frontier." ... After her American phase, she was to explore the sagas of classical antiquity in Greek and Hebrew myth. The peak of her development of these themes was reached in the full-evening work "Clytemnestra" (1958), which recounted the unhappy plight of the Grecian queen. (pp. 31-32)

Using the subject of myth and spirituality for choreography can be very compelling. It seeks to answer our questions of how and why we are here. Myth and spiritual stories also tell the archetypal stories of all humanity and are a means of cultures explaining our origins and teaching lessons to live by.

An essential aspect of the creative process for a writer and choreographer is finding a subject. This subject can come from the recesses of the memory or subconscious or be stimulated by what she sees, hears, smells, tastes or feels. It may come from her personal experiences or family stories. It may come from myths, legends, or spiritual beliefs or be an endeavor to connect with the divine.

Choreographer Graham (1991) reflects on the enigma of finding a subject and that she isn't even sure where her ideas come from:

Everyone wants to know about inspiration. Even Agnes (de Mille) sat with me years ago and suddenly blurted out, "Martha, how did you do it?" I wish I knew. Things wouldn't be so awful to contemplate if I knew. You never really know, you just sense those dreadful, inevitable footsteps following that make you go forward and work. I don't think in art there is ever a precedent; each moment is a new one and terrifying and threatening and bursting with hope. (pp. 260-261)

Choreographer Tharp (2003) sums it up succinctly through her words of wisdom about finding a subject when she says that in order to conquer her fear of the white, empty rehearsal hall before the moment of creation, before she has a subject, she remembers that:

Everything that happens in my day is a transaction between the external world and my internal world. Everything is raw material. Everything is relevant. Everything is usable. Everything feeds into my creativity. (p. 10)

## **Sensing an Audience**

Sensing an audience is that aspect of the process which moves the artist from creating simply for her own satisfaction and that desire to be seen and heard, to creating to be understood, and to have her story told. There are two aspects to this process, one is to be understood, to have enough of the subject presented that the viewer can grasp the subject, even when the subject is symbolic. The next aspect is to find ways to move the audience. This requires skill and a deep connection to your subject. The writer or choreographer will first recognize her own truth and then through her talent make it available to others.

An important function of art is to be a means of sharing the experiences, ideas, feelings, and wisdom of humanity. The artist acts as a catalyst. In the medium of his choice the artist reconstructs, transforms and illuminates human experience and reflects it back to an audience. By sharing, the artist fulfills his need to be understood. The writer seeks to convey and connect with an audience. The work she produces is an expressive and communicative act. Writer and educator Murray (1968), states:

The professional writer may write for himself, but he does not write to himself. The writer does not exist without a reader. The purpose of writing

is not to arrange ink on paper, to provide a mirror for the author's thoughts, but to carry ideas and information from the mind of one person into the mind of another. (p. 3)

Writer and educator Mamchur advises that after discovering a subject the writer must start to clarify her ideas and it may still be a mystery to her what she is going to produce but she is discovering along with her intended audience. (Mamchur, lecture notes, 2007) The writer is steadily considering to whom she may have a desire to communicate something to. She is developing a clear premise and examining what she believes in.

Writer Goldberg (1996) expands on the idea of the writer seeking to be understood and share:

Even if you're unconscious of it, when you write a piece, you have an audience of one in mind. This is true not only for the poems and stories that begin with a dedication, but for any piece you create. The same person may be sitting in the mind's easy chair listening to every piece, or some one different each time. It's not that internal, critical voice that judges everything; it's the friend you love, a relative, a stranger you want to reach. For whose sake the piece comes into being. It may even be a part of yourself. (p. 161)

The act of writing provides a writer with a concrete means to express and communicate to others. Creating connections with an audience is an important reason for artistic creation.

Does the choreographer, as the writer, have the same need for connection, understanding, and the accomplishment of moving an audience? Mitges (2008), in an interview with Canadian choreographer Webb, relates:

To find commonality with the audience, to create a work that touches people is what Webb is interested in. Webb states, "I work quite hard to find a connection with people. I find that more important than making the perfect structure for my dance ... The offshoot of connecting with people is that you also connect with yourself. (p. C9)

According to Blom and Chaplin (1982), the choreographer's purpose is to deepen that which is already understood and involve the audience in some meaningful way:

As a work of art, the dance is as specific as it is universal; it points from the known to the unknown or deepens that which is already understood. As artist, the choreographer's restlessness and sense of urgency about sentience takes him beyond craft, ideally to create a unique statement that will involve the perceiver in some meaningful way: a moment of perspective, of recognition, or skittishness or serenity. (p. 15)

In *Gestures of Genius*, Vigier (1994) converses with choreographer Smith about her concept of audience. Smith speaks of this element of finding understanding while sharing her art with an audience:

Very early on I felt that I had something to share with people. I wanted the exchange with an audience. I think of the performance as a piece that has to reach people. It has to first start inside. The motivation of the dance has to reach someplace, indeed of me, before I can communicate with the audience. A reviewer in *Dance Magazine* once said that I opened myself to the audience, I took a chance. That's what I try to do. When I take a risk, I often can sense an emotional response and a kind of unspoken understanding from the audience. It's not just my own experience that I'm bringing to the performance. (p. 122)

In Sorell (1973), German dancer and choreographer Wigman shares her feelings and reactions to an audience and speaks of live performance and how it can be a deep connection with others but also the possibility of failure. She insightfully relates:

You are standing on stage, at the mercy of the glaring lights – isolated and very much alone. Veiled in darkness, the auditorium stares at you, a huge black spot filled with silence. And whatever there is out there, I am supposed to turn it into a living thing. I am expected to move it to respond. Insolence, delusion of grandeur, or – grace? How perilous all this! The mere irritation of a poorly stretched dance rug may make the performance questionable. A break in concentration, lasting but a few seconds, might lead to a disaster. I am not permitted to step close to the footlights and beg the audience: Let me repeat this dance once more. It did not come off as well as it usually does. (p. 48)

A risk is taken, in that the choreographer, as the writer, must be willing to be vulnerable but brave in showing or publishing her work. The writer uses her skill with words to be understood and in kind the choreographers actions, gestures, and movements, must also convey the story or theme in ways that will reach an audience but also be understood by an audience.

Both choreographers and writers strive to be original but also to present ideas that an audience will relate to by finding common ground between themselves and their audiences. Murray (1968) explains this by stating:

To do this the writer speaks in terms the reader will understand. He does not talk down to the reader, nor up to the reader, but across to him. He must know what his reader knows, what his reader doesn't know, what his reader needs to know, and what his reader wants to know. (p. 3)

The most enjoyable novels, poems or plays are those in which the reader is drawn into the story, in that she comes to care about what's at stake and the outcome. As she reads, she gains an increasing emotional involvement. The same can be said of the best choreography, which engages the audience and leaves an intelligent and meaningful lasting impression. This superior work seems to be choreography, which resonates with the audience because of the statement, story or relevance of the subject matter and how it has been conveyed. The audience has been swept up in the subject matter and cares about the outcome. The choreographer's message has been delivered authentically and has been understood on many levels by the audience. Movement educator H'Doubler (1940) speaks of this sharing:

People go to the theater to partake of emotional experience, to have their concentration on everyday affairs broken down, and to be made to concentrate with the artists and live their experiences. One of the measures of an artist's greatness is his ability to do this with his audiences. (p. 37)

Murray (1968) teaches about the writer's need to portray life authentically in order to be understood. He posits that the writer in the act of creating is not only getting to know herself better and uncovering her own personal truth but in turn is enabling her readers to see a reflection of themselves through the work. He states:

The writer may be his own audience, but only after he has found by publication of some form or another that there are many other people who believe, think, and feel as he does. There is another way of describing this process: the writer is on a search for himself. If he finds himself he will find an audience, because all of us have the same common core. And when he digs deeply into himself and is able to define himself, he will find others who will read with a shock of recognition what he has written. (p. 4)

Writers seem to value the relationship they have with their readers. It may be reflected in book sales or in a hope that their writing has made a difference in someone's life. They are writing for somebody. A response may come as a review, fan mail, or at a book signing, verbally. Writers are encouraged by positive responses from their editors and readers. They may initially be writing for themselves, cathartically, but also seem to be thinking about who their audience may be and care if they are understood and are able to move an audience.

Is this acknowledgement of the audience also present in the choreographer's mind when they are creating? She is reviewed in writing but most importantly she receives a live response in the form of the energy and enthusiasm or lack of it from an audience. In an interview with Roseman (2001) choreographer Morris was asked if he thinks of the audience when he works. He replied, "Sure. I rehearse from the front of the studio. Absolutely. I make it up to be "watched." It's not enough just "to do." That's contact improvisation" (p. 72).

Writer Scothorn (1969) in an essay entitled, *Choreographers Talk about Audience*, interviewed three well known choreographers, Holm, Currier and Cunningham, to discover what audience these choreographers desired for their work, what role the audience played in their art and what they found in their performances that would reveal more about this relationship. She first asked, “What do you expect of the members of an audience? What is it they should do?” (p. 104). A student of Wigman, Holm, who choreographed many Broadway musicals such as, *Kiss Me Kate*, *My Fair Lady* and *Camelot* responded by saying, “To respond, to understand, to accept or resent. You hope there will be a reaction in them, rather than indifference; that would be worse” (p. 104). Currier, who choreographed modern dance for sophisticated New York audiences said, “What I hope to do is dig deeply enough into the choreographic subject, below the external impressions that I may have to arrive at a more basic statement that will evoke resonances in others” (p. 104). Cunningham, an experimental modern dance choreographer said:

I don't expect anything of an audience. They are there, and I might hope for their complete attention: that is the individual attention... to give themselves to the moment. To look, to listen, to be present and belong to the moment. (p. 104)

Another pertinent question posed by Scothorn (1969) was, “How do you consider the audience when you are creating a dance?” Holm said, “I don't consider them at all. You could not try to please so many people. You hope you are articulate enough to reach an audience in general” (p. 107). Cunningham replied, “Only visually. Most of my dances are made so they could be danced in the round” (p. 107). And when asked if the behavior of the audience affected him, Cunningham remarked:



Naturally, it affects, and at its greatest, physically. I do not mean to change a dance to suit a particular audience, but people do affect people. I am not concerned with choreographic success or failure. And to try to please is only to fool yourself. Whom do you please? (p. 108)

Scothorn (1969) comments after the interviews that:

Although all three at first denied the existence of an “ideal” audience... eventually in their conversation they began to speak approvingly of some audience qualities and disapprovingly of others. The good qualities mentioned include: “bright, unbiased, perceptive, open, responsive, alive, quick, who look, listen, understand, have temperament, participate, exercise their faculties, do not pass judgment, and have an opinion. (p. 110)

The second important aspect of sensing an audience is for the artist to find ways to move the audience. Much like achieving understanding from an audience, moving the audience is also realized by writers and choreographers by looking inward and calling on their genuine experiences and incorporating them into their art. Revealing the artist’s emotional truth in the work will draw the audience, engage them, and create a vested interest in the outcome. The audience will recognize this necessary element of emotional truth and respond to the artist with attention and feeling. Educator Mamchur emphasizes that the writer must have integrity at this stage. She must look inward, to what she stands for. She must be vulnerable and willing to expose herself. She must be willing to look at her pain and be willing to be uncomfortable with her chosen subject. (Mamchur, lecture notes, 2007)

Moving the audience requires clarity, which is expressed through the writer and choreographer having a deep connection to the subject but also in finding and communicating with her original and unique voice or style. This requires the writer or choreographer to have a proficiency and mastery of her craft.

Blom and Chaplin (1982), when discussing choreographic principles state, “Know what your intention is – then say it with clarity and simplicity” (p. 8). Further they stress:

With clearness of articulation there comes clearness of communication... It is this clarity and intention that is of concern to us as creative and communicative artists. The point that William Strunk makes about written composition applies to dance composition as well: go roundabout in a straightforward fashion. There is a distinct difference between a dance being chaotic and a dance making a clear statement about chaos. (pp. 9-10).

In writing, clarity is achieved by the writer through practice and editing but also through observing and sticking to tried and true principles of composition. These may include working from a suitable design, using the active voice, and using definite and concrete language. Good writing takes many skills, working together, but clarity can be seen as a desirable basic. Strunk and White (2000) comment on the importance of clarity:

Clarity is not the prize in writing, nor is it always the principal mark of good style. There are occasions when obscurity serves a literary yearning, if not a literary purpose, and there are writers whose mien is more overcast than clear. But since writing is communication, clarity can only be a virtue. (p. 79).

Clarity can be achieved in writing by the writer using his own distinct voice or style. Voice has been described by writer Culham (2003) as:

The golden thread that runs through a piece of writing. It's how the reader knows it is really you speaking ... Voice is the writer's music coming out through the words, the sense that a real person is speaking to you and cares about the message. It is the heart and soul of the writing, the magic, the wit, the feeling, the life and breath. It is flashes of spirit. When the writer is engaged personally with the topic, he or she imparts a personal flavor to the piece that is unmistakably his or hers alone. (p. 102)

The style, or voice of a writer, is unique and a presence in the writing. The reader can hear the author speaking to her. In Strunk and White (2000), *The Elements of Style*,

the rules of usage and instructions for writing mechanics are relayed but they also remind the writer that:

All writers, by the way they use language, reveal something of their spirits, their habits, their capacities, and their biases. This is inevitable as well as enjoyable. All writing is communication through revelation – it is the Self escaping into the open. No writer long remains incognito. (p. 67)

The unique voice or style of the choreographer is also essential in making her work original and to ensure her audience is moved. As a choreographer develops her craft and gains knowledge of the principles of choreographic composition, which may include according to Humphrey (1959), considering the motivation, dynamics, design, and the rhythm or timing, she is also trying to make her work stand out from others. It is hard not to be influenced by fashionable innovation in art and choreography is no exception. It seems the choreographer can only achieve originality by listening to or following her own inner direction. Choreographer Humphrey (1959) gives this advice to aspiring choreographers about finding their own voice:

He should be aware that he is profoundly different from his much-beloved and respected teachers and that mere imitation of them can only lead to disaster. Honesty is the prime essential here. He must ask himself, “What do I believe in, what do I want to say?” He must have a high resistance to novelty for its own sake and courage to depart from the trends of the day if necessary. To compose for himself, he must put a stethoscope to his own heart and listen to those mysterious inner voices, which are the guide to originality. (pp. 20-21).

The choreographer, as the writer, cultivates her personal voice or movement style, which is expressed through her body and shows her own signature in the unique appearance of her movement. She may utilize key movement phrases, which identify the work as hers, such as manners of traveling, rising and falling, balancing or posing. Or she may show her uniqueness in the way she applies dynamics, tempo, the breathe and

suspension of body parts. Each choreographer as each writer develops her own 'voice' in order to create a personal style and reveal to an audience what she cares about in her own special way.

The writer or choreographer can be seen to consider and move the audience by making her work understandable, by striving for authenticity and clarity, by using an original voice, or style and finally by caring deeply about the material she has selected. Choreographer and dancer Weidman (Weidman, in Brown, Mindlin, & Woodford, 1998), adds to this notion by stating, "The world of illusion which the audience expects from the artist is, in fact, the world of their real selves, the image of their own world, the translation of their hopes and fears, their joys and sufferings into the magic of the stage" (p. 67). Weidman reiterates that the choreographer is in a sense conjuring the ordinary and real details of people's lives into an art form that may appear ethereal and removed from every day life but it is not. By incorporating emotion and the recognizable into the performance the choreographer creates connections with the audience. The affinity and appreciation for the choreographer's statement occurs because the choreographer has found common ground, which the audience identifies as personal and familiar.

Writer Goldberg (1996) speaks to the difficulty of embodying integrity into the work when she notes that, "It can be a struggle to get to that authentic voice; we are hard wired to forget our pasts, avoid powerful emotion, look forward and ahead. It is an effort to work against the current" (p. 152). The writer or choreographer who strives to tap into his past and channel the remembrance of strong emotions into his work will have a better chance of reaching his audience as they will identify and relate to the authenticity of his experiences.

Dancer and choreographer, Strate (2002) reiterates and shares the importance of the choreographer imbuing the work with integral emotional depth:

The emotional content of a work, without which it is empty of meaning, is not always easy to come by, yet is essential if any real connection with the audience is to be made. There is no formula to follow in the crafting of emotion into art. It is largely a subconscious process and one that must arise from the artist's interior landscape, shaped by the experiences of life. For the work to resonate, an audience should feel that in some way it has come to know the choreographer as a person through the work. Awareness of this does not make the process any easier. In fact, it can get in the way. Choreographers are often tempted, as are dancers, to hide behind form and technique, rather than risk a true and honest statement. (p. 226)

Strate (2002) speaks of the audience as having to contribute something to the performance. He believes that the choreographer is essentially responsible for the work being successful but that the audience should not merely occupy a seat but be present and engaged and ready to respond. He adds:

If we are willing to contribute the effort, we feel something by seeing the dance ... If a connection is to be made to the content of the work, the viewer must feel something in his or her own body, and thus be able to summon up a kinesthetic memory. For this process to succeed, audience members must be open to it and, of course, the performer must be able to deliver the choreography with clarity. (p. 228)

In choreography, moving the audience can also be achieved by the choreographer employing movement and music that is so dynamic and rhythmic that the audience may be swept up in the beat and excitement of the moment. Manning (2004) in her book *Modern Dance, Negro Dance: Race in Motion*, observes how an audience watching choreography may become physically involved in the performance. Speaking of the work of black choreographer Ailey, she relates:

In the context of modern dance, the audience response to Ailey's work breaks the norm of quiet and attentive spectatorship. In the work, *Revelations*, each repetition builds more and more energy, and even after the dancers come to a sudden stop, falling on their knees and throwing

their arms overhead, the energy continues in the audience, now on its feet, clapping and moving in rhythmic unison. The earliest reviews document the engaged audience response. (p. 217)

Training the potential choreographer to sense his audience can be achieved through stressing the key elements of authenticity, voice and clarity but also through potential choreographers experiencing the role of an audience member. Learning to be a keen observer of others work and coming to appreciate what works in a piece and what doesn't work is essential. This step is achieved first by student choreographers presenting their work to other students in the safety of the classroom, much like student writers belonging to a workshop or writer's group.

Kaufmann (2005) in her book *Inclusive Creative Movement and Dance*, in speaking of educating dance students as choreographers states: "Regular dance sharing helps students become not only better performers, but also better viewers. And in becoming better performers and viewers, students increase dance literacy" (p. 53). Kaufmann defines dance literacy as, "Interpreting, speaking about, and making recommendations about a dance that one views or performs" (p. 51). She says that educating an audience happens, "when students have opportunities to demonstrate a movement concept, identify and use movement vocabulary, reflect on their ideas and interpretations, and make recommendations for improvement, they develop perceptual skills that lead them to dance literacy" (p. 56). Kaufmann (2005) further instructs that choreographic students can become better choreographers through being audience members:

After students perform, facilitate whole class discussions to celebrate and critique the piece. It can be very enlightening for your students to hear others describe their work. Choreographers will hear new interpretations and learn whether their intent was realized. Responses may focus on the

choreographic elements and processes or may focus on subjective elements such as imagery, emotion, memories, or associations. (p. 58)

Franklin (1996), in *Dance Imagery for Technique and Performance*, also instructs the new choreographer to consider the audience's perspective and the performance space. He asks potential choreographers to think about the stage and theater construction. He asks questions:

What is your relationship to the audience? Are you trying to involve them? Are they outside spectators, separated from your activities, looking in on an event, taking place within a large box? Onstage, one is usually surrounded by walls on three sides and emptiness in front. Uta Hagen writes about creating a "fourth wall" so that you can play against reality when facing front. (p. 222)

The choreographer's challenge is to make her performance so compelling that the audience will turn their entire focus to the movement on the stage and become deeply engaged. Choreography transcends the limitations of understanding a written language. But despite this the audience will see the choreographic work and may have quite different reactions or interpretations than what the choreographer intended. They are looking through their own cultural lens, which shapes a unique and personal experience when viewing art or dance works. Ultimately, the choreographer hopes that her audience has been moved and affected in some way by the exchange with her material.

Graham (1991) passes on this vital advice to young choreographers about impressing and connecting to an audience when she shares:

Go to great lengths, good and bad, to do your absolute best. The audience will understand that. The audience is your judge and your only reality. I am not a romantic. I believe you must have a demonic technique and as Louis (Horst) said, "Go at your audience at times with a whip". (p. 267)

In Press (2002), choreographer Lind (1960) concludes and summarizes the importance of sensing an audience when she observes that the audience, the performer, and the choreographer have a significant symbiotic relationship:

The audience must participate actively and when every part of its being is set working and when the sparks fly back and forth between performer and audience, that is when the dance has achieved its reason for being, and a little bit of self knowledge has been gained for all the participants---the creator, the interpreter, and the receptor. (p. 102)

## **Searching for Specifics**

When the writer or choreographer has selected or chosen a subject and engaged through her work a relationship with an audience, the next part of the process is to search for specifics. It is worth noting again that the elements of the writing process are not linear but may occur simultaneously and are being constantly revisited by the writer or choreographer during the creative process.

The specifics or details of the subject may be found through research, live sources or from the writer's or choreographer's own senses. Feelings, experiences and imagination will flesh out and create a believable and vivid picture enabling the reader or viewer to fully understand the intended subject. Specifics can be seen as the building materials of the work which when well chosen will unify to create a solid structure conveying clear meaning to the audience.

In speaking of specifics Murray (1968) states:

What are the raw materials of the published writer? ... The writer searches for specifics. A specific is many things: It is the statistic, the quotation, the anecdote, the parable, the authoritative conclusion, which will document what the writer has to say ... The reader knows that the authenticity of what he has to say comes from the specifics he uses. He will be believed by the reader if he uses concrete details which have the ring of truth. (p. 5)



Strunk and White report from *Elements of Style*, (2000):

If those who have studied the art of writing are in accord on one point it is on this: the surest way to arouse and hold the reader is to be specific, definite, and concrete. The greatest writers ... are effective largely because they deal in particulars and report the details that matter. (p. 21)

Murray (1968) and Strunk and White (2000) both concur that carefully chosen specifics will greatly enhance and clarify what the writer has to say. Writing is a communicative act, which requires the right word, phrase or sentence to explain, elucidate, or reveal the author's meaning. Through carefully selected specifics, the reader gains insight and clarity into the writer's thoughts.

Writer Shields in an interview with Garrod (1986), relates her experiences with teaching writing and the ability to see specifics. She reflects:

I have occasionally felt a bit of a fraud teaching creative writing, to tell you the truth, because I'm not sure it can be taught. I think you can do certain things, you can teach people to avoid the worst sins – to identify sentimental scenes and get rid of them, for example ... And students can learn to avoid clichés when they know what clichés are. Those two things work right away. But you can't give people better ideas, and you cannot make them observe more closely. I've tried every way I could. There are people who can see and people who can't see. (p. 247)

This seeing and observing closely seems to be what good writers do. Shields implies that 'seeing' can mean more than just the eye observing. It means taking in 'all' that is happening in an experience, which may include the nuances of the conversation, the feelings that were generated by the exchange, and what impressions the experience left one with. Then, can the writer convey all she has experienced or felt and relate this to her audience artistically by showing the details so the reader feels he is present and at the scene? The experienced and talented writer makes a close and focused observation, then a registered knowing of the intimate details which when written into a piece make it rich in

authenticity and truth. This concept of truly seeing and taking observations and experiences and translating them into art is the basis of searching for specifics.

The writer may find her specifics in many places. She may do research at the library reading journals, old letters, diaries, historical reports or encyclopedias. She may read the newspaper or magazines or watch movies or documentaries. The research may also take her to specific places, which offer important information and details about that subject. Whatever the writer is making the piece about will require her to investigate and search out the specifics that will make the work believable for the reader.

Author Itani (2008) expands on the idea of doing research:

As a fiction writer, my job is to create story, but because *Deafening* is set during a particular period, I had to do factual research so that I could learn the social and cultural history of the times ... What is made up is the story, and all of the characters. But the reason I did so much research was to make sure that each small detail, which helps ground the story, is entirely accurate. (p. 65)

Do choreographers employ similar methods for discovering specifics?

Choreographer Tharp (2003) speaks of reading to gain inspiration but also as a way of searching for specifics. She says, "I read the way I scratch for an idea, digging down deep so I can get something out of it and use it in my work. I read *transactionally*" (p. 111).

Tharp explains that she makes connections between the author's work and her own and transforms the author's ideas into useful material for her own projects. Tharp (2003) also suggests going to new locations or places to do research or scratch for specifics:

It doesn't matter where you live. If you have a goal in mind, you can turn any venue or destination into a valuable field trip. If you're looking for beauty and sensory relief, it could be local gallery or a walk in the woods. If you want chaos and exposed human emotions, spend some time in a hospital emergency room or a bus terminal. If you want information, pore over documents in a forgotten archive at your library. (p. 115)

The writer or choreographer may also turn to his own senses, feelings and ideas as sources for specifics. He has opinions, views and beliefs about the world. The writer or choreographer may use his own personal experiences but may also observe the lives of others and use these facts and observations as details.

In writing, these specifics will bring to life the characters, the time period and the setting or place. Canadian author MacLeod in an interview with Garrod (1986) discusses the detail he uses to describe a specific place:

Garrod: “It seems to me that your language evokes a mood – the tremendous attention to detail and very long descriptive passages.  
McLeod: The mood is important because everything must take place somewhere, and a lot of that description is describing the whereness, which may not be like the whereness of somewhere else - especially, I think, in a big country like this. If you’re in the outports of Newfoundland or the Lake Saint-Jean region of Quebec or near James Bay or in downtown Toronto, what you look out on every morning is very different. My description is the whereness against which events take place. (p. 167)

McLeod is pointing out the tremendous importance of specifics for his writing. He knows that creating an authentic setting is essential for the reader to believe in the world he is writing about. The detail and description is ‘showing’ the reader his ‘where’ and making his writing unique but also describing a place the reader may know something about or have been to.

As the writer has words, paragraphs, chapters and punctuation, the choreographer also possesses very clear and defined elements in which to explore the creation of her specifics. There is a clear difference between the medium of the writer and the choreographer. The writer’s words are his medium and are conveyed with ink or keyboard onto paper, the choreographer’s work is enacted through the body, in its shape,

movement, gesture, and facial expressions. The choreographer also has choices to make as to where to place the body on the stage, and in relationship, if any, to other dancers.

As outlined by Laban in Preston (1963), these elements or movement principles are contained in sixteen basic movement themes. They are the awareness of the body, the awareness of weight and time, the awareness of space, the awareness of the flow of the weight of the body in space and time, adaptation to a partner, the awareness of basic effort actions, occupational rhythms, the awareness of shape in movement, transitions between the basic effort actions, orientation in space, the combination of shapes and efforts, elevation, the awakening of group feeling, group formations, and the expressive qualities of movement.

Each concept is an important key with which to unlock potential movement specifics. If these concepts are studied, understood and applied, the sixteen movement themes will enable the choreographer an awareness of what is possible in moving the body to create meaningful choreographic specifics. It is the choreographer's aim to combine her creative intelligence, knowledge of the body and movement principles, to discover the specifics that will show the audience a clear and meaningful performance.

Choreographer de la Tour (1970) stresses what she believes are the essential elements to consider when creating choreography and searching for specifics:

There are four basic elements of dance: design, dynamics, rhythm, and motivation ... Dynamics uses the energy which produces certain qualities of movement: to mold, to fly, to float, to radiate. Another use of dynamics relates movement metaphorically to voice: to whisper, to talk softly, to talk in a natural tone, to shout. Rhythm is defined simply as the breaking up of fast and slow intervals, the making of intervals in different tempi. Motivation is a purpose, a reason, an idea or feeling that cannot be expressed in words – the desire to feel the mere joy of jumping, to defy gravity, to move swiftly in space, to create a mood. (p. 167)

In de la Tour's list of basic elements of choreography, she identifies similar and significant elements, when compared to Laban's. She first mentions the important element of design, which incorporates specifics within the structure or floor pattern of the choreography. She includes rhythm, which she defines as intervals in different tempi or time.

Rhythm according to Humphrey (1959) can be viewed as emanating from four sources of rhythmical organization in human beings:

First, the breathing-singing-speaking apparatus, which leads to phrasing, and phrase rhythm. Then the partly unconscious rhythms of function: the heartbeat, ... contraction and relaxation of muscles, waves of sensation through the nerve ends. Another, is the propelling mechanism, the legs, which man discovered would support him, one after the other, while moving in space, and which provided also conscious joy in beat as the weight changed. Lastly, there is emotional rhythm: surges and ebbs of feeling, with accents, which not only supply strong rhythmical patterns but are a measure for judging emotional rhythms in others. (p. 105)

The element of rhythm is a rich source in which to search for specifics. Referring to Humphrey's (1959) outline of rhythmical organization in human beings, the choreographer can vary the rhythm of the breath effectively to create lift by breathing in, and fall, by breathing out. Or slow down the movement by breathing deeply and slowly to create calmness and serenity. Varying the unconscious rhythms of the heart and blood flow is possible with concentration and quieting the body. Contraction and release, or fall and recovery, which radiate from the center, are also underlying specifics found in modern dance technique first identified by such choreographers as Humphrey and Graham.

The beat of the feet or the rhythm of clapping hands is an exciting and stimulating specific. The beat can be sustained or irregular, fast or slow, heavy or soft or in an

original rhythmic pattern the choreographer has devised. The changing of weight from one foot to the other can be done in many ways to create specifics, which will give the choreography energy and life. The choreographer may stamp the feet, or place them softly on point, swing the legs before placing them down or leap, skip, hop, or gallop, all in a complex or simple rhythm.

As her last rhythmical organization, Humphrey (1959) includes emotional rhythm, surges and ebbs of feeling, which may be important for the choreographer to include to engage an audience. Feelings are another notable specific and may be conveyed to an audience through the dynamics and motivation set out in the choreography.

Taking a closer look at dynamics and motivation, which are included in de la Tour's (1970) basic list of elements for choreography, the fundamental element of dynamics is linked strongly to expression. It has been described as the energy the choreographer radiates or puts forth into each movement. The dynamics infuse each gesture, and whole body movement with the desired movement qualities. Motivation may be viewed as the original purpose or reason the choreographer had for moving and creating but may also be viewed as a specific because it is an element the choreographer will infuse into each movement that directs the inner feelings that the performer manifests for the audience. Specific motivation will be the intangible but real inner workings behind each movement performed. Motivation being an inner mental quality is nonetheless an important choreographic element and is apparent in the way movement is presented to an audience. To further explain the importance of motivation for choreography I turn to dramatic training. As an actor becomes his character for a brief

time and transforms his body language to become someone else so must the choreographer feel from within the character he is portraying. In *The Six Questions: Acting Technique for Dance Performance*, Nagrin (1997) outlines the importance for the choreographer to emanate his internal self to his audience. He believes that transferring the method of Stanislavski for actors to choreographers will enhance the choreographer's ability to connect. Nagrin (1997) states, "To be able to dance with clarity and authority and the consistent ability to release the deep sources of one's person, requires a technique" (p. xiv). He believes that acting techniques can enhance and liberate performance and through specific exercises the choreographer can learn to be present on stage.

Litvinoff's (1972), *The Use of Stanislavsky within Modern Dance*, also suggests that using the Stanislavsky Method "is a way of making everything which takes place on the stage believable" (p. 3). Litvinoff quotes Stanislavsky to illustrate his point:

A physical action is easier to grasp than a psychological attitude; it is more accessible than an elusive inner feeling. It is easier to capture, is more concrete, more readily perceived. A physical action is connected with all other elements. Truly there is no physical action without a will towards it, a direction, a use of the imagination. All of this testifies to the intimate link between a physical action and the totality of one's inner being and feeling. (p. 4)

Motivation stems from our will and provides a purpose, a reason for an action. It can be a feeling or desire that cannot be expressed in words. In order to produce choreography that moves and affects the audience the choreographer must turn abstract thought and psychological attitude into movement that is understood and resonates with the audience. Through discovering authentic details, which have been uncovered through exploring the elements of movement, including motivation, the choreographer searches

for the specifics to deliver a clear premise with honestly motivated material. This work will ring true to the audience as the real motivation behind the movement is revealed.

Litvinoff (1972), describes the clear motivation of Graham's work:

Martha is a living embodiment of Stanislavsky. Her every movement on the stage, beginning earlier than the "Lamentation" and extending beyond the "Clytemnestra", is an illustration of the use of The Method, whether it is so labeled or not. Big gestures and small are all motivated; emotionally honest, colored by a sense of history and period; driven by an organic logic; and evocative of numerous phenomena, specific and general. (p. 11)

The notion of incorporating honest motivation into specifics of movement in order for the audience to have a resonance with the work was researched by Duncan (1928) and in *Gestures of Genius*, Vigier (1994) observes of Duncan that, "It is not the gesture itself, but the power and truth of the spirit behind the gesture which so inspired Duncan in her work, as she pursued her belief in dance as the art of finding the 'motor of the soul' which stirs the whole body to knowledge of its natural movement" (p. 41).

We may infer that successful choreographers require an inspirational subject to sense their audience but also somehow to evoke movement that radiates a genuine quality through the specifics of dynamics and motivation. The choreographer through the exploration of her subject and inner motivation finds the specifics that make her meaning clear for the audience. Choosing, discovering, or creating the specifics from many sources, such as memories, experiences and intuitive breakthroughs are ways to uncover real specifics. Incorporating these real specifics into a work will infuse the performance with integrity and truth. Without real and honest specifics the work may lack depth and not communicate effectively to an audience.

Choreographer and dancer Graham (1991) believed that our bodies can not lie. She had an ingrained conviction that the choreographer will inevitably reveal who she is



and what she believes in to an audience through her movement. Her conviction stems from an incident in her childhood. Her father was a psychiatrist and had invited a patient for dinner who displayed odd behavior. Martha asked him later what was wrong with the patient. Graham (1991) writes that she will always remember his answer:

I have never forgotten the vividness of that moment, which has presided like a star over my life. In a curious way, this was my first dance lesson – a gesture toward the truth... He replied that she was not well, and her body was telling us so. Each of us tells our own story even without speaking. “Movement,” he later told me when I asked more questions, “never lies.” (p. 20)

Applying or transferring this idea to choreography, Graham believed that an audience would be able to spot movement that was unfocused, insincere or not coming from the choreographer’s true feeling. She also believed that the choreographer must create dance from her own real inner sources or the work would appear false and have no substance.

Another way to search for authentic specifics, which may also be employed in discovering a subject, is through discovering inner material, found, according to Hawkins (1991) through listening to the body. She speaks of motivation or impulse as the catalyst to externalize material in the artistic process:

The choreographer’s task then is to become aware of the felt dimension of experience and images that set a new work in progress. This inner-oriented process requires that you temporarily separate yourself from the external world and in a state of relaxed concentration attend inwardly. From this inner listening comes an awareness and impulse for the externalization of felt thought in a form that we know as dance. (p. 31)

Graham (1991) also stressed the notion of listening to the body to attain wholeness or integrity in one’s movement quality. She states, “A dancer’s art is built on an attitude of listening, with his whole being” (p. 253). For the choreographer, listening

to the body may be compared to the writer listening carefully to her inner voice, or her intuition to reveal what is in her subconscious.

Listening to the body is a kind of meditation, with the choreographer becoming aware and waiting for what the body may reveal in movement. This material is buried deep in the body, in the muscle memory, bones, and skin. When the choreographer is searching for specifics through listening, improvisation or through thoughtful use of the elements of movement, the subconscious mind, so inexplicably connected to the body, may divulge the choreographer's inner truth in movement. Creating and acknowledging these connections between the body and mind can be seen as important in the creation of specifics for a dance work. To make the body speak and express authentically, one must listen to the body and draw from within the body.

Employing mental visualizations is also a way of connecting the body and mind and to ensure the performer is radiating the dynamics and motivation that will make the choreography come alive. Graham (1991) relates the type of imagery she instructed her students to envision when performing specific movements:

For the deep release, there is a deep breathing in of air, and then expelling it out in a deep contraction. For the contraction I see the heavens; for the deepening over I see the earth. For the release I view the earth over a cliff. For the high lift, I dwell within. (p. 250)

To create the right facial and body expressions for each specific movement Graham (1991) asked students to use their imagination with imagery to produce the correct effect:

For the contraction on the floor with a high arch: When arching back, think of Joan of Arc resisting a sword that is piercing her chest...For the use of the head and body: Think of Michelangelo's *Pieta*, or that extraordinary Bernini, *Ecstasy of St. Theresa* ... For demi-plie's: Think that there are diamonds on your collarbone catching the light. (p. 251)

Besides visualization, Graham's technique stresses incorporating the desired quality of the movement, or what Laban described as 'effort actions'. Graham (1991) reflects on a comment by famed prima ballerina Fonteyn.

My dancers never fall to simply fall. They fall to rise. When Margot Fonteyn first saw us perform, she noticed how different our falls were from those of the Royal Ballet: "Why, we fall like paper bags. You fall like silk." (p. 253)

This notion of incorporating inner motivation and visualization into each dance gesture can only add to the authenticity of the specifics. It adds a rich underlying layer to the details. Writers gather their specifics and transfer them onto paper into a concrete product created from words, sentences and paragraphs. The choreographer must also search for specifics but use the body as a vehicle for expression.

Horst (1969) refers to technique as a choreographer's vocabulary. He shares, "If you are a dancer (choreographer), your technique is your vocabulary, that with which you speak. The more technique you have, the more you can say and the more interest you can add to it" (p. 17).

However, dancer and choreographer Eric Hawkins (1992) has a slightly different interpretation of these words. He explains dance technique and vocabulary in this way:

One of the errors in thinking "technique" in modern dance or balletic terms in the West is to confuse technique and vocabulary. Technique means how the body works. Vocabulary is the means by which the movement is conveyed to the audience ... For example, a person can have a very good vocabulary but have errors in technique, and, likewise, a person could have a good technique and turn out a very dull dance. To find a complete art of dance we need the technique AND the vocabulary. (pp. 137-138)

Graham (1991) speaks of her technique, the basis from which she finds all of her specifics, as coming from the breath. Her genius is in her close examination of the

ordinary and discovering the extraordinary. In the basic action of breathing she has identified an element, which she has used to deepen and emphasize the quality of her choreography:

My technique is based on breathing. I have based everything that I have done on the pulsation of life, which is, to me, the pulsation of breath. Every time you breathe life in or expel it, it is a release or a contraction. It is that basic to the body. You are born with these two movements and you keep both until you die. But you begin to use them consciously so that they are beneficial to the dance dramatically ... It begins with breath. (p. 46)

In choreography, the specifics, as well as the subject, may often be discovered through improvisation. As the writer must write and continuously draft out his ideas on paper to uncover what he really wants to say so the choreographer drafts her ideas by moving her body and tapping into her creativity by trying out movement ideas physically.

Snowber (2002) aptly defines and outlines the qualities of improvisation:

The word *improvisation* stems from the Latin *improvisus*, which means “unforeseen”. The elements of surprise, wonder, mystery, and discovery is at the heart of improvisation as the dancer, writer, or artist forms the unformed until that which is invisible becomes visible. Improvisation becomes the act of instantaneously finding fresh movement. One utilizes the elements of design, shape, tempo, directionality, repetition, focus, space, movement qualities, emotive content, conceptual ideas, and philosophical questions as the seeds of creating a dance piece. (pp. 24-25)

Through Snowber’s (2002) description of finding fresh movement through improvisation, we see that the effective and experienced choreographer will use her knowledge of movement principles to explore her improvisation with expertise. She will be improvising in an informed manner while utilizing and drawing from a vast array of solid elements of choreography to find her specifics.

In Blom and Chaplin's (1982), *The Intimate Act of Choreography*, they discuss the use of improvisation to discover specifics and explain it as connecting to the subconscious by moving in response to a choreographer's chosen subject:

Dance improvisation fuses creation with execution. The dancer simultaneously originates and performs movement without preplanning. It is thus creative movement of the moment. Improvisation is a way of tapping the stream of the subconscious without intellectual censorship, allowing spontaneous and simultaneous exploring, creating, and performing. Improvisation emerges as an inner-directed movement response to an image, an idea, or a sensory stimulus.

Writer Shaw (2006) in describing the process of dance creation by choreographer Pite speaks of her use of improvisation to find specifics. Pite employs some pre developed movement phrases and rules as a place to start before collaborating with her dancers in improvisation and discovery:

Pite begins her creative process by establishing a map of some kind upon which to build her choreography: a textual map, a sound map, a line traced on the floor. In *Lost Action (2006)*, she begins by making basic choreographic phrases, which are intended as guides for her exceptionally talented dancers. Through these phrases, Pite initiates a basic language of movement: a common ground, a nexus of unity and understanding... Embedded in each phrase is an ethos of practice and principle acknowledging that although the underlying rules of the dance are agreed upon by participants, they can be interpreted and performed in as many different ways as there are movements. (p. 6)

Shaw (2006) describes Pite's movement specifics as being clear and recognizable. She states, "Each expressive act is highly codified, often unconsciously articulated and yet intimately and instantly understood by the audience and performers" (p. 7).

Music or sound for choreography may also be an important specific. The music may create the mood or suggest the tone and so is chosen carefully so as not to overpower the choreographer's idea. The music assists in the audience's understanding and enjoyment of the choreographer's subject. Interpreting a piece of music does not

necessarily make the best dance. Having your subject, sensing your audience and having known specifics before finding the music will give the choreography a clear and firm foundation that may be altered by the music if it is chosen first. Music has the tendency to tell a choreographer what to do. The choreographer is attempting to reveal her vision and subject, not the musical composers.

To support this notion, in an interview by McClung with choreographer Lewitsky (1975), McClung and Lewitsky discuss the use of music with dance:

Earlier you said that dance is at its strongest when it is removed from other art forms. Do you include music in those other forms? Lewitsky: Yes. I think music and dance are marvelously compatible. But they are different forms. They have in common the fact that they exist in time... The form of dance is as different from music as it is similar. I think one gets into a trap and loses the value of dance as an independent form if it is used only to interpret another form. (p. 13)

Graham (1991) supports the idea of choreography being independent of music. She is clear in her view that dance and music are separate art forms and that music can act as a specific for choreography:

With composers, I have always wanted and demanded a collaboration... There are only two choices: you either accept the composer's music or you do not. I think that it's important to state that the dance does not interpret the music; the music is the setting for the dance. (p. 224)

In *Dance Masters*, Roseman (2001) interviews dance legends about their careers and philosophies. She asks choreographer Morris about his non use of music:

Did you know when you went into the studio that you wouldn't choose to use music? Yes. That was my mission in that dance ... When you see and hear something that is organized by music, it is rhythmicizing itself, you hear and watch it at the same time. Whether it's beat for beat or not, or big washes of things, it still looks like it has a relationship to the music because it happens at the same time. (p. 72)

Morris is reiterating that dance and music have the tendency to mesh and ‘seem’ to become one, which may not be what the choreographer wants to happen. They may wish to preserve their dance in its purity by not using music. Morris consciously was experimenting with creating dance as an entity that did not require music to be complete.

Other important specifics, which the choreographer may choose to enhance her production, are the lighting, costumes, scenery, and props. In a professional production, trained artists are hired for their expertise in making these items and professional lighting is an art in itself, creating mood, tone and setting. In smaller productions, costumes and props can still be effective despite being less elaborate. Props and costumes may provide the audience with visual suggestions, color, texture, and items with which the dancer may interact, helping the audience suspend their disbelief and enter into the world of the choreographer’s theme or idea.

The search for specifics appears to be an essential activity for writing and choreography because of the requirement for clear description and showing the reader or viewer the details that will make the piece believable, authentic and alive. Writers and choreographers may find their specifics through many sources, such as research, interviews or from their own personal experiences.

For choreographers, Laban’s movement elements provide a guide to draw from to ensure they are taking many movement possibilities into account. Listening to the body and mining the subconscious for detail and inspiration with improvisation will also reveal authentic specifics. Finally, considering other elements of staging, such as costume, the use or nonuse of music, lighting, scenery and props will greatly enhance a production and endow it with the specifics of color, sound, and texture, to aid in the clarity of the

choreographer's vision. The magic of the creative process occurs when the choreographer blends her own particular style and unique voice with a subject, she knows and cares about, has an audience in mind that she hopes will understand and be moved by her work, and carefully chosen movement specifics that will illustrate her ideas with clarity.

As the writer must choose each word carefully so the choreographer chooses each movement specific with discernment in order to create the imagery he needs to convince his audience that what he has choreographed is authentic. The details and refinements of the body as seen by the audience are important for the whole structure or dance piece to work. The choreographer is constructing or creating an impression, an image, an insight or story and each moment in movement is a telling snapshot, which are all connected in understanding the whole piece.

Dance pioneer and choreographer Halprin (1969) insightfully sums up the process of searching for specifics:

At the beginning, when the raw materials are released, it has come, shall we say, with ecstasy and inspiration, and this is what it should end with, but in between there is much crystallization to be done. There will be choosing, cutting, elaborating: always with a return to the intuitive intelligence for judgment. Each step along the way will be charged with new flashes of kinesthetic insight until the product had finally been hewn out of the body into the space where it lives. (p. 53)

## **Creating a Design**

Having chosen a significant subject, become so aware of your audience's possible reactions that you create the piece so they understand your truth and experience the emotion you intended, and searched for authentic specifics that clarify the meaning of your work, the writer will now turn her attention to creating a design. All of the elements



of the process have an impact on one another and aid in the creation of the others. The writer is aware that it is a process that is broken into component parts for the purposes of examination and revision and one in which she is moving back and forth.

Writer Murray (1968) teaches:

The writer understands that writing is a process, not a rigid procedure. He constantly rediscovers his subject. He gets to know his audience better and sees what they need to know. When he gathers facts, the facts will change, refine or perhaps even destroy his subject. When he creates a design of what he has to say, his outline may show him he needs to expand or limit the subject ... He must be open to these changes, for writing is a continuing state of discovery. He is doing something, building something, creating something, and it will change under his hands. (p. 7)

As the subject becomes more defined as the writer endeavors to communicate and make connections to her potential audience, and while researching or discovering the authentic specifics, the writer will also have an outline or design in mind. The design is the element that will assist the writer in pointing the way and unfolding her material. Mamchur (2007) teaches that the design is the architecture, which holds all the parts together in the way they need to be to convey the clearest meaning. (Mamchur, lecture notes, 2007) On the exterior, the design can be seen to be the outward structure to contain the work. On the interior, the design is the blueprint or plan of where the writer hopes to go with her subject and specifics.

This design may also change, or be reformed in the process of creation. Drafting and rewriting are what experienced writers do. The creative process does not usually happen in one quick write or gush of material. It is not set so easily. The writer works at his craft and is editing, revising, tweaking and changing his material until he feels it conveys the message he intended. He works out of abundance with all the ideas he has and then refines them down to the ideas that matter. He revisits each aspect of the process

and checks to see if he has it right, asking himself, is this aspect of the process working with the others, do they compliment each other and work together so my audience will understand and be moved by my work?

Writer Dillard (1989) discusses the importance of design and form for writing, stressing using her original ideas as a foundation for what will come next:

The reason to perfect a piece of prose as it progresses – to secure each sentence before building on it – is that original writing fashions a form. It unrolls out into nothingness, It grows cell to cell, bole to bough to twig to leaf; any careful word may suggest a route, may begin a strand of metaphor or event out of which much, or all, will develop. (p. 15)

Dillard compares writing design to a tree's growth and sees each branch leading the writer in new and fruitful directions. The original design is a plan to follow, which if solid from the beginning may ensure the whole piece leads from one thing to another coherently and logically. This plan or design may change as the writing develops. The writer has to view the process as flexible and stay open to the creative possibilities as they unfold.

Writer Goldberg (1996) advises that, "Form is a mystical equation; it forces your hand the moment you invite it on the page. Writing within a predetermined structure helps you approach difficult subjects and steers the direction of the piece" (p. 174). We may surmise that the thoughtful and organized writer will have a design in mind before she starts writing. This preplanned design will provide the writer a starting place but will inevitably evolve along with the subject, sense of audience and specifics.

Writer Banks (2008) comments on his own writing style and on creating and building a design. He sees that there are many ways in which individual authors approach design:

I work very differently from John Irving, on the one hand, inasmuch as I try not to know my last sentences. But I also work very differently from, say, Michael Ondaatje, author of *The English Patient*, who does write in the scattershot, or shotgun, way, without knowing really where one sentence will lead to the next, or how. I fall somewhere in between these two. And I generally work with a very loose, big, and infinitely changeable outline for the overall narrative arc of the novel and at the same time a more detailed and refined outline that covers the next chapter or perhaps twenty or thirty pages. (p. 35)

As the writer creates a design to aid in the development and direction her work will take so will the choreographer follow a similar path. Creating a design or structure for choreography is an important aspect of dance creation. The medium of writing and choreography may differ but both acts of creation require a form.

Movement educator H'Doubler (1940) supports the notion of choreography requiring a design and speaks about organization and structure being integral for the audience to gain meaning from the work:

Once the desired movements have been discovered, they must be so organized that the newly formed whole answers to the mind's need for ready comprehension. To accomplish organization or structure by aiding the comprehending mind to grasp meaning, the same devices are used as in everyday intercourse. If we spoke or wrote with our words all jumbled into incoherent groupings without thought of order and relative positions, there would be no communication. A dancer goes to work in much the same way he fashions his speech and writing. He sets out to assemble, relate, and integrate his materials into the final expressive whole. (p. 140)

H'Doubler (1940) recognizes that our minds look for structure and form to understand and grasp ideas and communications. Form and design in writing orders and arranges the words of the author into coherent and flowing sentences, paragraphs, and chapters and surrounds or encases the writer's ideas so readers will recognize that a piece of writing is a poem, short story or novel. Choreographers utilize design in much the

same way by borrowing or creating recognizable and organized forms which assist the audience in understanding the meaning of the piece and convey the subject clearly.

Horst (1969) understands design and structure as key to the audience relating to a work. His ideas stress that organizing movement into form or design leads to clear communication:

You put your gesture into a form, and that very organization, which makes a piece of art, heightens the communication value for the audience. No matter what the passion or emotion is, form enables both the dancer and the audience to enjoy it through the mind and not only through the senses. Though dance is a sensory art, it must be enjoyed mentally, too, so we see the structure, and, through the structure, the intention of the artist. (p. 16)

Horst is reiterating the important role of structure and design for the audience to experience choreography on an intellectual level. A dance work may be enjoyed on many levels, such as the colors of the costumes, the patterns created by the interaction of the dancers or the movement and rhythm of the dancers synchronized with the music. But underlying these specifics is an essential organized design or structure, which supports the subject and aids the audience in understanding the meaning the choreographer wishes to impart.

As in writing, choreographic organization and design can also be viewed as the architecture or plan, which holds all the specifics together aiding in a deeper understanding of the work by the audience. The choreographer knows that creating boundaries for the outward form and organization of the inward structures of the dance will aid the audience's comprehension of the work.

A dance isn't sewn together hit or miss like a crazy quilt, and the phrase so often used, "building a dance," is not as offhand a remark as it may at first seem. Careful attention must be paid to organization all along the way, as the dance grows from single movements to short and long phrases, to

sequences and sections, on its way to becoming a completed piece. (Blom & Chaplin, 1982, p. 90)

As in well-organized writing, the design for choreography will also include a recognizable and clear beginning, middle and end. Murray (1968) notes that, “Most writers find out what the journalist knows: the lead is all-important” (p. 7). For writing, the lead or opening words, sentence, or paragraph will introduce the subject and should capture the audience’s attention. This ‘hook’ is an essential part of the design. What is said in the lead will determine what can be said in the rest of the piece of writing. It will shape the design. Murray (1968) adds, “The lead limits the subject. The lead makes it clear where the piece of writing is headed; the lead establishes the tone” (p. 7). The lead may be the hardest part to write. But once set up and established will outline and determine the shape of the writing.

The beginning of the choreography is where the setting, tone and first impressions are created in the audience’s mind. The choreographer who plans well will have a strong, clear opening image or entrance to catch or hook the audience’s attention. This can be created in choreography with a strong static first pose as the curtain rises or an entrance that is imaginative. The choreographer provides the opportunity for the work to capture the attention of the audience. The opening of a dance piece like the first sentence of a story should secure the audience’s curiosity and keep them watching, intently wondering what will come next.

After the opening of the piece or beginning, the writer and choreographer start to reveal their subject, doling out specifics in a strategic order so the audience will be intrigued. The material should unfold and build progressively. The choreographer, as the writer, is creating tension. Through the design, the audience is led on a journey in which

they gradually find out more and more about the subject, going deeper and deeper into the specifics, all the while increasingly understanding the author's or choreographer's meaning, until the story or theme reaches a climax.

Dance educator H'Doubler (1940) describes this building in a choreographic work:

The movements must build to a climax. There must be a beginning, a rise to the turning point, and a resolution. As the plan develops, it is carried forward by sheer momentum of action. Stress in rhythm, strength in action, and varying shades of feeling are factors that contribute to richness and animation of any dance composition. (p. 141)

The middle section of the choreographic design needs to have flow, which means each section or movement phrase transitions smoothly from one to the other. There has to be continuity. "This matter of transition is an important aspect of creating choreography that flows with its own inner kinesthetic logic" (Blom and Chaplin, 1982, p. 87).

Whatever the form, and no matter how complex, the piece must work as a unit. The overall form includes how a dance builds, peaks, and concludes. The flow of the piece, how it picks up and rolls along, can be thought of as its time line. (Blom and Chaplin, 1982, pp.120-121)

For a choreographic piece, as in a writing composition, the design provides a timeline or sequence of events that unfolds strategically and this adds to the telling of the story or development of the theme. As the mid section develops, the author or choreographer will carefully choose each specific and see that it fits with the design to move the piece along. If the choreography is brief, succinct and completes its idea quickly, like a short story, not a novel, it is accepted as a shorter piece. Writer Mosley in *Off the Page* (2008), relates his ideas on writing forms which can be seen to apply to choreographic works:

I think of novels as mountains, and short stories as far-flung islands that are tips of mountains. The idea is that poetry and short stories are very crystalline. Each word, each idea, each movement is specific and unalterable. (p. 101)

As the writer or choreographer moves along her time line and the work builds to a climax, the piece of writing or choreography will then resolve in some way to an ending.

Writer Dalton in *Off the Page* (2008) says of his endings:

With an ending, I want to invent a concluding incident that in some graceful way comments on the important themes I've set up throughout the novel. And I want to wrap up some, but not all, of the plot lines so that the novel feels like life – some issues resolved, others open-ended. (p. 141)

The ending or crescendo for choreography is also where the audience will receive its last impression. The last image can leave the audience with a powerful summation of the work or make a final statement, which supports the theme or premise. Humphrey (1959) in her book *The Art of Making Dances* discusses endings. She believes the ending to be of the utmost importance in the overall effect of the work on the audience:

The ending is a highly important affair, which choreographers should worry about fully as much as playwrights with their third-act curtain. The theater is a place where the last impression is not only the strongest one, but tends to color the audience's opinion of the whole — which is perhaps not fair, but it is a fact. If the curtain — that abrupt effacing of the color, action, music, comes down on a weak, equivocal or illogical conclusion, the first reaction is one of disappointment, and there is an impression of total failure. (p. 162)

Writer Goldberg (1996) recognizes that endings are necessary and written by authors to finalize and tie together all their ideas. By completing her poem, play or novel, the writer is now free to publish the finished work and Goldberg likens this process to giving birth. She realizes the final stage of writing, presentation, is where the author lets go of the work and must trust her audience:

Endings are the hardest parts to write. This is because they are false. Nothing truly ends; it transforms. Still, the novel must have a last page, the poem a final line. So it is helpful when writing ends to remember that you are really constructing a passageway, a birth canal, a place where the writer lets go and the work becomes part of the reader's consciousness, understanding, and imagination. (p. 200)

Well-constructed and designed writing and choreography will provide the viewer or reader with an organized framework with which to fully understand the work. The choreographer or writer, who includes a well thought out beginning, a carefully structured middle, which moves the audience along in the understanding of the subject and builds dramatic tension, and a well defined conclusion or ending, will provide a satisfying structure for the audience to receive the author's or choreographer's intent or ideas. Form, although perhaps not apparent to the audience who is enjoying the work and not spending their time analyzing it, is still present and created by the artist to give his work structure and organization thereby conveying clear meaning to his audience.

Writer Murray (1968) supports the idea of incorporating careful planning for a design when writing and his advice can easily be transferred to design in choreography:

The writer must plan and calculate, scheme and decide. He makes a thousand executive decisions every time he outlines a chapter. The lawyer chooses a defense from all the laws and past cases and judicial opinions with which his experience has made him familiar. The writer briefs his article or speech or essay or report in the same way. (pp. 6-7)

The choreographer will also outline the work she intends and decide on the form or design based on her experience and study of design principles. The writer uses her craft, her knowledge of words, sentences, paragraphs and punctuation to create her design. However, Murray (1968) states:

Art is beyond craft. Craft is the calculation which turns inspiration into creation ... (The writer) ... understands that writing is a way of



perceiving, a method of discovery, and refinement and synthesis and clarification. (p. 13)

Choreographer Humphrey (1959) believed that good choreographic design also involves craft and that there are certain requirements in creating good design which she sees as including: the understanding of the use of symmetry and asymmetry, how to use one and more bodies, the use of the phrase to build movement sentences, the use of the stage space and how to design with groups of dancers. However, she also warns the choreographer not to be too rigid when designing:

The workmanlike procedure, with all its logic, is not the best way to compose a dance. Things are usually made in a series of steps: the assembling of materials, the cutting or shaping, the fastening together and finally the polish or paint. Choreographers should not begin at the beginning and plod through like this. The dance is not an artifact, but is shot through with intangibles of feeling, intuition, inspiration, and a special psychological attitude to the ending. (p. 166)

The writer uses words, paragraphs and chapters to create a structure and so the choreographer has similar tools to create meaning within a choreographic structure.

Choreographer de la Tour (1970) reiterates what she believes are the main elements of good choreography and expands on her definition of design:

There are four basic elements of dance: design, dynamics, rhythm, and motivation. Design includes floor patterns; levels (height and depth) and orientations (horizontal and vertical) in space; and linear development of body shapes and gestures — in straight lines, in circles, in over-all architecture filling a given space with more than one figure. (p. 167)

For choreography, the elements of design can be seen in the floor pattern or directions and pathways the choreographer plans but also where the choreographer moves in space. As discussed in searching for specifics, elements of design and specifics are not separated in the process of creation but may occur simultaneously. While creating the design, the choreographer is also choosing the appropriate specifics to incorporate into

her design. Choreographic design can take place on many levels and orientations in space besides standing erect on the floor. For example, a dancer can roll, slither, or crawl on the floor in a low level as well as leap, jump or spring into a higher level.

The choreographer can map out her use of the space to ensure variety, recording her floor pattern and gaining an overall view of the piece. The floor pattern is only limited to the choreographer's imagination and may look like zigzags, spirals, straight lines, following the diagonals or moving in a figure of eight. The theme, message or premise is the first consideration when designing a floor pattern or deciding on which levels work best. The choreographer asks herself, is the audience understanding and being moved by the work, is the design adding to the understanding of the theme or story? Minton (1986) further clarifies an understanding of floor patterns or pathways:

Various pathways on stage also differ in terms of importance to the audience. Movement executed in straight lines is seen as strong and direct... When an individual follows a curved pathway, his facing changes constantly and the impression left with the audience is less forceful. (p. 59)

Humphrey (1959) discusses the use of space on the stage. She states, "It seems obvious, with even the most superficial thought on the subject, that the stage, a place for communication, has some very special attributes spatially, which can be made to help choreography or injure it, according to the understanding of the composer" (p. 73).

Humphrey (1959) additionally outlines key ideas of stage use which include recognizing the four corners and their corresponding powerful verticals and diagonals, the strength of center stage due to all lines converging on it, and strategic places for entrances and exits.

From these comments on staging, it is apparent that the choreographer may use stage design strategically to communicate her choreographic intentions. Traveling from

place to place on the stage in different directions and to different locations will determine how the audience perceives the choreography as a whole. Humphrey (1959) makes further comments about the use of specific places on the stage. She imparts the impact a choreographer can make by using the front of the stage:

You cannot say anything serious or important on the footlights unless it is a speech at a bond rally. This is the place for comedy — and personality pitches. Comedians nearly fall over the edge in their reliable instinct to be closer, and they are quite right too. People who enter in downright corners can only become more personal, as they move on stage, or more remote and recessive. (p. 78)

The use of the center of the stage, especially for a solo dancer, is a place to make a strong impression as she is literally the center of attention or focus. In Graham's *Blood Memory* (1991) she bitingly has this to say about the use of center stage:

Doris's book *The Art of Making Dances* became a great success and I was glad for her, but a little put off with some of its concepts. The chapter that just did me in was entitled "The Center of the Stage." To Doris, it was a geographic place in the middle of things. When I saw it I thought, "But the center of the stage is where I am. (p. 69)

Creating a design within the space on the stage is an integral aspect of choreography. Well-plotted pathways, patterns, directions, levels and thoughtful choices of where the choreographer chooses to have the dancers enter or exit will greatly influence the audience's perceptions of the work.

Historically, looking at how patterns, forms and the recognizable designs of organized human movement or choreography were first created, Blom and Chaplin (1982) suggest that, "Forming is as basic to art as it is to life". (p. 83) They surmise that artistic endeavor may be unconsciously mimicking or echoing nature's patterns:

Form existed, and humans conceptualized, abstracted, and then incorporated it into their own creations, into their highest expressions about life, into art. Cycles, patterns, and form are so much a part of life

that they are understood to be part of the definition of life itself. Form has the same inherent definitional relationship with art. It provides the internal logic that holds a piece of art together and makes it work. (p. 84)

In *World History of the Dance*, Sachs (1937) relates how ancient and early dance forms and choreography were dominated by imitating the ways and actions of animals and naturally occurring phenomena. The circular form, which was most popular, saw the dancers moving or stepping rhythmically in the round. This revolving motion may have been copying the circular shape or motion of the sun moving across the sky. In his research Sachs (1937) discovered that early human beings through their observance and mimicking of nature created the choreographic themes, which we still use today:

The history of the dance in Greece, then, has little to record of actual invention as that of any other culture. All that it offers in theme, type, movement, and form has been anticipated by primitive peoples and by the advanced Asiatic cultures... There are the same forms: circular dances with either sexes and line dances in which a row of men is drawn up opposite a row of women, labyrinths, processions, solo dances, and at a late period couple dances. (p. 245)

Minton (1986) describes later choreographic patterns, which developed along with and mirrored musical form. She recognizes choreographic patterns as perhaps echoing the cycles of life. She reports:

The overall shape of a piece of choreography can follow many different paths of development while still maintaining its sense of wholeness... A very simple choreographic form is called the AB ... Another frequently used dance form is ABA ... The ABA was derived from a musical form and has two sections, A and B, followed by an ending ... Louis Horst felt that a work that follows an ABA format is like life because it proceeds through the universal pattern of being born, living and dying. (pp. 6-7)

Minton (1986) discusses other choreographic forms such as the rondo, which has many different sections following one after the other, the suite, theme and variations, and the narrative, which is a story or dramatic dance.

In her book *Blood Memory*, Graham (1991) interestingly discusses her childhood play experiences, which she believes helped foster her abilities to create design and choreograph. She describes a relationship or connection between architecture, building and the staging of choreography. She remembers:

My sisters and I had a large nursery with wooden blocks which we would build into cities — practical houses with windows, doors, and all those sorts of things. I felt that this play with blocks, this making of another landscape, which could be called livable, contributed a great deal to what is now called choreography ... I'm not speaking of the technique. I'm speaking of the stage planning and the presentation of a story, an idea, or an emotion in formal terms, as one uses the words of a language to present a poem, a letter, or any thought which passes through one's mind ... The playroom was our first theatre, as we constructed elaborate stories and built cities from blocks of wood. (p. 31)

Choreographers seem to be in agreement that design is a necessary and important element of the choreographic process. Further illuminating the complexity and intrigue of building and molding choreographic work into an artistic form are the following important words of choreographers who seem to articulate the process particularly clearly.

Choreographer Lind (1960) shares this profound statement about the process of creating a design:

A choreographer begins the tension — the deep struggle between the need to pour forth the ideas and emotions ... and the need to keep them in check in order to give them coherence, shape, form, meaning. And now is the time when all the frustrations come welling up, the sense of inadequacy, the insuperable obstacles that seem to confront him on every side. It is not an easy thing to look deep within one's self and to try to create something that will be alive—that will stand forth in its wholeness, in its own kind of truth. (p. 101)

Lind's statement reveals the difficulty of melding all of the necessary elements together to form a complete and unified work that speaks to an audience. As a writer or

choreographer grapples with her subject matter and deals with the inner tensions of creating, as the ideas come together and are fused into a form or design that works, the artist may be able to harness this tension and use it to build the work, from the beginning through to the climax, into a complete whole.

Choreographer A. M. Hawkins (1991) notes that the designing process is one in which the material is derived intuitively from within the artist and essentially a structure is first designed in the artist's mind and then when it is released physically it can be worked on and molded further to the choreographer's purposes:

Professional artists describe their experience during the intense moments of creating, in different ways, but running through all their comments is the recognition that an inner-directed intuitive process, often referred to as inexplicable, guides the discovering and shaping of the aesthetic form. The germinal material that emerges from the inner-oriented process provides the unique substance embodied in the work of art. Artists may use their craft to further develop and refine certain aspects of the intuitively created form, but the original structure does seem to hold up. (p. 78)

Choreographer Halprin, (1969) stresses the necessity of a carefully constructed design to create meaning for the audience. She claims that, "Growth in the creative process is a matter of relentless labor to find the ultimate form that will communicate what one person has experienced to another" (p. 53). She emphasizes the effort it takes to design a work that will truly reach the audience. The choreographer, in creating a meaningful design, strives to provide a structure that will encapsulate the work but also have a clearly defined inner organization and sequence of actions.

To conclude, Blom and Chaplin (1982) emphasize and reiterate the importance of design, form and structure, which they see as paramount for art in its many forms:

This is how art functions: art takes and uses these patterns and condenses them, isolates, captures, highlights, and presents them, thus distilling the form from the complex morass. This ordering of the complexity is a

necessary part of what makes art important to people... There is reassurance in recognizable patterns and forms — a feeling of identification, familiarity, even comfort. (p. 85)

## **Conclusion**

An examination of the literature uncovers evidence that just as writers use the language of the four essential elements of the writer's process to discuss and talk about their creative process, so choreographers use these same paradigms to describe their process. The four elements of the creative writing process (discovering a subject, sensing an audience, searching for specifics, and creating a design) seem to be stressed by choreographers when creating choreographic works. It is significant to recognize that while the mediums differ, the need for discovering a subject, sensing an audience, searching for specifics and creating a design in both writing and choreography appear to be basic elements of the process.

I was surprised at how closely choreographers followed the four elements of the creative writing process and how the writing process was so similar and applicable to the choreographic process. Both creative processes require the writer and choreographer to find a relevant subject, which will convey meaning, be understood by and through the presentation of their ideas move an audience. Both writer and choreographer also search for specifics to make their work clear, believable and vivid enabling the reader or viewer to fully understand the intended subject. A design is also built for both writing and choreography providing structure and form upon which the writer and choreographer can organize their words or movements.

Both creative acts require the writer or choreographer to revisit and revise each aspect of the process in order to develop and reshape what they have to say. They both accept that a first draft is only the first stage before they reexamine what they have written or choreographed. They are not satisfied until the writing or choreography has achieved wholeness, and the final product has unity and coherence.

Both processes employ craft. Writers and choreographers marry their innate creativity, imagination and intuitive abilities, their need to communicate and tell a story with the concrete rules and methods of building a work, the tricks of their trade. For the writer, this may look like rules of grammar, employing a thesaurus for specific word choices, knowing about the importance of the lead, and showing not telling. For the choreographer, this may look like examining movement choices using Laban's movement principles to ensure the appropriate body shape, effort, space, and dynamics are chosen for the project. Both the writer and choreographer know the importance of working at their craft.

A difference between choreography and writing is that the choreographer is presenting a live performance, which may include concrete specifics, which the writer has no need for, such as body actions, but also props, costumes, scenery, and music. The writer may figuratively have these specifics, but they will be described with words.

There is also the added element in choreography of the choreographer's work being performed by hired dancers, although often choreographers perform their own work. The hired dancer has the dual job of simultaneously interpreting and presenting the choreography, whereas, the text, created by the author, is not usually mediated by any



one but the reader, except for plays and movies which are acted and children's books which are illustrated.

Another difference between choreography and writing is the substantial and real text that writing leaves behind and the brief moment that dance exists in time and space. In Sorell (1973), German modern dancer and choreographer Wigman discusses how dance is of the moment:

Every work of art is the result of a unique and unrepeatable process of creation. The work of a painter can be seen as an independent entity detached from its creator. However, where the human being in his entire corporeality becomes the visible vessel and instrument of his message, the work itself remains tied to its creative interpreter. It can be effective only at the moment of its living realization. That it can be repeated does not change anything about its dependence on the moment of its presentation. (p. 48)

This in no way takes away from the rich and exciting experience of watching choreography in action. The viewer, however, must use memory and feeling to relish the performance after it has passed. Watching a work on video is not the same. The dynamics and motivation of the choreography is not easily transferred or recorded. Writing gives us the opportunity to read and reread, experiencing the text perhaps differently each time it is read, gaining deeper meaning. If given the chance, choreography may lead to the same experience. Having attended a writer's workshop several years in a row, called Writing Dance, through the Vancouver Dance Center, where the participants are given the opportunity to watch many dance performances and then write about them, I had the opportunity to watch several of the same choreographic works more than once and found that similarly to reading a text I experienced the works differently each time they were viewed.

This was a fascinating experience in that, watching a piece a second time, you thought you knew what was coming but on the second viewing the perception was quite different and the things you noticed again had more detail and you saw things you didn't notice at all the first time. The second viewing provided a deeper appreciation for the movement, effects and staging but also awareness that the interaction between the choreographer and audience is unique to that moment. I received the performance differently, the second time, already informed by new experiences, memories of having watched the performance before, and a different emotional and bodily state. Press (2002) also observes the 'immediacy of the moment' for choreography when she remarks:

In dance, the artwork is "alive" based on the sheer immediacy of the dancer's presence. Without the action of dancing, no dance exists. Except for the elusive memory, the ephemeral nature of dance is paramount. (p. 103)

Choreographer Cunningham in (Cunningham, in Brown, Mindlin, & Woodford, 1988), sums up the choreographer's dilemma and joy of creation when he reflects:

You have to love dancing to stick to it, it gives you nothing back, no manuscripts to store away, no paintings to show on walls and maybe hung in museums, no poems to be printed and sold, nothing but that single fleeting moment when you feel alive. It is not for unsteady souls. (p. 90)

In summation, the literature suggests that the writer and choreographer have much in common in their creative processes. While there are significant differences in the two mediums' manner of presentation, choreographers can be seen to follow the four elements of the creative writing process. The four elements of the creative writing process (discovering a subject, sensing an audience, searching for specifics, and creating a design) appear to be present and recognizable in the choreographic process and to be useful in describing and analyzing the process of art making in the area of choreography.

What are the educational implications? Applying the writer's process to choreography may allow the choreographic student a new method or fresh outlook with which to build choreographic works. This application may also lend the choreographer a similar discipline, a method to examine, describe and analyze her process enabling a clarity and wholeness of outcome. Murray (1968) relates a last piece of important advice for educators, applicable to students of writing or choreography:

We must make our students understand that creativity comes not only out of an openness to life, a willingness to make courageous and imaginative connections, to turn life inside out and upside down, but ultimately out of the struggle to contain life, to give it form, shape, order, meaning. It is the problem of poetry to fit life into language, to be precise in the documentation of dreams, hopes, feelings, emotions. The writer dramatizes life's conflicts, isolating them, identifying them, and revealing them. (p. 22)

## **‘Earth Dances’**

This chapter will be a presentation of two dance works on DVD entitled ‘Earth Dances’ consisting of two pieces entitled ‘The Orb’ and ‘Mother Earth’ choreographed by the author in which she reflects on and employs the structure of the four elements of the writing process, (discovering a subject, sensing an audience, searching for specifics, and creating a design) to choreograph the pieces.

DVD archived in the  
Simon Fraser University Archive  
and may be borrowed from the  
SFU Library circulating collection.

### **The Orb**

Music:  
Plugged in Electronica  
BT Rare and Remixed

Choreography: Karen Kurnaedy

In this piece the choreographer explores the theme of modern humanity, out of control, treating the earth with contempt and indifference. Is our planet in danger? If so, can we wake up in time to save it?

### **Mother Earth**

Music: Barber- Adagio for Strings

Choreography: Karen Kurnaedy

In this piece the choreographer personifies Mother Earth lamenting the destruction of her beloved child. She is being forced to walk a tight rope, trying to restore balance for her planet.

# **A CHOREOGRAPHER'S PROCESS: A PERSONAL STORY**

## **ARTS-BASED RESEARCH**

### **Introduction**

What are the functions of art within the human experience? Art reflects human behaviors and helps people in their search for meaning. The artist may view her art making as an outlet or means of expression but also a way of sharing her deepest truths. Art making is a process in which to discover, develop and ponder big ideas and issues but also to explore very personal experiences. In the examination of how one has created an artwork, the artist may have a cathartic experience or engage in a discovery of things worth sharing with others. Charting this path, which may be a process, a method, or an investigation of specific elements, may reveal new understanding. Finishing a work of art, such as a novel, a choreographic piece or a painting, is important for the artist as part of the artistic process. But paying attention to the landscape, the details and experiences on the journey to this destination may lead the artist to a valuable self awareness for further art making and with this close examination of process provide insights which may assist other artists.

Slattery (2006) reflects on aesthetic inquiry and arts-based research:

In ... approaches to qualitative, aesthetic, and humanistic inquiry in curriculum studies there is an interest in exploring ways of knowing and learning that create what William Pinar and Madeleine Grumet (1976) call "synthetical moments". In the synthesizing moment there is a reconstruction of the self and an experience of solidarity of the intellect,

the body, the spirit, and the cosmos, as well as an intrinsic coherence of time, place, and meaning. (p. 242)

One can infer from Slattery's (2006) observations that arts-based research is a medium through which to examine and deconstruct one's own art making in order to experience these "synthetical" moments. Arts-based research will assist in a reconstruction of the self, a gaining of solidarity of one's faculties, an understanding of one's own artistic and learning process but also evoke an informed response. Recording one's responses and observations in a scholarly manner may result in research that may be useful for others.

Pelias (2004) observes, "Whenever we engage in research, we are offering a first-person narrative. Even our most traditional work is someone's story" (p. 7). Preferencing choreography as my primary mode of expression, engaging in arts-based research is a way of viewing, deconstructing, and documenting my own choreographic personal story.

Siegesmund and Cahnmann-Taylor (2006), explain the benefits of arts-based research:

Arts-based research is capable of reflecting the resonance of lived experience by refocusing attention on the interplay between nonsymbolic and symbolic meaning to form understanding ... The outcome of such learning is personal agency: autonomous individuals who have the capacity to imaginatively shape their own lives by having the courage to write their own stories. (p. 244)

Under the umbrella of the broad term known as arts-based research we find a variety of research methodologies or practices of inquiry which incorporate the same basic search for new learning by blending art making with scholarly practices. Each methodology has its own unique way of interpreting and employing the arts as a medium of research. Autoethnography, for example, is a practice of rendering self and Other through

arts creation practices; the discoveries, revelations, or understandings made through reflection by the artist while art making are documented and may be presented as part of the art sharing. Irwin and De Cosson (2008) coined the term *artography* and define it as a practice of inquiry in which interdisciplinary spaces of identity and meaning are navigated, opened, and made sense of in personally profound ways.

Also under the umbrella of arts-based research, is performative inquiry, a research methodology that was conceptualized and articulated by Fels (1995, 1998, 1999, 2008). This methodology involves exploration through performance, which according to Fels and McGivern (2002), “may involve the investigative tools of dance, visual and media arts, music, writing in tandem with or separate from those of drama” (p. 33).

Performative inquiry is a methodology that invites inquiry and reflection. It is a means to investigate and learn about matters of significance through engaging in actions. The participants immerse themselves in an activity such as role drama or improvisational movement and as events unfold, the participants may pause to reflect on their initial questions and how the subject of their investigation may be addressed or understood in unexpected ways. The learning that emerges is not predictable but hinges on each moment and the interactions of the performers. New knowledge and understandings about a particular issue or situation or phenomenon or practice investigated become visible to the inquiring researcher. New sides of an issue or situation may be exposed or fresh questions raised. “The quest of performative inquiry is not to achieve answers but to open up spaces of inquiry through which new ways of engaging become possible.” (Fels, 2004, p. 82).

The theoretical or conceptual underpinning of performative inquiry:

proposes that it is through simultaneous interplay between our experiences as we engage in a role drama or drama exploration through visualization or improvisation, and our lived experience, past, present, and anticipated that we come to moments of recognition, moments of learning which, in turn, illuminate our embodied experience. (Fels, 2004, p. 80)

I chose to use performative inquiry as my methodology because it would enable me to find out if I would be able to choreograph work using the four stages of the writing model and discover whether or not the writing model was applicable and had a resonance for choreography. I could only do this through a methodology that allowed for the physical actions of choreographing movement or dance. I required a methodology that would allow me to explore the artistic avenues of my choreography by doing, to inquire and reflect on the meaning of the movement discovered, and to apply these insights in shaping this movement for an audience to appreciate.

Performative inquiry is a methodology that offers the researcher the possibility of several important outcomes for a researcher in inquiry, including perhaps an exciting performance to enjoy and ponder. But perhaps more importantly for the alert researcher is the discovery that:

Being or coming to learning through performance is the temporal bridging of imaginary play and lived experience. And it is within these meeting places that research becomes possible – a seeking of disequilibrium and temporal balance that spells the not-yet known into being. (Fels, 2004, p. 81)

Fels and Belliveau (2008) explain further:

Something happens when individual and shared worlds of experience, knowledge, memory, and performance intersect. Imagination, experience, and inquiry collide, resulting in startling moments of recognition .... Performative spaces are action sites of learning where children and adults bring into being new understandings, new recognitions, and new possibilities. (p. 29)



Through performative inquiry, I as choreographer and researcher, am hopeful that in these meeting places, the learning that emerges will both startle and inform.

As writers, or choreographers, or artists of any type we bring to our art a huge range of experiences and influences as well as all of the training and technique we have gleaned through direct study with individuals or institutions. All of these influences cannot help but mold, shape and motivate us as creators in our own artistic expression. Reflecting on my own work as a dancer and choreographer, which I see as a life long practice, I acknowledge some of the influences, which have contributed to produce my own unique choreographic voice and style.

My formal dance training started at age ten with Gertrud and Magda Hanova. The Hanova sisters established the first modern dance school in Vancouver in 1959 and taught a unique blend of European modern dance, Indian dance and ballet. They had studied with Mary Wigman, the Paris Opera Ballet, Max Terpis, Rudolph Laban and in India with Udi Shankar and Menaka. Consequently, their lessons provided a warm up with yoga, technique at the bar and Laban theory for understanding how to create choreographic work. Each class included choreography and ended with improvisation.

I received my Bachelor of Education from the University of Alberta in 1990, where I was privileged to take several modern dance courses from Dorothy Harris who had been a student of H'Doubler at the University of Wisconsin. Harris incorporated H'Doubler's passion for movement education and choreography into her teaching.

I returned to British Columbia and became a public school teacher in Coquitlam and continued my dance studies with the Hanova sisters until their deaths in 1993 (Magda) and 2003 (Gertrud). I have continued to study dance, perform and choreograph

by presenting work at various venues, most recently at, the EWOB graduate student conference, October 2007, the Community Arts Village in Port Coquitlam, January 2008, and at the Vancouver Story Telling Guild, in May 2008.

It was when taking Mamchur's, Creativity Education 850, in the Winter 2007 semester at SFU that I first noticed what seemed to be a parallel between the four fundamental skills used by successful writers: discovering a subject, sensing an audience, searching for specifics and creating a design, to the choreographic process. Mamchur's (2004) four stage model seemed to be easily adapted and transferred to my discipline of choreography and spoke directly to the heart of my process. Each element of the writing process seemed as if it could be extremely applicable and useful in the choreographic process. Through creating choreographic work with the four writing process elements and using the methodology of performative inquiry to create and examine my process, I was able to document my experiences and incorporate my learning into this study.

## **I Discover a Subject**

In his essay, *The Pattern of Art Making*, Abbs (1989) speaks of art making of all kinds as developing in clear phases. He sees the artist moving through a circle of phases, which include responding to an impulse, working within a medium and striving to embody his experience, realizing the final form, taking the artifact into the world in presentation or performance and finally having the work responded to and evaluated. Abbs (1989) first phase concentrates on discovering your subject as connected to the body and the impulse to symbolize:

Within impulse there is the desire for reflection, a desire for an image, which will hold, comprehend and complete. This desire is buried in the

body, bound into our instincts, as innate propensity. Art is the life of the body, projected, developed and taken into consciousness. (p. 199)

Abbs (1989) also recognizes the correlation of art making to the body and its rhythms. As a choreographer I feel this resonance and see this interplay between real life, the body and art. Abbs (1989) reflects on the complexity of all the functions of the body contributing to and playing into the creation of any artwork:

... We must not forget that art making is a wholly natural activity, an astonishing outgrowth of instinct. Its blossom may open out in consciousness but its roots are down deep in affective impulse, in muscular and nervous rhythms, the beat of the heart, the intake and release of breath, patterns of perception, unconscious coordinates of the limbs, the obscure, fluctuating, dimly sensed movements of the organism, in the preconceptual play of psyche. (pp. 199-200)

This notion that the body and its natural rhythms are the beginnings and source of art creation can be reflected in music, dance and the rhythm of speech, which is the basis for prose and poetry. Our subject for art making may emerge from our subconscious in the form of deep or remarkable connections or intuitions, memories or reflections of experiences, prompted and encouraged by all we have witnessed, read or viewed. As creators, we try to convey our subject in some form and then let it stand alone to be interpreted in many ways by our audience. Writer Murray (1968) speaks of the writer's job as being complete when he has conveyed his subject subtly and unseen:

The writer tries to see and then make the reader see. He does not want to tell but to show. He believes he is successful when he is invisible, when the reader discovers the subject for himself. (p. 13)

As part of the Master of Arts program, I took Mamchur's Creativity 850 course, in the Fall of 2007. We were required to produce a final project, which demonstrated our creativity in an artistic form. As choreography is my preferred artistic method of

expression I decided to choreograph and dance my project. It would allow me the opportunity to use my body as a means of conveying my ideas.

I was inspired to choose ‘ecology’ as my big idea or subject. I discovered my subject in my role as an educator when teaching a Social Studies unit on ecological issues with my Grade Five class in the 2006-2007 school year. The Grade Five class had been studying aspects of ecology and through their exploration and learning produced writing projects, visual artwork and also choreography, which demonstrated ecological concepts. This work inspired me to use the same big issue or topic of ecology as a subject for the choreographic final project in Mamchur’s university class and for this thesis.

Here are a series of excerpts from my Journal of Creativity, which was kept during my university class. I recorded initial ideas of how I discovered my subject. I reference choreographer Tharp (2003) from her book *The Creative Habit: Learn It and Use It for Life* as this was the text we read and referred to for the university class. Tharp (2003) speaks of literally putting things in a box and saving the materials, which have inspired her subject. So I started thinking in terms of collecting things that interested me and kept them in a box to inspire a subject for my choreography.

**February 8, 2007**

I am putting things in a box for the end project. So far I have Argentine Tango music (an idea for a passionate dance) and material on ecology and our state of crisis concerning global warming etc. Right now my own Grade Five class is studying ecology for Social Studies and investigating issues surrounding what is going on with our planet. We are looking at newspaper clippings about the weather and investigating whether there is a correlation between how humanity is treating the planet and the extreme weather places have had, such as flooding and storms etc. So this has been in my mind as an idea for a dance piece. I also recently listened to a piece of music by Barber which really captures the mood of what I feel would be the Earth crying in sorrow over its destruction. I had a picture in my mind of the Earth teetering on the brink, it could go one way or another depending what people will do in the future. I had an image of tightrope

walking and how our future is hanging in the balance. (All movement phrases.) !!! This could make an ecologically educational and hopefully moving and meaningful dance piece.

Can we save our planet for future generations? It really depends on if people care enough to stop doing destructive things to our Earth. I, of course, am still driving my car but I am recycling paper and containers at my school and educating my Grade Five class about all aspects of ecology. A dance about this topic really appeals to me and could be an exciting and creative endeavor. I care about this idea and see that it has universal applications in that an audience will relate to it with all the talk of ecological issues in the news

### **February 15, 2007**

I am continuing to put things in my box for the final project. While exercising the other day with my giant gym ball I thought that creating an Earth from an exercise ball would be a creative way to make a prop for the dance piece I want to do. So I need to paint on it or spray paint a blue ball with continents. I only have a pink one so I will have to buy a blue one.

Also in my Grade Five classroom my students and I have continued with our investigation of environmental issues and they have done some really great work defining and scientifically understanding what the issues consist of and why we are facing these dilemmas. For example, global warming, too much garbage, holes in the ozone layer, pollution and endangered species are all going in my box as good ideas to experiment with for the choreography.

### **March 5, 2007**

I'm really excited about my final project and how it connects to my Grade Five classroom. Things are coming along. Barber's Adagio for Strings is still resonating with me as a possibility for musical accompaniment. It has a somber and serious quality, which I feel might compliment the idea of mourning our planet. Music is usually chosen after a choreographer has developed her theme and specifics but there is no hard rule and sometimes the music presents itself, which in this case just happened when I was listening to some classical music. I intuitively felt this might be the right music, a specific in sound that would assist in my production but not take it over.

So I have done some research on Atlas. I have this picture of a Greek God holding up the World. (my exercise ball) This image would make a good beginning to the piece. I am also brainstorming movement verbs about how we treat our planet, as we've talked of verbs moving the action along in writing. This would be an interesting way to create meaningful action for the dance. In my choreography I have always tried to make the images

specific in order to convey my subject clearly to the audience. I also have my own method of recording the movement so as to keep a record and also to be able to 'edit' and rehearse from. So this list will be a starting point. The following ideas would make good specifics.

We:

- dig big gaping holes in the Earth
- kick it around (figuratively)
- strip it/ rape it by taking away the vegetation
- bury toxic waste in it
- pour chemical waste in its waters
- dump garbage on it that isn't biodegradable
- use it up
- abuse it by killing its animals and plants
- chop down its trees/ destroying the atmosphere
- spew polluting gases into the atmosphere from factories
- pound it and jab it

### **March 6, 2007**

I've put more stuff in my box. I've added a strobe light and have been experimenting with it. I would like to do more than one dance and perhaps use Rave or Techno beat music, something harsh and grinding to illustrate destruction and use the Earth ball in this piece too. I also thought of using verbs that would not be so destructive. There are ecologists and environmentalists out there that are treating the world with respect. People are recycling, reusing and reducing, as well as replanting and bicycling instead of driving. The destructive verbs don't fit with the Barber music. But the rave music works really well. It is high energy and I have an image of humanity blindly pounding away at the planet, oblivious to all the harm it is causing.

### **March 12, 2007**

I have done a lot more research about the Earth and can't believe I overlooked the obvious image of Mother Earth. This image provides lots of new movement ideas. I see the planet Earth protected and loved by Mother Earth, held and caressed, and she is dismayed at its current treatment by humans. She is a 'being' that takes part in the Earth's journey around the universe and in its rotations amongst the other planets.

I found out that Mother Earth, was also called Gaia, a Greek Goddess personifying the Earth. She had many offspring. She brought forth Uranus, the starry sky, her equal, to cover her, the hills, and the deep of the Sea. She also lay with Uranus and bore the World-Ocean Oceanus. In classical art Gaia was represented in one of two ways. In Athenian vase painting she was shown as a matronly woman only half-risen from the earth handing over a baby. Later in mosaic representations she appears as a

woman reclining upon the earth surrounded by a host of Carpi, infant gods of the fruits of the Earth. Wow, the imagery and movement possibilities suggested here are great.

The idea that the fertile Earth is a female, nurturing mankind, was not limited to the Greco-Roman world. Many other early cultures also have recorded worship of 'the mother of life', for example, Hebrew, Eve, Norse, Jord, the Irish Celts worshiped Danu, and in India the Mother of all creation is called 'Gayatri'.

Wiccan practitioners believe that Gaia is the Earth or the spiritual embodiment of the Earth. And Carl Jung suggested that the archetypal mother was a part of the collective unconscious of all humans. Finally, in modern ecological theory, it is hypothesized that living organisms and inorganic material are a part of a dynamic system that shapes the Earth's biosphere, and maintains the Earth as a fit environment for life. The Earth Mother seems to be alive and well in our consciousness.

I am continuing with the choreographic part of my project based on all this new input/information about Mother Earth and always find it so satisfying to be in the creative process of choreography. This final project will tie together the ecological studies I have taught in my role as an educator with my Grade Five class and my personal expression about our planet. This idea of Mother Earth fits very well with the Barber music and ball prop.

I know that it really takes time to be creative. Developing your subject and moving into the actual physical choreographic development occurs over many, many hours. I look forward to Spring Break to finish my choreographic project.

### **March 19, 2007**

Spring break, I now have more time to concentrate on my choreography for the end project. It has really evolved in a parallel way to the writing assignments. I have learned more about the processes necessary for a piece of writing to evolve and see these same elements are necessary for a coherent and meaningful choreographic work to emerge.

By examining my journal entries, I recognize how I have recorded the sifting of the ideas to discover my subject. I chose a subject that truly interested me and that I felt passionate about. Ecology and saving our planet from destruction is in the news but really a worthy subject regardless of its newsworthiness. Tharp (2003) aptly calls the underlying idea the 'Spine.' She says if you stay true to your 'spine' your work or piece

will have a consistency and hang together. The spine for this work is definitely 'Saving the Earth', and bringing an awareness of issues surrounding humankind's destruction of our planet to be the main focus of the piece.

The choreographer, like the writer, comes up with many ideas but then juggles them and puts them together in such a way to create a harmonious, flowing pattern. Often, the choreographer, like the writer, will have too many ideas for the piece and will have to hone the ideas down to one important aspect of the subject. For example, I first was inspired with the big idea of doing an ecological piece because my Grade Five class had been studying environmental issues. We learned how modern people may soon create their own destruction and will undoubtedly leave the planet in bad shape for future generations. But this is a huge subject, with many avenues to explore. I definitely couldn't choreograph all of these great ideas in a single piece.

I narrowed down my ideas to personifying Mother Earth. I could dance this solo and portray the Earth's pain and sorrow in her being treated so badly by humanity. I had a real stake in this subject and felt I could show my ideas in choreography in such a way that an audience would understand my work and experience an emotional response.

All things environmental seem to be in the news right now, such as Gore's and Di Caprio's documentaries on ecological issues. I gained a lot of new information from watching these two documentaries. When I started to actually work on the dance piece, I found I actually had two great and clear ideas. So, I had to create two pieces. I felt the sorrow piece with Mother Earth would demonstrate her feelings and show a point of view maybe not previously related to by anyone. But the theme of lamentation and a deep worry needed to be juxtaposed with showing the attitudes and nonchalance of humanity



towards the planet. To show the sorrow without showing the destruction somehow seemed flat and too maudlin. Fast paced action in a first piece would really off set a second more low-key piece. Subsequently, I decided to show both choreographic works, back to back, to my university class for my final project and I include the choreographic notes for both pieces. The two pieces are also recorded on a DVD as the third chapter for this thesis.

As writers discover their subject by researching, reflecting on personal experiences and beliefs, reading or viewing, and by seeing relationships, so can choreographers follow the same process to find a subject that is meaningful and relevant for dance making. Closely examining your ideas and seeing what's at stake, creating a story with your subject, unfolding a theme with tension and rising action, which concludes in a satisfying ending are important parts of the process to consider to ensure the subject has depth.

## **I Sense My Audience**

Having discovered my subject, I now considered with whom I would be sharing this choreography. In sensing my audience, I considered potential responses and understanding of the work and if the choreography would be believable in my portrayal of the characters and move my audience. Abbs (1989) comments on the importance of audience, even if it is imagined:

As the work moves towards completion the art-maker will frequently consult with an imagined audience, constantly seeking its advice. "How does this bit look?" "Should it be this way round?" "Is the reference too obscure?" "Does it go on too long?" "Is it finished?" It is as if a continuous inner dialogue is going on between the artist and the critic,

between the creative subject and the sympathetic onlooker. And through this interrogation, the work, if all goes well, attains its definitive shape. (pp. 201-202)

The ecological dances I was envisioning had the potential to make expressive and emotional statements and stories by juxtapositioning the two ideas of destruction and sorrow. By laying the two ideas side by side, I hoped to create tension and provide insights for the audience about our ecological dilemma. My message would encourage and inspire change or at the very least bring awareness about environmental issues.

I started to consider how to communicate and share these ideas and how I would make connections with my audience. I imagined what this audience might want to discover and what I thought they should discover. I wanted to reach my audience in an authentic way by presenting material that spoke to them but would also not compromise my own voice, style and artistic vision. I felt intuitively that appealing to the audience's humanity and understanding of mothers, children, love, and caring would be a great underlying premise to reach and provide a way to connect with my audience in the 'Mother Earth' piece. 'The Orb', on the other hand, would emphasize people abusing the Earth and using the Earth as if we had unlimited resources. In this piece I wanted the audience to recognize themselves and others in all our daily activities that use up or squander energy.

Part of the purpose of the artist is to express and to 'say' something in her work. A connection should occur. Of course not all art has an obvious message, nor should it. There should be room for viewers to interpret, draw their own conclusions and meanings. For this piece I wanted my audience to make a connection between the two dance pieces and gain a unified message, which was to inspire change and caring for our planet.

Addressing authenticity, which in writing includes such things as is the author making her writing so concrete and authentic that the audience believes in the story and characters, I saw the need for movement that was so specific and real that my audience would understand my subject and be convinced by my performance.

A choreographer stays in character throughout a dance piece as does an actor in a drama. A choreographer believes in the moments she is on the stage that she is her character. She must exude a quality of believability and create the ambience, the mood, or atmosphere through which her audience will enter into the world she has created in movement and suspend their disbelief, if only for those moments. A choreographer's motivation or intention and energy or dynamics will make a real but intangible connection and touch the audience. In a live performance, she will strive to create a bond with her audience.

Berger (2001) speaks of artists who are not willing to make the deep connection with their subject that is required to make their work genuine:

When a painting is lifeless it is the result of the painter not having the nerve to get close enough for a collaboration to start. He stays at copying distance ... To go in close means forgetting convention, reputation, reasoning, hierarchies and self. (p. 16).

Transferring this idea to choreography, the choreographer must also be willing to fully engage her subject, to go in close and then convey this engagement to an audience. The audience will feel if the choreographer is merely going through the motions or if she is totally engaged and 'present' in her conveyance of the piece.

Making connections with an audience will start long before the dance is composed, in the connections the choreographer is making between the movement and the subject. When the choreographer has established these deep connections, through

working with the material she is using in the piece, she will later have the ability to communicate this to the audience.

When a choreographer creates a work for an audience, she is usually telling a story the audience knows already. There is after all no new thing under the sun. We are all simply retelling the same stories, versions of truths, which people don't seem to get tired of. In conversations about writing with educator Mamchur (2008), she stresses that there is a difference between plot and story. The story is usually archetypal and speaks about truth, the plot is the vehicle that tells the story.

The subject of ecology is a subject we 'know' deep down inside and is present in stories, myths and tales in all cultures. Preserving what we have, taking care of things and guarding the Earth for future generations are not new ideas. But in this time of imminent disaster, this story may not have a happy ending or way to recover that, which is lost. Writer Abram (1996) is a great source for specifics and fresh ideas in the area of ecological learning. In his writing he deeply connects to his audience with his intriguing perspective on our relationship to our planet. He rings an alarm bell to our ecological dilemma when he states:

Sadly, our culture's relation to the earthly biosphere, can in no way be considered a reciprocal or balanced one: with thousands of acres of nonregenerating forest disappearing every hour, and hundreds of our fellow species becoming extinct each month as a result of our civilization's excesses... From an animistic perspective, the clearest source of all this distress, both physical and psychological, lies in the aforementioned violence needlessly perpetrated by our civilization on the ecology of the planet; only by alleviating the latter will be able to heal the former. (p. 22)

Conveying this information through artistic presentation is a unique way to deliver an important message to an audience and through art the artist may empower

people to deal with future problems. To foster genuine caring for our planet is a difficult task unless the artist presents her ideas in such a way that they are entertaining as well as being informative. To convey this theme, as the choreographer, I tried to maintain an objective view, and examine my choreography from an audience's perspective. This was about the audience understanding metaphor and imagery, even if the audience only understood the message on a subconscious level. I had to question myself and ask; are these images going to reach the audience? Will they relate to or recognize themselves in the character of Mother Earth or the destructive character in 'The Orb? Will they see the metaphor of the Earth and our bodies being in danger as our ecological system starts to break down? Will they see that we are all responsible and all things are connected?

Klein (1997) speaks of the uphill struggle of seeing these connections in our modern world. She views our physical bodies as potentially and formally having a deep connection to the physical Earth:

In general, we relate to our bodies in ways that are largely determined by a variety of historical and cultural circumstances. More specifically, whenever nature is no longer viewed as sacred and alive, as in the modern West and the industrialized East, boundaries between our bodies and the external world seem to harden ... This makes it more difficult than before to connect with anything outside of these narrow boundaries — with the external world, with other people — and even with our own minds and bodies. (pp. 139-140)

Through viewing my choreographic work and experiencing me as the performer embody these big ideas, the audience will hopefully discover something meaningful along with myself, the choreographer. A choreographer can only hope that there will be a resonance, a relating, a reciprocal kinesthetic connection with the audience and the audience will come away changed in their thinking and awareness. Abram (1996) recognizes this by stating, "By an associative "empathy", the embodied subject comes to recognize these other bodies as other centers of experience, other subjects" (p. 37).

Choreography is a unique art form in its presentation of subject through viewing human movement. Audience resides in their own bodies and relate to choreography because they see other bodies expressing and moving in ways they identify with. We all can jump for joy or cringe in embarrassment. Abram (1996) reflects that, “When we attend to our experience not as intangible minds but as sounding, speaking bodies, we begin to sense that we are heard, even listened to, by the numerous other bodies that surround us” (p. 86).

Sensing an audience for writing and choreography may also be related to Eros, a belief, Pathos, the heart, and Logos, a structure (Mamchur, lecture notes, 2007). The pieces I have choreographed have a clear belief, a warning about environmental issues. They have heart or feeling, which is conveyed through specific movements, which signify lamentation and sorrow such as the lifting of the arms which are begging for change, the desperation Mother Earth registers on her face and with her body while she is walking the tightrope, and in the foolish abandon the character in *The Orb* displays as she acts as if we will never run out of gas or cease to have batteries to operate our cell phones.

I also chose the costumes to specifically engage the audience emotionally. Mother Earth wears a flowing Grecian robe of many hues of green. In this costume she embodies the ancient world and the purity of nature. In ‘the Orb’, the character wears night club party clothes symbolizing frivolity and a lack of depth. I’m endeavoring to show metaphorically the Earth portrayed as a mother in sorrow to see her child so sick and hurt and the people of the Earth personified in one character to convey all of humanities uncaring and selfishness.

Finally, there is the necessary Logos or structure. I planned and examined the structure of my performance to reach my audience. I experimented with which piece

should be first and which second. I decided that showing the violence and ignorance first would speak more to the audience. I wanted to show how people treat the Earth violently so I had to create a personification of humanity to portray this behavior. Then when they see Mother Earth's sorrow, they would relate to her because the reasons for her lamentation will just have been represented. Each piece had its own carefully arranged structure to fit the mood or tone of the piece. For example, in 'The Orb', there is a lot of thrashing about and wild boundless movement while in 'Mother Earth', the character flows smoothly from one position to another, rotating and circling, embodying how a planet might be suspended, revolving and flowing through space.

In sensing my audience I was constantly questioning myself about my movement choices and trying to imagine what an audience would gain from my performance. I strived to make the choreography exciting, relevant, and memorable as I wove my message of ecological awareness into the performance. I wanted my audience to be moved and care deeply but also understand my message clearly.

## **I Search For Specifics**

Having a solid subject or idea and sensing who my audience was by consciously questioning how I hoped to convey my subject's meaning and how this might be interpreted by an audience, I could now focus my energies into a deeper search for specifics that would best present my subject and affect my audience. In choreography as in writing, you create a world by the specifics you choose. One does many drafts and casts off aspects of the subject that don't work for the piece. One works from an abundance of ideas and too much material to get down to that nugget of truth. I had

visions of grandeur in my original ideas. I wanted to choreograph the Earth in all its multifaceted beauty and show such things as the waves of the ocean and the seasons emerging through tree branches. But I soon realized I had too many ideas and that they would not fit together cohesively.

Working within a medium can be a next vital step to finding your specifics. The art making is moving from immediate self-expression to representative embodiment. In the case of choreography, this involves improvisation and trying out how the movement specifics might fit together, taking all of the potential specifics and trying to make a coherent and whole picture. Abbs (1996) notes that for any art to be made the artist creates within a process or method:

He moves from first approximations, from notes and highly-charged fragments, towards that which is progressively more shaped, more completely expressive, as the work develops, so his critical judgment comes more fully into play. He begins to discard, to select, to consider, to evaluate. (p. 201)

In creating the specifics for the dance *Mother Earth*, I first reread my notes, research and the stories I had originally collected for material to discover my subject. I also reconsidered how I could connect my ideas to my audience. Next, I saw that more research might be necessary. I asked myself, what do I want my audience to see in the specifics? What are they going to learn, realize, understand and above all recognize?

As the writer chooses each word carefully so will the choreographer choose each movement with discernment. The details are important for the whole structure to work. The choreographer is constructing or creating an impression, an insight or story and keeping in mind that each moment in movement will be a telling snapshot towards



understanding the whole piece. Each choreographer, as each writer, will have their unique voice and must stay true to it to present authentic work.

Choreography is only as good as its material and so the choreographer as the writer must draw on memories and experiences for the specifics to give the material a convincing feel. I drew on the fact that I am a mother and know love and sorrow for my 'Mother Earth' character. I have also witnessed people show utter disregard for our planet and I have felt helpless and frustrated about it. I see how people abuse the Earth, spewing their garbage and creating wastelands by deforestation and strip mining, which gave me descriptive specifics and emotions for 'The Orb'.

Specifics for choreography include the kind of body actions the choreographer chooses to convey her ideas. I considered ways in which the body can move, ways in which the use of time and energy are developed in body actions, and ways in which the body uses the space around itself. The educated choreographer experiments with the concepts of body awareness, the awareness of weight, the awareness of time and the awareness of space.

Choreographers who consider these elements in searching for specifics may greatly enhance their final product. Craft is important and Laban's movement elements are a good starting place to search for specifics for choreography. They will enable the choreographer to reference basic movement principles and then combine them with her own unique imagination and ideas. Choreographer A. M. Hawkins (1991) states, "Craft plays a significant role in choreographing, but without the germinal material that flows from the imaginative and intuitive process, the final product will lack a sense of authenticity" (p. 78).

For Mother Earth, the specifics and details I wanted to include had to show the Earth as living, loved, vulnerable and moving. Trying to ‘see’ and observe closely, I did more research and asked myself movement questions to elicit the specifics I needed to show the Earth (my prop, the ball), in movement. I asked myself, what does the Earth do? It revolves, rotates, travels in orbit, in a circular or oval path. These are quite obvious images but nonetheless, I thought could be very effective. Next, I thought, how could Mother Earth, manipulate the prop, gracefully, to help the audience suspend their disbelief? So through improvisation, practicing moving with the ball and continued ‘drafting’, and cutting out material that didn’t work, I settled on some clear specifics.

For ‘Mother Earth’ I decided the traveling and whole body movements, would focus on spinning, whirling, rotating and turning. For “The Orb’, I focused on machine like movements, symbolizing machinery cutting up and pounding the Earth. The prop ball (Earth) in this piece was smashed, thumped, bounced aggressively, and then finally spins totally out of control.

For ‘Mother Earth’ the body parts moving in isolation or together would be sustained and slow in tempo and I chose still or almost static poses, mimicking Grecian statuary which would fit the imagery of the Earth Mother by capturing something of the quality of the Goddess. For these images, I researched Greek and Roman mythology and looked for photographs from turn of the century modern dance in which dancers wore Grecian costumes. The transitions were also chosen to create a seamless and cohesive flow from one movement or image to the next because of the serious and somber subject matter and because our Earth revolves and rotates in a smooth manner.

Dynamics were an important specific I considered. The timing of each movement changes the feel of a piece as well as changing the energy, muscular force and rhythm used. The dynamics or energy for 'The Orb' was forceful and direct and employed hitting, striking and kicking. The dynamics or energy for 'Mother Earth', were controlled and sustained, showing her inner integrity and strength of character, she is literally holding up the world.

The music, another important specific for 'The Orb' was chosen after the piece was well on its way to completion. I had brainstormed verbs of destruction and fit them together to portray a short story of a person who uses all of our modern day machines but is not stopping to think about energy use or pollution. I chose the pounding beat of techno music to emphasize the aggression human kind employs towards the planet. In contrast I chose Barber's Adagio for Strings for 'Mother Earth', which was slow, measured and flowing but through the slow tempo I was allowed the time to emphasize the imagery I wanted to include. This music evokes a mood of somberness and reflection, which suited the message I was conveying.

Another important specific to make my characters plausible was to create the right costumes. For 'Mother Earth' I researched the type of garments worn by the early Greeks and tried to recreate the style of dress worn by the women. I wanted my Mother Earth to look like a Greek goddess. I specifically chose rich greens for the different robes and a green body stocking for the underlying costume to represent earthiness.

For 'The Orb', I used costume to create a character who would embody modern humanity. I looked at youth pop videos and copied some aspects of dress such as high heeled army boots, a short mini skirt, and sunglasses. I was portraying the 'oblivious'

every (wo)man who is not aware of environmental issues or is too caught up in their own existence to care.

The next part of my arts-based research will break down the choreography and explain specific movement choices. Of course an audience would not read these notes nor know what I was thinking for each specific. However, in recording these notes, I am also as researcher, noting the decisions being made, and what new ideas or movements emerge as I engage in the inquiry through choreographing each dance. New insights are discussed in the concluding section.

## **Choreographic Notes:**

### **The Orb**

#### **Music:**

**Plugged in Electronica**

**BT Rare and Remixed House Music**

**(upbeat, loud, fast paced music)**

This section illustrates the carefree life we all seem to lead. We accept and take for granted all of the technology and machines that make our lives so easy. But we don't often consider the price we will pay in terms of pollution and land fills full of materials that will not degrade.

- **(sounds of people talking)**
- **start by crouching beside Earth/ talking on phone**
- **specifically, lying on back, then sitting facing front, laughing and chatting on an imaginary phone**
  
- **as the music fades in, get up and party dance around the Earth**
- **specifically wave rt. arm, then both arms punching, then big arcs, then in front of Earth shake your booty**
  
- **next sit on the Earth, and make three big circular moves with your butt**
- **walk forward in the left diagonal until balanced on your head on the ball, circling hands**
- **walk back regaining sitting, then quickly get on your stomach and roll into the rt. diagonal, do three push ups with your feet on the ball, then roll back**
  
- **sit back on Earth, bouncing to music**
- **each bounce gets progressively bigger and more exuberant, swing arms and really get into the bouncing, register delight at bouncing to the audience, you are riding the Earth and literally on top of the world**
  
- **get up, go behind ball and bounce it with rt. hand 8X**
- **then while bouncing ball, jump with the rhythm 8X**
- **then make a big circle while dribbling until you come back to center**
- **one two three a larry 2X**

This section illustrates human kind as extracting resources from the planet, showing no mercy, greedily grabbing whatever they want. Not considering the harm they are causing.

- **then big knee/three small steps/big knee going forward alternating 4X**
- **then back same step 2X (holding Earth up high)**

- then holding Earth out in arms, spin/ rotate in big circles, about 5X
- then put Earth down, spin it on the spot and
- pound the Earth with rt. arm 4X, upper jab with left arm 4X, kick Earth rt. foot 4X, knee Earth with left leg 4X
  
- center body behind ball/ elbow, elbow, fist, fist, repeat 4X
- go tribal as in beating on a drum, really get carried away, and then do the monkey

This section illustrates how things are really getting out of control on the planet Earth, in terms of global warming, acid rain, etc. We are going to spin out of control if we keep on disregarding all the warning signs of our destruction.

- throw the Earth in the air, 5X, moving all around the stage
- put the Earth down, kick it really hard at the wall 3X
- pick up the Earth and stagger around randomly, almost falling, you are spinning out of control
- flop/sit down on the Earth and fall forward until you plop down on the floor/ the Earth rolls away, you've lost control of the planet.

For this piece, the specifics were chosen after examining and writing down lots of ideas that show how people abuse our planet. I had too many ideas and had to carefully choose the ones that would ultimately enable the audience to understand my message. I decided showing extreme aggression and violence in actions towards the Earth (ball) would clearly deliver the idea that human kind needs to stop hurting our Earth. I hoped that an audience would see my violent actions and understand the metaphor I was conveying. I ended the piece with the character sliding off the Earth, which illustrated symbolically our downward slide as a species. We are foolishly destroying our home. I was surprised how easily the ideas flowed one into the other and organically transitioned into a whole. The preplanning and brainstorming, researching and reading all come together and pay off when the choreographer actually gets down to work and is trying out the movement specifics. This initial work sets the choreographer up for success by providing lots of material to draw on.

## **Mother Earth**

**Barber: Adagio for Strings**

- **opening start in Atlas position, earth balanced on left side of back, crouching down, center stage**

I felt this image was a very important specific to start with because I wanted to show Mother Earth, literally, using her back, to hold up the planet. And as the Earth is very heavy, and she is tiring from all of the terrible things inflicted on her and the Earth by humanity, holding up the planet has become a very difficult task. I also had this image of peasant women carrying heavy loads, uncomplaining, as long as they can help their family and continue their existence.

The idea of the Earth, as a living being, is not new nor does it exist only in mythology. Some scientists believe man is a disease on the surface of the Earth, a bad skin condition. Perhaps the Earth through its so called 'natural' disasters', will get rid of the parasites, who are creating all of the havoc. (The Eleventh Hour, movie by Leonardo Di Caprio, 2007)

- **slowly rise, stretching up, holding Earth over head and then bend slightly back filling out the music**

Again, I endeavor to show the Earth as being held and balanced in the heavens in the arms of her mother.

- **next, holding Earth straight out from body, slowly rotate around 3X**

I am showing the Earth as orbiting on its axis in order to create day and night.

- **until facing front, balance earth on left hip and bring rt. arm around to hug it lovingly**

I am showing Mother Earth 's affection and love for her child.

- **next, again hold earth straight out from body and rotate around in big oval as in the universe**

Here I am showing the Earth as it rotates and travels in orbit around the Sun.

- **until you reach center back, place earth down gently and get down on knees**
- **hug the Earth placing first the rt. cheek on it then the left, rock it gently to and fro**

I am showing the deep caring for the planet, trying to invoke images of babies being nurtured.

- **rise up and place left knee on Earth, gesture with left arm, asking why, why have you let this happen, repeat with rt. arm**

I wanted to capture grief here and worry, fear, and sorrow.

- **bring both hands to face in weeping, then whole body down on Earth, left arm thrown back, rt. still covering face**

Complete grief.

- **both arms go up over your head in supplication to the Gods/ asking for help**
- **frustration/anger/grief with wringing fists clenched**

The Earth Mother is saying, “This is not fair, I need respect and to be treated better.”

- **swiftly pick up Earth and hold it almost behind to the rt. side**

I am expressing protection, you can no longer have the Earth if you are going to mistreat her.

- **rotate to left in diagonal, hold Earth up to the universe, how beautiful it has been in the past, bend sideways, foot in gesture**
- **turn straight across to rt. balance Earth on rt. shoulder, like a Greek statue**

Here I have the Earth, remembering her past glorious beauty and how she used to be revered and cared for.

- **rotate to center, hold Earth straight up slightly to left diagonal, bend back**
- **place earth on head and slowly fold down, until lying on back**
- **put legs around earth in birthing position**
- **slowly raise the ball until it is balanced on feet, arms parallel to legs**

Here I show Mother Earth balancing the planet but also metaphorically show how the process of birth and rebirth must continue or we will all die. Polluting our planet is killing everything and reproduction of plants and animals may fail.

- **lower earth back to arms and slowly sit up and hug Earth then simultaneously turn/twist body to left while rising**
- **bring left arm around in arc**

I transition from the floor position to stand and then show the Mother in a gesture of shielding and protection.

- **roll Earth in diagonal to rt. corner, then back**



I roll the ball in the diagonal to show that continued movement for life is necessary and that we must keep the ball rolling literally to ensure life continues.

- **walk around earth**
- **pick up earth and in a low plie` rock back and forth**

I circle the Earth and then rock my child in love and affection, reiterating my caring.

- **sit on Earth/ rt. side, caress**
- **lay on back on Earth**
- **again sit on side, face back**

I wanted to show how the Mother and the Earth have a symbiotic relationship, supporting one another. People used to also have this symbiotic relationship, where they would care for the Earth in ways like leaving a field fallow or cleaning up refuse in responsible ways.

- **rising and face front placing Earth on left shoulder (make sure you are center back)**

Back to the beginning, (ABA form) a movement that will remind the audience of the start of the piece and indicate perhaps the end but reiterate the Mother as carrying the planet.

- **slowly extend rt. arm**
- **you are beginning to walk the tightrope, slowly extend the rt. foot, testing the rope**
- **balancing is hard work, put Earth overhead and then take another step**

Here I am literally walking a tightrope, trying to create balance for the planet.

- **again step, then wavering and almost losing your balance turn and face rt.**
- **quickly face back and then left**
- **this is an extremely unstable situation/ register fear and uncertainty**
- **hold the Earth straight up while shaking**
- **quickly grab the Earth and hold it tight, then place the Earth on my back as in the opening, hold until music ends**

I chose to make this part quite literal and stayed in character and made it serious. Mother Earth is scared, terrified of dropping the Earth, her child. The Mother continues to hold up the Earth, and the audience is left with the question, for how long can she continue to be strong and support the Earth in her weakened condition. The continued existence of life as we know it on our planet is in jeopardy. Will humanity stop, make changes and start behaving in responsible ways?

## **I Create A Design**

In addition to discovering a subject, sensing an audience, and searching for specifics, the creative artist will explore and develop a design to frame her artwork. To add to the understanding of your idea, the idea is set in a structure. This organized framework in choreography can take on many forms but will nevertheless aid the audience in relating to the work. “The creative process takes place inside a specific aesthetic field where the forms of the past are constantly recreated and recast... We need to know what others have done and how they have done it” (Abbs, 1996, p. 205).

Choreographers seem to build on the forms and designs that they have observed or learned, either consciously or unconsciously. H'Doubler (1940) further expands our understanding of choreographic design by discussing how it is developed:

The final dance, as art form, is an aggregate of elements. Its development consists of several stages, each with its particular technique. There is the technique of selecting and organizing the psychological elements into substance and content, and the technique of selecting, organizing and executing the motor element. All become bound together and made as one by the overflow of rhythm into all phases. (p. 146)

Selection and organization of the specifics in a clear form and order are essential for the audience to understand the work. A recognizable and clear beginning, middle and end aid in this understanding. In ‘The Orb’, the piece begins with the sound of voices, people talking. We see a character lounging on the Earth as if it is a footstool, talking on the phone as a teenager would, stretching over and on the ball. This beginning section, then transitions into increasingly bigger and more violent actions and builds the dramatic tension in the mid section. The audience is led in their observations of the character who is crazily pounding and kicking the Earth, to ponder and question, what is she doing, why

is she becoming so violent, is there a connection to something I know already? A tension, is building, something is at stake and then the burst of the climax and a feeling of conclusion or resolution. I asked myself, “Will the audience see the parallel that has been drawn between the character and humanity through the design?” “Will they understand the metaphor of the character embodying and reflecting themselves in the patterns?”

For the work, ‘Mother Earth’, I chose a clear image of the Mother holding the Earth on her back for the beginning as my hook. So the audience might remember or be reminded of Atlas or some Grecian Goddess and wonder what was coming next. The design of the beginning of this piece develops the theme of the ever in motion, rotating planet but also establishes movement patterns that reoccur throughout the dance such as the Mother reflectively posing in her Earthly splendor. The middle of this dance continues to develop the theme of the Earth Mother as an entity, balancing and rotating as she holds her planet (child), but also allows the Mother to remember her past glories, the birth of her child and then to ponder her future. The end of the piece has a climactic rise of action, where the audience is engaged in the spectacle of the tired and beleaguered Mother trying to keep her balance on the metaphorical rope of life for our planet. Will she fall? The end of the piece says no but the future is hanging in the balance. The choreographer hopes this question is left on the minds of the audience by the impact of viewing the piece. The tension of the work is in the question of that balance.

It is important that the final images in choreography contain some kind of statement and tie in with the premise. For example, at the end of the dance, ‘The Orb’, I have my character, which is symbolizing all of humanity, fall off the Earth, which was spinning out of control. I hope my audience asks themselves, “Will she be able to get

back up again?” At the conclusion of ‘Mother Earth’, I show the mother walking a tightrope, trying to create balance for the planet. I hope the audience wonders “Will she fall?” The audience is left to ponder and ask themselves questions, deliberately embedded in the final movements. Through strategic planning of the design’s beginning, middle and end sections the choreographer can take the audience on a journey shaping their perceptions and helping them receive and understand the message the choreographer intended.

The specifics of choreographic design can be seen in the floor pattern, levels, and orientations in space and on the stage. Drawing the floor pattern for ‘The Orb’, the design starts in the center of the stage but then travels in the diagonals and forward and back. Up to then, the design of the floor pattern has been very linear until it seems to break down from the violence and rough actions and as the earth spins out of control the floor pattern becomes random, the dancer (myself) crashing around as if she is lost and spinning out of control with the planet.

For ‘Mother Earth’, my dancer (again myself) starts slightly left of mid center stage, for dramatic effect, and then rotates turning on the spot and then makes a large circular/oval around the stage until coming to the back of the center stage echoing the Earth revolving around the sun. This central location is then used for several movements until the action is taken forward left and forward right and back to left of center. The choreography then moves in a diagonal from center to the right corner and back to center and then to far back center. Finally, the choreography moves from far back center, forward and ends slightly forward of center. I consciously tried to use the whole

stage space when planning my design. I wanted to engage the audience and hoped they would identify my rotating and revolving as actions the Earth takes as it travels in space.

Movement in choreography can take place on many levels as well as at mid level, where the performer is standing erect on the floor. This gives the piece more variety. I start 'Mother Earth' in a low position and rise to middle level. I raise the ball and dancer up into high space several times, balancing the ball on my shoulder and palms. I kneel on the floor and hug the ball in low space. I also give birth lying flat on the floor in low space. I use the mid space strategically to roll the ball, sit on the ball, lie on ball and end with the dancer moving down again from mid space to low space.

For 'The Orb', various levels were utilized. The ball, as a prop, was quite interesting in that the dancer could add to the mid level by lying on the ball, rolling on it and being underneath it while standing. I utilized high space by throwing the prop ball up in the air and jumping with the violent motions.

To summarize my creating a design, H'Doubler (1940) reiterates its importance and how it contributes to the audience experiencing and viewing a satisfying performance. Design is more than the time line, levels and patterns created by the choreographer but is also the unseen or invisible connections that have been designed which link all of the choreographic elements together to produce a unified and organized work of art:

The delight in proportion, balance, and rhythmic activity is coexistent with human behavior; therefore a dance, as a constructed form, can be a means of both satisfying and experiencing these pleasures. Structural phases of form are sensed as well as understood. They are organic and motor, and are, therefore, emotional because of the feelings of balance and unbalanced tensions. Structure in this sense is an organization of forces. Because of these factors, structure has a direct and emotional appeal and therefore adds to clearness of expression and communication. (p. 145)

## Conclusion

In the choreography of 'The Orb' and 'Mother Earth' I focused on using the four aspects of the creative writing model and found a close fit of process. Utilizing this model to aid my process of choreography was beneficial in that by focusing on each element I became more conscious of my choreographic process. As I applied the four elements of the creative writing model to the choreographic process, my process became clearer and provided a way to examine what I was doing. Focusing on the elements was beneficial in that they engendered questions which led to changes and improvements in defining my subject, choosing the details that would matter and in designing or structuring the work so an audience would understand it. For example, while reexamining the four elements in reference to my two pieces of choreography, I asked myself such questions as, am I sticking to my premise? Does the work have specifics that will move an audience? Are they clear? Is the design too elaborate or too understated? Will an audience understand and be able to identify my overall meaning? I have learned through my performative inquiry that in utilizing the writer's creative process for choreography, there are clear applications for understanding and engaging in the choreographic process; this model would be of benefit for educators and students undertaking a performative inquiry through choreographic exploration and/ or in the creation of a performance of "big ideas" in movement.

The choreographic process is unique in its exploration of space and time but never the less can be seen to parallel the elements of the writing process. I learned through my performative inquiry that the four elements are guidelines, which the choreographic artist can use to reflect on and improve her creative process. For example, when I was

immersed in the choreographic process, I did not systematically stop and examine each element during the creation of the movement, rather while I crafted each phrase and section, I was caught up in the moment of improvising and drafting my movement ideas as they flowed intuitively. The knowledge of the writing process model was nonetheless in the back of my mind operating with its subtle influence. The writing process model provided a framework to refer to as progress with the choreography occurred thereby informing me of areas of my work that needed to be changed.

My choreography was informed by performative inquiry in that it drew my attention to my learning as I was doing. Through performative inquiry I was able to examine the meaning my body had revealed. An example is the creation of the wild, out of control spinning and careening movement phrases in the latter part of 'The Orb.' I had started working on these movement phrases by simply holding the Earth ball and spinning around freely. As I spun around the movement phrases evolved and changed as I imagined a drunkard spinning out of control, staggering and almost dropping the ball. I then had the epiphany of the meaning of this symbolism correlating it to humanity spinning out of control.

Another example of performative inquiry informing my work was when I created the imagery of Mother Earth giving birth. I was working on the design and I thought I needed to incorporate more levels. I held the ball up high and then melted down and lay on the floor stretched out straight. I put the ball between my legs as I'd seen on an exercise video and immediately thought of giving birth. This recognition or understanding realized through movement became a clear image to use for reinforcing the mother concept.

A last example of how my final choreography was informed by performative inquiry is that as I rehearsed each piece, thinking I was finished and the choreography was set I would discover parts I wanted to change. By performing and doing the pieces again and again, within a performative framework of inquiry and reflection, more ideas would occur to me. For example, I ended up adding the image of the person falling off the ball at the end of 'The Orb' because while I was rehearsing I was continually slipping while sitting on the ball and almost tumbled off. Then it occurred to me, as I fought to regain my balance, the impact this image would make for the final movement of 'The Orb.'

It was through engaging in this performative inquiry that I was able to confidently confirm from my personal experience that there is a strong resonance between Mamchur's (2004) creative writing model and the choreographic process. In addition, the performative inquiry allowed me to identify the usefulness and applicability of the four elements of the creative writing process to choreography and to create meaningful work. By creating dance works while employing key concepts of the writing model, I was able to confirm the feasibility of my initial question of whether the writing process model could be applied to choreography.

Insightful learning emerged through this performative inquiry that informed me not only about the application of the writing model to choreography but also about the subject of ecology as I employed the four elements of the writing process as a model for my choreographic process. Most importantly, this learning may provide an example of the possibilities inherent in using the creative writing model as a method of choreography with or aided by performative inquiry to challenge educators, choreographers or students



to make new discoveries of their own about subjects or issues that are relevant and meaningful to them. Performative inquiry may lead the inquiring artist to “those moments of learning (elusive and desired) that emerge through performance to inform, disturb, question, or illuminate actions, relationships and /or issues that emerge, trouble, engage, or challenge participants...” (Fels, 2004, p. 82).

Ultimately, artistic creation remains a mystery, despite our having elements and processes to examine, which help us to develop our creativity. How we transform our ideas, thoughts, experiences and inspiration into something symbolic that is art, and that conveys meaning to others, is an elusive venture; deliberately seeking to successfully achieve what we might call creativity is an illusive endeavor. Yet, artistic creation is the conduit to a shared experience, and in some way, provides a link, unites the artist’s inner ideas, makes them apparent, yet leaves space for individual response and interpretation. The viewer, reader or listener experiences something new but familiar in the work. Choreography is my personal choice of artistic expression and is a means to tell my stories. The creative writing model and performative inquiry have assisted me in opening new doors for my practice, expression, personal understanding and enjoyment of creating dance works.

## **Final Summary**

There are many ways to reach an artistic destination. In the subject of the arts, creative artists seem to find their own way. There is no one set formula. However, artistic processes exist and the artist of any discipline realizes that there is much to learn from those who have come before and demonstrated a mastery of their craft. Student artists

benefit from learning a solid body of knowledge and skill on which their own creativity can be nourished and emerge.

After examining the literature on the processes of writers and choreographers, it is apparent that many writers and choreographers employ the four elements of the creative writing model, as outlined by Murray (1968), (1990) and further defined by Mamchur (2004) which are discovering a subject, sensing an audience, searching for specifics and creating a design. Through archival research I discovered a strong resonance to exist between the processes of the two art forms. The presence of the four elements of the writing process as spoken of by choreographers suggests that this model is useful in describing and analyzing the process of art making in the area of choreography.

In addition, using performative inquiry as a methodology allowed me to come to a deeper understanding and recognition of the viability of choreography as incorporating the four steps or stages comparable to those of writing. Performative inquiry afforded insightful learning to emerge not only about the application of the writing model to choreography but also about the subject of ecology as I employed the four elements of the writing process as a model for my choreographic process. The connections and parallels I uncovered and discovered reiterated the recognition that art making processes may aid, support and guide artists in their art making and help them find starting places for creativity. Artistic processes may also point to new directions and emphasize important elements for inclusion in an artistic endeavor. The writing process as identified by Murray (1968), (1990) and further defined by Mamchur (2004) stresses the importance of discovering a subject that has meaning for the artist, while developing the

idea with clear specifics and a well thought out design so an audience is moved and understands the idea as clearly as possible.

Mamchur's (2004) creative writing model provides the opportunity to organize, discover and produce work for both writing and choreography. Process is present in the creation of works of art, even if it is not consciously employed or acknowledged. But a conscious process can be valuable in allowing the artist to reflect and learn from each creative experience. This reflection may lead to employing deeper and more complex insights into succeeding work. Refining one's method in the creative process is part of the maturing artists building towards achieving the most they can attain in their medium.

The writer's and choreographer's processes teach ways to communicate and convey the individual self. Self expression leads to self awareness and self understanding, both of which promote positive mental, emotional and physical health. When we start school, children are encouraged to express themselves with art making in one form or another. Educators realize it is important to address all aspects of the developing child. Young students sing and dance, draw and paint and play with clay and sand. Each child is learning many things from these experimentations. The child is learning to make choices, depict the world, and show others who she is before she learns how to read or write. The arts and particularly movement and choreography provide chances for young children to discover, explore and problem solve alone and with others in nonverbal ways. Movement builds and develops important mental and emotional skills. Through creating choreography we have the particular opportunity to experiment with our bodies and unite and understand our whole selves.

Continuing to incorporate and emphasize movement and the physical body to tell a child's personal story as children learn to read and write, may aid and strengthen both forms of expression in their growth. Teaching a similar process for both forms of expression simultaneously may further illuminate and reinforce the positive development of writing and choreographic skills.

The choreographic and performative arts may provide the means with which to shape and express our understandings and ideas in new ways. Dee Dickinson states, "The Arts are languages that all people speak that cut across racial, cultural, social, educational, and economic barriers and enhance cultural appreciation and awareness" (p. 4). Choreography is a unique and special language. There are no words, nor is there a literal message in the language of dance... The words that dance "speaks" are movement phrases expressive of the choreographer's design" (Ellfeldt, 1967, p .5). Exploring choreography as a way to erase barriers of all kinds, and solve problems by 'showing' solutions artfully with our students may be achieved by fostering and teaching choreography in our educational systems.

To reiterate the usefulness of the creative writing process as a choreographic process, this model could provide the inspiration and structure for developing choreographic work in many educational settings. The experiences we have as children in the school system shape us and help determine the kinds of people we become, the kinds of jobs we get as adults and how we view the world and if we feel positive about it. Educating an individual and a society in the choreographic arts along side learning to express oneself with writing could be powerful ways to discover and determine who we want to be. Reflecting on the state of our physical being, understanding our bodies and

learning to appreciate who we are and who we can be may be made possible by employing a choreographic process for creation and provide a means to explore these possibilities. To conclude, I reflect on the important words of movement educator H'Doubler (1940):

Of all the art forms, dance is the most generally available, since everyone finds the instrument needed for this purpose in his own body. Anyone who understands how can create his own dance, or find meaning in forms that have been created by others, and so satisfy, to some extent, his latent desire to experience and manifest what is pleasing to him in content and form ... One of the greatest values of any art is its power to carry the individual beyond himself into a broader world of imaginative experience and understanding ... Dance not only satisfies and deepens the aesthetic sense by its own forms, but also gives insight into the fundamental elements common to all the arts. It carries the student beyond the limits of one art into the wider realm of all art and makes him a citizen of its world of beauty and meaning. (pp. 164-165)

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