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INTIMATE ENCOUNTERS: STAGING INTIMACY AND SENSUALITY

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts in Theatre Pedagogy at Virginia Commonwealth University.

by

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Abstract

INTIMATE ENCOUNTERS; STAGING INTIMACY AND SENSUALITY

By Tonia Sina Campanella, MFA

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts in Theatre Pedagogy at Virginia Commonwealth University.

Virginia Commonwealth University, Master of Fine Arts in Theatre Pedagogy

Major Director: David S. Leong
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This text is a partial record of the conception and development of *Reflections of Red in a Mirror of Desire* that opened on February 20th 2006 for a three day run ending on February 22nd. The majority of the text is focused on the events and research that provided the concept for the show. Some of the research includes influential choreographers and companies such as Pina Bausch, Graziela Daniele, Moses Pendleton, Pilobolus, Momix, Julie Taymor, and Merce Cunningham. Included in the analysis of this event are the experiences and lessons that came about during the process of directing *Reflections of Red in a Mirror of desire*. The result of this evaluation is the creation of an approach to choreographing and directing sexual or intimate scenes for

the stage. Further reflections on directing, choreographing, collaboration, creative process, and aesthetics serve as the culmination of lessons inherent in both the creation of the production and the author's three years of study at the Virginia Commonwealth University Theatre Pedagogy Program with an emphasis in Movement and Choreography.

Introduction

This thesis outlines my attempt to develop acting techniques to help with the safety and comfort levels of everyone involved in performing sexual situations for the stage. These techniques include contact improvisational exercises and open discussions about sexuality. There is often a problem with staging scenes that contain sexual material. Many times people have difficulty with issues of sexuality. This is even truer on stage.

Many actors and directors come across the stressful or embarrassing situation of having to tackle a love scene that may involve heightened intimate contact. In my own experiences, there are many times that a director, often young and inexperienced, does not know how to handle the scene with care. In fact, I have been in situations in which the director let the actors control the scene, other situations in which the director blocked a very intimate situation in front of the entire cast, and even more situations in which directors completely avoided any kind of open communication about a scene's sexual content. All of these situations led to actors' discomfort and misunderstandings. I believe that this happens more often than it should, especially in university theatre.

There are many emotions that are involved in intimacy, even if it is staged. Sexual tension between two characters can easily become blurred with sexual tension

between actors. This can be a problem when the actors are unable to recognize the difference between the two worlds. This in turn can lead to an awkward, unhealthy, or potentially dangerous situation for the actors, the rest of the ensemble, and even the entire show.

As a movement coach, it is my opinion that sex and love scenes on stage should be meticulously choreographed using attention to the safety of the actors. Ideally, each move should be specifically blocked, directed and rehearsed by a choreographer or director with prior training in such situations. This would ensure that there is an outside control of the scene, so that the actors have the ability to feel safer and more comfortable with each other. I also believe that there is a certain aesthetic that many people do not understand about staging intimacy. The most interesting part of sexual scenes is not the act itself, but rather the energy—physical, emotional, spiritual, mental – that exists between the actors. In most cases this often translates as a “less is more” guideline for choreography. It is important to realize that there is a difference between sexuality and sensuality, and that sensuality is the more interesting of the two.

This thesis is a study of the experiences I have had as a movement coach in situations of both sex and violence. The purpose of a Fight Director is to teach the techniques needed for fight sequences in a safe manner and to protect the actors from getting hurt. Likewise, if a movement coach is dealing with an intimate scene, the same rules of safety and protection should apply. Scenes with sex and intimate contact may not seem as physically dangerous as fight scenes, and yet, there are physical as well as emotional hazards.

I hope to challenge other directors to think about these issues when choreographing scenes containing intimacy. Most of all, I want the actors with whom I work in the future to have more freedom and confidence expressing sexual tension onstage. Finally, I want all actors to feel safe working with me on shows of which I am a part.

As part of this thesis, I have written and directed a performance using these techniques with a group of actors. This project consisted of several different pieces written by myself and approved by David S. Leong, the Chair of the Theatre Department at Virginia Commonwealth University, and chair of my thesis committee. All scenes were choreographed either to music or to silence. The theme of every scene was dealing with obstacles in love or sex. My goal with this performance was to create an ensemble that became comfortable with each other, and to create a new piece of art that challenged my movement, coaching and directing skills. This thesis will describe the process of rehearsing the show, the final product, and lessons learned from the process.

CHAPTER 1: The Origins of My Interest

The following is a description of my experiences at Virginia Commonwealth University that led me to write this thesis. All of the events took place within my first two years of graduate school. Each event involves choreography of sexual or intimate situations from a variety of venues. *Night and Day* was performed at the Science Museum of Richmond. *Picasso at the Lapin Agile* and *Metamorphoses* took place on the VCU Mainstage. *Held* and *Fixed* were graduate student directed projects that were performed at the Newdick Theatre in Shafer Street Playhouse.

NIGHT AND DAY

I first began this process in my second semester of graduate school at VCU when I had been working mainly on stage combat choreography and contemporary violence. I was cast in Andrew Hamm's thesis performance of Joe Jackson's *Night and Day*, which was a music concert with theatrical elements. Matthew Ellis was the movement coach and choreographer for the show. He was responsible for choreographing the acting scenes that took place during the songs. One of the songs called for a choreographed lap dance to be performed in the background while another girl was singing. Julia, the girl giving the lap dance, was an eighteen-year-old who had

never seen or performed a lap dance. Matthew was uncomfortable with explaining it her. I offered my services, and Andrew and Matthew allowed me to step in to help.

Julia looked terrified when we began the process, so I told her that I would not make her do anything that I would not do first. She seemed to relax after that. I began with choreographing Julia's walk. She was young, and clearly uncomfortable with her body and sexuality. I explained that she needed to use her hips in the walk. I told her to focus on two parts of her body: her hips and her eyes. She was to make eye contact as much as possible and move her hips constantly in a fluid rhythm. As we worked on her walk and posture, I looked around and felt this amazing sense of power and confidence, two things I had been lacking since my arrival at VCU. Not only did the men feel uncomfortable teaching a young girl about taking control of her sexuality, but also it would have been a bit inappropriate. In that same light, it could have been detrimental if either of them had to touch her in the process. It would have made this girl uncomfortable and that would have been the last thing that would help in this particular situation. Both of the men were in their third years of graduate school. They both had teaching and coaching experience, but this was one thing that made them uncomfortable. I was completely in my element. I could show her exactly what I wanted, I could take her place, I could touch her and the man receiving the lap dance without worry of crossing any lines of an inappropriate nature. The lap dance turned out to be quite natural looking, and she felt very comfortable with the number. She trusted me, and it helped for her to watch me do everything before I made her do it.

This situation felt like second nature to me, and immediately I felt that there was more to be explored in this area.

PICASSO AT THE LAPIN AGILE

My next run in with this topic was in the following semester. I was performing in *Picasso at the Lapin Agile* as the character of Suzanne. In this play, there was a very intimate scene between Suzanne and Picasso. At first, I was quite uncomfortable with the actor playing Picasso. The director tried to block it a couple of times in rehearsal, but the scene kept changing, and nobody was content with the results. There was no chemistry between the two of us. During tech week, the scene was still unnatural and constantly changing. A couple of days before we opened, I asked the director what we could do to make this scene better. He told us to make the scene really steamy. He said he wanted the audience to squirm in their seats. He did not say to us, "Lets figure this out together." By this point in the process, he was involved with the tech of the show, and there was not time to stop and rehearse the scene.

So, I decided to take matters into my own hands. After all, I was the movement coach for the play. Jeff Cole, the actor playing Picasso, and I rehearsed this scene alone. This was extremely dangerous to do, and if I could go back and do this again I would have had an assistant director help us. However, the scene turned out to be much more natural than anyone had expected, partly because it was genuine. It is dangerous to let two actors figure out a love scene alone, because suddenly it is not acting. This can cause all kinds of problems and tensions. We were not in a safe environment, and

unfortunately this situation is not all that uncommon. The emotions attached to a scene like this are very strong and can easily spin out of control. Our emotions trickled off stage and into our personal lives. I feel very strongly now that this can and should be avoided.

In my opinion, no matter how mature the actors are, this situation can be dangerous. However it is not about blame, it is about the work. I later realized our work was affected by miscommunication and lack of attention to the emotional safety of the actors. Even if the actors are immature, that is all the more reason to address the issue with them and keep an open dialogue about the emotions involved. If this scene had contained even younger actors, it still would have needed to be dealt with, not avoided. This is not to say that I am totally blameless for this situation. I feel that I should have communicated better with my director and not have allowed myself to be placed in a compromising situation. I made sure to remember this situation for future reference with my own actors. This event was one of the strongest experiences that pushed me to writing this thesis.

HELD

The next choreographic job in which I was involved which included something of a sexual nature was for a student-written show called *Held*. The movement coach did not want to choreograph a strip tease. The actress in the scene was a nineteen-year-old girl who was very uncomfortable developing her own choreography. The director asked me to come in and help her with what she had already created herself. As I was

watching, I realized that the audience would instantly be uncomfortable because she was not comfortable.

She had choreographed herself to start the scene in a bra and panties. Then she began to seductively dance and place herself in suggestive poses. I instantly knew why this wasn't working. First, there was no build. It is very similar to the rules of a duel. The action has to build and form an arc. If she is already undressed, there is no anticipation and she has nowhere to go. Secondly, the scene looked gratuitous. It was sex for no reason. It made me uncomfortable because the sole purpose seemed to be shock value.

The first thing I changed was the choice to start practically naked. I told her to start the scene dressed and slowly take the straps of the dress off of her shoulders so that she ends up in a bra with the dress down at her waist. This allowed the actress to be much more comfortable, therefore making the audience more comfortable. The audience's experience is an essential aspect of choreographing successful sexual situations. If the goal is to make the audience uncomfortable, then choreograph something to make the audience uncomfortable. However if the goal is to arouse them, then one must consider that a group of people watching explicitly sexual choreography may not be comfortable for them. Less can be much more. It is charged sexual energy that interests the audience, not just sexual contact. In the end, Elaine felt much better about the choreography and mentioned that she felt more confident about having her relatives watch her performance.

METAMORPHOSES

My next project was extremely dissatisfying while at the same time immensely informative. I assisted Jonathan Becker with fights in *Metamorphoses*. I saw this as the perfect opportunity to test my developing specialty, since the show had so much sexual content and Jonathan had no interest in dealing with sexual matters on the stage. I was given the scene between Myrrah and her father, Cynarus. I was assigned to choreograph the heightened sexual situations. The scene involved a romantic relationship between a girl and her father. Myrrah, by the curse of Aphrodite, falls in love with Cynarus. She and her maid trick him by blindfolding him and allowing Myrrah to come to his bedroom. They have sex for three nights, and on the third night, he demands to see her face. He removes his blindfold and sees her. Immediately, he tries to kill her; changes his mind; and instead, runs away in shame.

Instantly I knew that this scene would have to be approached with care because it involved incest. It had to be handled delicately or it could turn out to be disgusting to the audience. I immediately brought my questions to the director. He told me he wanted the final picture of the blindfold removal to be simultaneous to Myrrah performing oral sex on her father. I expressed that oral sex is not going to tell the story of her love for her father.

As is the case many times, the director rejected all of my suggestions for the scene. He wanted it to be disturbing and realistic. As a technician I had no choice but to choreograph the scene as he wanted. As an artist, I had several problems with his approach. First of all, if her emotions toward her father were only lust, she would want

to pleasure herself more than give him pleasure. I feel that oral sex was a sexist choice in that situation. Secondly, I felt the director was not thinking about the audience. I believe that this scene should have been arousing but beautiful. Instead, as I was sitting in the theatre opening night listening to the audience giggling uncomfortably and making disgusted comments, I was filled with embarrassment and anger. The scene had such potential to be the most moving of all the scenes, and this director chose not to portray the beauty in it. I also realized that I was not working with a collaborator; he did not want to hear my opinion. This was an experience that I will never forget.

When he presented the choreography ideas to the actors, they were completely uncomfortable with his choices. After all, he was asking a nineteen-year-old girl to simulate the act of masturbation and climax, realistic sex, and finally oral sex with a twenty-two-year old. When I choreographed the scene, I wanted to give them a sense of comfort, but the director did not work with them privately to ensure they were comfortable. I understand that he felt he was directing as he would in professional theatre, but even in that environment, I see nothing wrong with making sure the actors are comfortable with an intimate scene. Since this was university theatre, it should have been a learning process. Instead I feel that the director was careless with the safety of his actors.

At one point, the director asked the couple to kiss. He wanted them to start slowly and become more aggressive, leading them into sex. The actors tried to do what he said, but he could not verbalize what he wanted. I asked him if I could work with them, and he surprisingly turned the scene over to me. I knew that both of these actors

had been familiarized with David Leong's "Water Meets Water" exercise and decided to use this language when relating to them.

"Water Meets Water" is one of many contact improvisation exercises invented by David Leong. He created them for the purpose of choreographing scenes that contain intense physical contact or heightened emotional content. This exercise allows the actors to use real physical resistance leading to more honest emotional commitment. "Water Meets Water" uses the language of intensity levels 1 through 10. Level one requires almost no resistance and level 10 is complete and full emotional and physical resistance.

When choreographing the kiss with the two actors from *Metamorphoses*, I told them to start the kiss at intensity level 1, then after a couple of seconds go to 3 then quickly to 5, which led them into a positioning shift and higher intensity levels. Having learned "Water Meets Water," they completely understood this language. From this experience, I realized that choreographing violence had a definite connection to intimacy. It was an exciting realization. I could see the actors relax because they were no longer under the pressure of controlling the kiss by themselves. Neither one wanted to be the aggressor; so having an outside party directing every move was easier for them. Applying David Leong's intensity levels to intimate scenes has become one of my techniques.

As frustrating as this project was for me, it gave me many great insights on my theories. Working on *Metamorphoses* was a step-by-step guide on what I never want to do when I direct and coach actors. Bad experiences are sometimes more useful than

good ones, so I appreciate the time I spent on *Metamorphoses*. This assignment provided me with tangible proof that some of my theories are legitimate. There is a major difference between sexuality and sensuality; intimate choreography is closely linked to violent choreography; and David Leong's "Water Meets Water" exercise can be tapered for different purposes. I also learned that as a movement coach and choreographer I might not be given certain design rights when it comes to the aesthetic for the piece on which I am working. As David Leong told me, the director's decision is final, and even if I disagree, it is my job to make the director content with the product. Sometimes this is challenging, but it is part of the business.

FIXED

Another experience that taught me a great lesson was choreographing another student-written piece called *Fixed*. The directors asked me to help with a scene that involved a man going to see his sex-crazed psychiatrist. During their session, the psychiatrist came on to him several times. She unzipped his pants, which ended up around his ankles. The writers indicated that she should take his shirt as well. I asked the directors if the main intent of the scene was to arouse the audience or make them laugh. They said that they wanted it to be sexy. I recommended that they discard the shirt and pants removal from the scene. Again, less is more. Besides, if a man is standing with his pants around his ankles, it is going to be comedic. Instead, I positioned her behind him and had her slowly unbutton his shirt, but not all the way. She never touched his skin. Then she unbuckled his belt, slid it off, and hung it around

her neck. It was much subtler than what they had, and I thought it was quite sexy.

They agreed.

This experience reinforced my previous theory that the subtle suggestion of sex is more effective than showing as much as possible. I also came to the conclusion that subtlety was something quite different when applied to intimate versus violent scenes. When choreographing violence, I have found that the audience seems to want to see as much gore and pain as possible. They want to see blood and realistic fighting (this is more the case with motion pictures than with theatre). With sex, the more that is shown, the more uncomfortable the audience seems to feel. I find this interesting and something that not all directors understand.

By this time I was being asked to choreograph sexual scenes for more and more students. I made the decision that the techniques I developed during this process were going to be part of a life-long approach to acting and choreography. I began to think of ways to test my theories and apply it to a workshop or classroom situation. Each of these experiences in which I was asked to choreograph sexual or erotic movement contributed to my decision for developing my own skills in this area. Every one of the previous situations brought my attention to potential dangers and also helped prepare me for the emotional and physical risks involved in directing such scenes. I was able to experience the scenes from an actor's perspective as well as a choreographer's, which was extremely informative when it came to developing the techniques.

CHAPTER 2: Lincoln Center Theatre Research

Before writing my own play, my thesis advisor, David S. Leong suggested I research some of the world's most renowned theatre practitioners that excel in staging intimate love scenes. As an independent study, I traveled to New York City to conduct research at the Lincoln Center Theater Library. I was assigned seven choreographers, companies and directors to study: Matthew Bourne, Momix/Moses Pendleton, Graciela Daniele, Julie Taymor, Pilobolus, Pina Bausch, and Merce Cunningham. I used the video library to watch as many recordings as I possible. Watching all of these pieces was extremely helpful and gave me a lot of ideas that influenced the writing of my play.

MATTHEW BOURNE

Swan Lake was the first video that I watched at the Lincoln Center Library. Knowing that Matthew Bourne is primarily a dance choreographer, I was expecting to see some form of a ballet. *Swan Lake* was much more than that. There were balletic dance numbers throughout, but it was really more of a theatrical piece choreographed to music. It moved like a play without words. It reminded me of the projects we choreographed to music in my second year of the movement program.

There was a dance with one of the guests at a ball that I found extremely sexual but not overdone. One of the women had a short black dress on and was thrown around

to several different male dance partners. This was sexual in itself, but at a couple of points some of the men raised her skirt just enough for the audience to see the top of her thigh highs and garter straps. The lifting was almost treated as if it wasn't really meant to happen, which made it even sexier. If they had simply lifted her skirt, the excitement would not have been present, but Matthew Bourne created this forbidden quality to the action that made it much more scandalous. This is the type of choreography that interests me.

The second piece I was able to watch was called *Narcissistic Love Story*. This was a piece choreographed by Matthew Bourne that was more like a one act to music. The plot is a little muddled for me because I was short on time and needed to fast forward to the erotic scenes. A woman was trying to throw a birthday party for a man who was sleeping upstairs. He was mostly naked and writhing in bed, and then he fantasizes about another man who dances with him at a hotel lobby. This seemed a bit awkward as opposed to the males dancing in *Swan Lake* because there was less invested in the characters. There was a brief moment of a man dancing against a door that inspired an image that I wanted to pursue. The image was of two people trying to communicate through a piece of glass. I decided to keep this image as a reference when I was ready to write my play.

Matthew Bourne's choreography gave me a wonderful insight into the options I had for my own project. It opened up many possibilities for my work. For example, I realized one aspect of the type of sexual content that really moves me. It is not necessarily the outlandish naked orgy type of choreography that I want to see, but more

the type that is slowly revealed. The building of status in the scene is important to me. For example, every moment of physical sexual contact must be earned, and thus should not be rushed. This is the type of choreography that supports my artistic aesthetic.

MOMIX/MOSES PENDLETON

The first film in this group that I watched was called *Pictures at an Exhibition*. This film follows the story of a man walking through an art gallery looking at pictures, which become different abstract and stylized situations. Each situation has sexual undertones without being extremely overbearing. Some of the images used a man watching a woman in a window, a naked woman under an umbrella and a slightly transparent white material to make a jellyfish type shape, a woman dancing with a mannequin that appears to be alive as she manipulates it, actors standing in water and using their reflections to make shapes, and finally two people who are positioned in such a way that their own legs are camouflaged as his or her partner's legs. This was an image I later used in my play.

The next film I was able to watch was called, *Moses Pendleton Presents Moses Pendleton*. This film was a documentary of Moses Pendleton, the choreographer of Momix. Pendleton believes that in order to be truthful, dance has to reflect life. Pendleton claims that a dancer needs to be both inside and outside of their work, meaning that the choreography needs to be supported with emotional commitment. When looking at work he has created, he asks himself if it is good theatre. He claims, "If it is too dancy or too gymnastic, then it is out."

Moses Pendleton's style is a cross between athleticism and dancing portrayed in a theatrical way. All of their pieces are more similar to performance art rather than dance. Pendleton's unique approach to movement stretches the minds of the audience members.

What I took from watching Moses Pendleton and Momix was a few images and an interesting approach to creating theatre and movement. I agree with many of Pendleton's views on movement, such as the concept that actors have to express emotions from within. Also, I repeatedly looked at my own work to see if it appeared too "dancy" as he put it. I did not want my play to be considered dance.

GRACIELA DANIELE

The first of Graciela Daniele's film I was able to watch was called *Chronicle of a Death Foretold*. I was pleased that I was able to watch this unique musical because it did not cater to the same formula as other musicals I have seen. It felt as if the characters actually would sing like this in their lives. The women would sing when getting ready for a wedding, the wedding guests would sing while dancing at the wedding, and the mother would sing a lullaby to her daughter to comfort her. The choreography was so well done that every piece contained its own story. Graciela Daniele uses many different conventions in her choreography.

At one point two men were dancing, but it didn't look like a dance at all. They were wrestling more than dancing while miming kicking a soccer ball to each other. Every moment of the wrestling was shared centering in disguise. Even the fights were

dances. It was a stylized form of a fight, but still violent and very real. Another convention that Graciela used was cloth. At one point, the women were teaching the main character what she should do on her wedding night, and they demonstrated with a sheet. It was very erotic, but covered, so it was subtle which supported my theory of the slow reveal. The other girl comically straddled the material and rode it like a horse. Then the women placed the material in front of the main character so that it looked like she was pregnant. Most of Graciela Daniele's pieces are more like tribal story telling. She uses the same techniques in *Once on this Island*. Her work feels like a group of people gathered around a fire acting out stories.

Later in the play there was a dance that was stylized to portray the act of sex between the husband and his wife. It was really dance splashed with sex, almost like a formal ritual. It was very erotic and involved many lifts and shared centering, but most of the shared centering was the man lifting the woman, simply because of the style and time period of the piece.

The second film of Graciela Daniele's that I viewed was called *Tango Appassionato*. One of my favorite parts of this piece was the dance between two men and a woman, which symbolized a sexual threesome. The two men were brothers that shared the woman as a lover. She began to fall in love with one of the brothers more than the other. This story was realized in the dance. It is very sexual and the dancers are impressively talented. I enjoyed that the story was reinforced throughout the performance; the plot drove every move. In my opinion, this is something that gets lost in many dance pieces.

Watching Graciela Daniele's work was enlightening. I have a large amount of respect that as a dance choreographer she was able to remain loyal to the story she was telling, which allowed her audience to follow along on her journeys. This is something that I hope take into my own work.

JULIE TAYMOR AND MERCE CUNNINGHAM

I classified these two choreographers together not because they are similar in style, but because their work applied the least to my present project. I found a lot of value in watching their work, but was unable to find as many correlations to my own. Juan Darien was one of the films I watched of Julie Taymor. Her style was unique and unlike anything I had seen before. It is not the type of theatre that I see myself doing, but I appreciated it very much.

One thing I enjoyed about watching Julie Taymor's work was her immense creativity with language. She uses forms of gibberish as language many times in her transitional changes. The language was very telling of the emotional states of the characters. I also liked the epic feel of her piece. Her characters are archetypal, and this makes it universally moving to audiences of all kinds.

The second film I watched was called *The Green Bird*. The costumes were larger than life, and there was a lot of spectacle. I was very glad to be able to see Taymor's work. Her use of space is so unique, that watching her work stretched a part of my creativity that I had never thought to explore. I was not able to directly apply

much of Julie Taymor's work to my own, but I plan to research more of her style in the future.

I watched five videos with Merce Cunningham's work including *498 3rd Ave*. I know that he is a huge name in the world of dance because he molded modern dance as we know it in America. However, I did not see much of his work that pertained to my own.

The dances I saw contained a great use of space. He followed a lot of the rules that we learned in mass battles. One of the things I learned about Merce was that he did a lot of dance without music. I thought this was interesting. He claimed that music could stand alone without dance, likewise dance should stand alone without music.

A lot of Merce Cunningham's moral views in his work did speak to me. He said many things in an interview during the video that really rang true to me. Some of those things were, "It is about making something; it is not about making money." He said this while in New York with no funds in the sixties. He also stated, "What is the point in doing what one already knows? I want to see something new-something I haven't seen before so that the audience can't pin it down, and can't forget it." I admired his ambition to create something new that moves the audience and takes risks.

PILOBOLUS

The first film of Pilobolus that I was able to watch was called *Last Dance*. This video was really a documentary of the Pilobolus Company trying to create something. It was helpful to watch because I was able to see what their rehearsals were like and

how they come up with ideas for their shows. The actors themselves are like contortionists. They are extremely athletic and strength trained. From what I saw, the group had a couple of choreographers that collaborated much like the way David Leong and Aaron Anderson work together. When the choreographers were asked about their process, they said, "You have to see a rehearsal to really understand what is happening. We like to ask the actors to find a movement that is interesting and add a story on top of it." Most of the time, people start with the story and then add in the movement. This company is so driven by the skills of the actors that stories must be created out of their movements.

Their rehearsals are usually run with the actors experimenting with lifts and contortions. Then the choreographers will stop them and tell them to do something again, making it into a story. The content was not sexual in nature, but there were moments of sexual content in which the actors were already extremely comfortable, having worked many times completely naked and contorted around each other. It was impressive to see people so free with their bodies and able to do such amazing things. What these people do is something that not all actors can do. They are definitely athletes.

The next segment involved two groups of three people. In each group, a man was holding two people on each side of him. With every step he takes, he lifts one person and sets them down, as if they are an extension of his legs. While he is doing this, the people getting lifted have to help by keeping their muscles tense. The men walked around the stage with the three people walking as one person. It looked very

interesting and difficult. Even if I wanted to incorporate some of this work into my thesis performance, I would have to find a way to make the moves simple enough that the average person could accomplish them. Only trained acrobatic performers could do most of this work. I loved watching all of this. I think that as a choreographer of this material, one would need to understand the capacities of these actor/athletes and know how and when to push them

Watching Pilobolus was inspiring because it really stretched my mind. It made me wonder how creative I could be with a group of very disciplined actors with great control of their bodies. I began to wonder if the people I cast in my thesis would be able to handle what I wanted them to do. I predicted changing a lot of my ideas in the moment. This was one of the reasons that I was tentative to write down exactly what I wanted before watching what my actors could handle. I found that many times when I came in with a preplanned idea, seeing the story realized within my actors forced alterations in the choreography and even the script. Despite this, I was glad David suggested I write the majority of the scenes beforehand.

PINA BAUSCH

Of all of the choreographers whose works I was able to see during my trip to the Lincoln Center, Pina Bausch's work was my absolute favorite. She makes bold, clever choices and at the same time her work is so simple. I was thoroughly inspired and motivated by almost everything of hers that I watched. Her work was closest to what I hoped my thesis project could be.

The video of the play, *Seven Deadly Sins*, contained several images that helped me with my own play. There were several moments that contained one girl with many men. The actress was going to each one of them and using different sexual gestures with each of them. I learned a lot from this section. Before I watched this, I wanted to do a piece with a girl surrounded by several men and getting thrown around by them. This film gave me a lot of ideas of how I could do that.

The second piece was called *Danzon*. This particular piece was my favorite. It blended sexual content with clowning. The choreography was indirectly sexually suggestive. It left me feeling as if I, the audience member, was the one with the sexually perverse mind. Pina Bausch's suggested that she and her company were completely innocent. This reminded me that I did not want to slap everyone in the face with my play. I wanted to make a piece that climbed in tension and earned the right for the few moments of material that might be conceived as truly risqué.

Specifically, there were a few ideas that I directly adapted from Pina Bausch's work. She had a few numbers that were choreographed with repetitive movements that looked like a fight, but used sexual gestures. I really wanted to try a piece like this. The other idea that she used brilliantly was her transitional pieces. Between each larger scene, there were smaller scenes that were there to make the audience laugh before the next dramatic piece began. I really liked this idea, and wanted to use it for my own play, but I did not have enough time to plan them out. When I put up my show in the future, I plan on using this concept.

I loved this piece of theatre. I think that the one difference between what I see my work becoming and Pina Bausch's work is that hers is a little more abstract than mine. Her work contains many stylized concepts, and I felt that it worked for her. I want my stories to contain a beginning, middle and end. Also, what I loved about this play was that it looked as if she used Viewpoints. Everything looked as if it was discovered in moments of improvisation, because the actors seemed completely natural. They looked like they were having fun the entire time, so the audience was having fun too.

In watching her videos, I found that the aesthetic I am seeking to define resembles Pina Bausch's. I felt that her pieces really spoke to me as an artist, and I also realized that this was similar to the type of work that I would like to be doing someday. When I did my research on her before my trip, much of what I read about Pina Bausch expressed that her work was controversial and uncomfortably violent. I saw little of this violence in the pieces I watched on this trip. I did see a short strip of a violent gang rape at one point, but it was in a documentary for about ten seconds. If I continue to research her, I will look for her more violent pieces because I am interested to see how she handled that situation.

LINCOLN CENTER CONCLUSION

I was glad that I had the opportunity to watch these videos. It gave me much more focus on the ideas I already had and changed a few others. It brought things to my attention that I had not thought of before, and also gave me ideas of how I was actually

going to rehearse with my actors. I wanted to create something that would inspire dialogue and leaving room for different interpretations. This was one of my goals for my thesis project.

I had started to think about the audience as well. Exactly whom was I playing to, and how did this affect what I put onstage? I have not seen anything at VCU like the show I wanted to create. How delicate did I have to be with an audience that may have been experiencing this style of theatre for the first time? Of course I could not put naked people in my show. It would be too shocking for everyone, and the ideas would get lost in the distraction of breasts and genitals. My concept of what I wanted to create was very experimental. I was concerned that at a school with so much of its content deeply rooted in realism, my ideas might have been too abstract for anyone to appreciate, but I knew if I told a story, the audience would be able to follow. Most of the ideas I had for my show were very universal. The stories were situations that most people have experienced, know someone who has experienced, or fantasized about experiencing. I wanted my work to speak to them, affect them, and perhaps even give them ideas about their own work.

Each choreographer and director whose work I watched not only ignited a passion in me to write my play, but they also provided valuable lessons that helped with other areas. Matthew Bourne provided the image of the glass that I later executed and supported my theory that the actual blocking of sexual content can happen subtly. Moses Pendleton and Momix provided the image of the couple that I later used to write “Joined at the Hips” and reminded me to stay clear of making my choreography too

dancy. Graciela Daniele provided images of using a piece of cloth to portray an image and reinforced the importance of telling a story. Julie Taymor stretched a new part of my imagination, and Merce Cunningham challenged the morality of my art. Pilobolus gave me future aspirations for my work. Finally, Pina Bausch provided the backbone for my D.M.V scene as well as several ideas that I plan to mold in my future endeavors with making theatre. Each person influenced a different part of my play, and helped enhance the entire experience.

CHAPTER 3: Writing the Play

Before I even began writing anything down, I already had several images from which I wanted to start. The images were pictures from my own life, or from people very close to me. I wanted about seven scenes that portrayed different sexual and romantic situations. I knew I needed to be able to choreograph sexual scenes, but I did not want the show to be about sex. I wanted to make an event that the audience would be able to relate to their own lives, or to someone who is close to them. The scenes were to be as non-judgmental as possible, so I did not want to portray any of the characters as manipulative or spiteful. I knew this would be a difficult task, since I wanted to have an affair involved in one of my scenes. Most people have so many judgments of other people involved in these situations. I wanted to show the perspective of everyone caught up in the circumstances.

Despite the fact that the scenes began with images, I kept stressing the importance of putting personal and powerful stories behind the images. Images and aesthetically beautiful pictures would not be enough to make the scene complete. David Leong was a great help in reminding me of this in the writing process. For example, I did not want the two people having a relationship through the glass to be a dance recital. I needed a tangible story for the actors so that they could make the scene specific. Each

one of the scenes contained a story that became the foundation on which the choreography was based.

The songs I ended up using for the show were mostly pieces that I found with my assistant director, Paul Wurth. As a musician, he originally wanted to write all the music for me, but after some advice from David Leong, we all agreed that it would be useful, considering our time restraint, if we found songs from other artists. Three of the songs we chose are by a band called Sigur Ros. As soon as I heard the music, I knew it was perfect for my project. Sigur Ros is a band from Iceland whose songs have a very unique sound. They use the human voice as an instrument, so the words sung are not a language. The other pieces were from various movies and other soundtracks such as *Love Actually*, *Cinema Paradiso*, and *Birdy*. After finding the musical pieces, writing the scenes was much easier because the music dictated the stories.

Paul and I were very pleased with the musical choices. It was a very difficult process, but I knew what I wanted. The songs were to be inspiring for me on their own. I wanted to be able to listen to them and fall in love with the sound and see the story in my mind before choreographing anything. To this day, I have never gotten tired of any of the songs I chose for this performance, and every song dictated the stories for each piece.

The following is a written journal of the inspirations for each piece that I had written for the show. In the end, the pieces were named “Beginnings,” “Remember,” “In Love With Love,” “Fantasy at the D.M.V.,” “I Choose Love,” “Joined at the Hip,” and “Pain of Glass.” The order of the scenes for the performance was different than the

order in which they were written, because I wanted the play to bring the audience on a specific journey. I have also included the original written storylines for every piece, including “Joined at the Hips,” which was cut from the actual performance. Each piece evolved tremendously throughout the process. Some of the pieces developed into something completely different that I had originally envisioned. Those ideas that did not get used are ones that I have filed away to use in a future performance of this show, or other shows that I will direct and choreograph.

BEGINNINGS

Originally, this scene was going to be two people who couldn’t have sex for some reason. I had the idea that they were only able to talk about subjects that had nothing to do with sex while engaging in sexual acts. I liked the opposition of two people having a conversation while their bodies were having an entirely different conversation. When I presented this idea to David Leong, he suggested a slightly more realistic approach to the story. He suggested that the two people were teenagers and they couldn’t be intimate because her mother was downstairs. I liked this idea, and tried to make them converse in trivial matters so that the mother would not think they were trying to kiss. This eventually evolved into a scene with no dialogue at all where her mother calling them downstairs for dinner interrupts them. I thought this was enough of a foundation to begin choreographing the scene.

The following is the original description of “Beginnings”:

This piece involves two young people who are bound in conversation to talk only about nonsexual things but whose bodies are only able to converse through sensual contact. The premise is that two teenagers are sitting on a bed talking. They really want to touch each other and kiss, but the girl's mother is in the next room, so they have to converse about things that are completely nonsexual. The fact that they are not able to kiss keeps them somewhat at a distance. If one is kissing the other person's neck, the one being kissed must be talking to hide the fact that they are being "naughty." There is no music for this scene. The piece should be pretty light and comical.

~Lights come up on a teenage boy and girl. They begin to speak. The conversation is small talk and slightly awkward. Suddenly, the girl touches the boy's knee. He looks at her incredulously. She gestures that he should keep talking, and even prompts him with a question or two. It starts with hands touching and caressing, then touching legs. He is very nervous about this at first, and then begins to open up and play along with the girl. She rubs the front of him with her hands. Then she moves to the front of him and they face each other. He tries to kiss her but she stops him with her words and shakes her head ("No kissing").

~They move closer together with their bodies. Pressing against each other, they continue the dialogue. It is getting harder to keep the conversation going. The physicality gets more and more intense until they begin to take each other to the bed, still talking. Their voices are starting to give away what they are doing.

~Suddenly, we hear a voice from offstage asking the girl what she is doing "up there" (it is her mother). The girl answers, "nothing, just showing my CDs."

The mother asks them to come down because dinner is ready.

~The two teenagers smile at each other and run off stage hand in hand.

REMEMBER

The first step towards writing this piece was picking the music. I knew I wanted to use a certain piece of music for the show, and it was only a matter of writing a piece around it. The song was an instrumental selection from the movie, "Love, Actually." It is about three minutes long and consists of the same melody repeated twice with more intensity the second time. The music told me what the piece was going to be about. I knew I wanted a stylized scene that involved two different opposing situations. Either

one was going to be the present and the other the future or past, or one realistic and the other a fantasy.

I came to David with a piece I had written about a couple on a date, or having coffee. They were awkward at first, and then suddenly they see into their future. They see the relationship they could potentially have. It is a split scene where two other actors play them in the future. They are happy, in love, and extremely sexual.

I almost decided to go with this idea, when a fellow graduate movement student, Katie Bradley was discussed the scene with me. Together we came up with the idea that they were an older couple. Perhaps they were remembering the past instead of the future. I decided to use this idea.

I saw an older couple, the woman very sick. The man is taking care of her. Knowing I still have many medical supplies from my own health history, I decided to give her kidney failure and put her on dialysis. I wanted to establish a long built bond between the couple. Then I wanted a memory of theirs to enter the scene. A younger couple that represents a healthy, sexual, vibrant couple that used to be, and still exists within them. When I wrote the scene I had two inspirations. The first was my own grandparents. My grandfather was very sick for about ten years before he died, and my grandmother took care of him every day. They were very much in love as a younger couple all the way into their old age. Many times people forget that older couples were like that at one point. My other inspiration for writing the scene was my own future. I will most likely die on dialysis and with kidney failure, and I see myself in this exact

situation one day. I hope to be able to remember myself as a healthy young person and relive the days of my youth. This scene was also very personal to me.

The following is the original description of “Remember”:

Remember is a piece about two older people sitting at a dinner table. We are watching them very carefully drink tea. Suddenly they look at each other and two other people enter, playing the memories of their youth. They watch each other as the young people embrace and dance together around the stage. We are seeing the relationship in its beginnings. The two young people begin to kiss and get sexual with each other. They disappear behind the table, and the two older people are left staring at each other.

~Lights up on an elderly couple sitting and drinking tea at a table.

~The woman tries to pick up her cup, and her hand is shaking so much, that she has to put it down. He walks over to her side of the table and helps her.

~He pulls a chair closer to her and sits down. They sit and look at each other.

~A young couple appears and they rush towards each other. The man takes the woman’s hand and kisses the inside of it. They dance around the stage and begin to embrace and kiss each other. They run upstage of the table and he lifts her on top of it. As she is sitting on the table, he kisses her neck. (The older couple just sits and stares at each other through this exchange.) The couple embraces one more time and sinks behind the table and disappears.

~The elderly couple takes a breath together and reaches out for each other’s hands. The old man kisses the inside of her hand...Lights out.

IN LOVE WITH LOVE

I was inspired to write a scene about a close friend of mine. I wanted to tell her story because I thought it was very interesting, and I know that her situation happens to many women. Her parents were divorced when she was a baby, and then the son of her father’s girlfriend sexually abused her as a child. She had a distorted view of love and sex even as a youth. This view only came back to harm her later in her life. She was very self-conscious as a teenager and into her twenties. She was always looking for men to tell her she was beautiful and worth something. After some traumatic situations,

she turned the tables and began to use men. She led a lifestyle that hurt many people around her. Even her friends were affected by her actions, and I was one of those friends.

I thought this was a perfect situation to turn into a theatrical piece. It contained the opportunity to surround one girl with several men, which is an idea that I developed upon watching Pina Bausch's work. It also was based on a real story that did not have an ending, and I allowed myself a lot of freedom to elaborate on certain events stylistically.

I loosely wrote the story for the piece before trying to find the music. I knew I wanted to show her sexual abuse in her childhood, a time in her late teens with an inconsiderate boyfriend, and a time in her twenties that involved what remains in her mind as a date rape. These were to then lead into her transition into using sex against men to control them. She takes the very thing that made her feel small and used it as revenge against men. This provides her with confidence on which she thrives, but it only lasts for a short while. Once she feels that thrill, she wants more and more of it. She finally gets the attention she always wanted from a young age. Just as she thinks that things cannot get any better, the men begin to turn on her. They see through her façade and begin to retaliate.

The movements that were sexual and suggestive now switch to becoming very violent and hurtful to her. They begin to throw her around in anger like a rag doll. She becomes numb to it. Sometime at the peak of the tossing, she falls on the ground and all the men except one leave the stage. He tries to help her up, and she tries to embrace

him sexually. This is now the only way she knows how to communicate with men. He pushes her away, and she tries a different way to embrace him. He pushes her away again, and they look at each other. At this point, I was not sure how to end the scene, and I was satisfied with discovering the ending in rehearsals.

The following is the original description of “In Love With Love”:

This is a story about an unfortunate little girl who finds herself in many desperate situations with love and sex. She is sexually abused as a child, then unfortunately dumped later, and finally raped by a man she trusts. After this she gets involved with man after man, which keeps damaging her self-esteem and turns her to find more men. During this middle sequence, she never looks any men in the eye. They are all objects to her. She needs their attention. She needs them to validate her attractiveness and worth. This is a vicious cycle for her that escalates until she finds herself alone. One man sees through her façade and accepts her past. He tries to help her out of her habits. He offers to help her up, and she goes right back to trying to use sex to get his attention. This time it doesn't work. He refuses her advances. This leaves her upstage left at a diagonal looking down stage right. She finally looks him in the eye. This is the end of the piece.

I am planning on using a long piece of material as a prop for this piece. It is going to tell us her age, and it is going to be used when she is being tossed from man to man.

~Lights up on a girl, she is sitting on the floor playing with a boy. They are having a good time, and then he moves closer to her. She doesn't seem to notice. He moves even closer- close enough to touch her. He reaches over to her and touches her leg. She freezes. Then he brings his hand higher and higher. She begins to fight him and he stops her by putting his hand over her mouth...transition to...

~Years have passed and the girl is about nineteen, but she is still naïve. She is with a man who doesn't appreciate her. She seems to cling to him. He drags her around the stage. It is evident that he mistreats her. He sees another woman and leaves the girl suddenly and exits.

~Another few years have passed and the girl is now a woman. She is on a date with a man; it looks like they are having a good time, when suddenly he grabs her and kisses her. She tries to push him away, but he forces himself onto her. They struggle for a bit, and the man overpowers her. She finally accepts it. He leaves her on the stage alone.

~The girl is heartbroken, and looking for answers. She covers herself up as much as she can with her clothes and arms. She looks at herself and that is where she places the blame. She looks at her body, which only reminds her of her past experiences, and she is disgusted with herself. She begins to look around for the next guys she sees, who enters right then.

~She grabs him and links arms with him, gazing with stars in her eyes. He looks at her and smiles. They walk around the stage in a circle while another man cuts in front of them.

~(This begins a montage of several different men that she has relationships with) She pushes the first man away and grabs the second man. Then she jumps between two men who both pull on each of her arms until one lets go and she falls into the other's arms. He then pushes her to the next man, and so on. This continues and gets more and more intense until she is being thrown across the stage into the arms of all the men at once (similar to David's trust exercise in movement). This escalates into a climax of men and the girl throwing her around and into lifts (there is a hint of violence here). She never looks any of these men in the eyes. Her eyes are at the floor or at their bodies. Finally they let her fall on the floor (maybe they push her to the floor).

~All the men leave the stage except for one. He stands watching her struggle. Then he walks over and helps her up. He holds out his hand. She smiles at him and starts to embrace him. He stops her. She tries again, looking confused. He stops her again. She stands and stares, not knowing what to do. She tries a third time with a much larger tactic. (She doesn't know how to have a relationship without sex). He almost pushes her away this time. She backs off and stumbles to the stage.

~He holds out his hand to her. The last picture is of her looking up at him. She finally looks into his eyes. She stands, maintaining eye contact. Black out.

FANTASY AT THE D.M.V.

This scene changed the most of all the scenes that I had written. Originally, I had wanted to choreograph a piece that had the same foundations of a mass battle, but without the fight techniques. Instead I had wanted to use sexual gestures, as Pina Bausch had done in the play *Danzon*. I partly wanted to test my skills with the mass battle techniques that I had learned in my first and second years of graduate school. I never had the opportunity to test those skills alone after the information really became

understood. I wanted to use this as a check in point for myself to see if I was able to incorporate this lesson into my work. I also wanted to prove that it could apply to other forms of choreography.

Initially, this scene was going to be a mostly abstract movement piece that involved all eight actors. The idea that I had planned on using was that each of the eight characters were chasing after someone who did not reciprocate their affections. This would mean that each character was chasing someone, and being chased by someone else that they did not desire. I had specific gestures and movement patterns planned out before rehearsals began, but the idea seemed to be too difficult to figure out completely, and Paul and I were getting very frustrated.

The following is a description of the piece called, "Love Hurts," which eventually evolved into "Fantasy at the D.M.V.":

This piece is more like a dance piece-without the dancing. I want to take movement patterns that are erotic but also patterns in which one of the pair working together gets rejected by the other. This piece is combining the information learned from the semester with mass battles and the semester with choreography to music.

The piece begins with one person and the rest are added on. The music is in counts of eight. After the eight people enter, all trying to get the opposite sex to notice them. Each person is assigned to a specific movement pattern that they must continue as long as the music is playing. The following choreography is the template for the entire piece. These people are trapped in these painful patterns. The music, a song by Sigur Ros, is what determines most of the mood of the scene.

Person 1: Step step step step stop stop turn turn.
 Step step step step stop stop turn turn
 Step step step step stop stop turn turn
 Step step step step stop stop turn turn
 (this continues for the next sixteen counts)

Person 2: (Enters at the second set of eights-the first voice)

Step stepstep out, grab
 Step stepstep out, grab
 Step stepstep out, grab
 Step stepstep out, grab

Person 3: (Enters at the third voice – first count of third set of eights)

(Looking back----->
 Step step step see . . . turn head

Person 4: (enters at the second count of third set of eights)

Step step step step reach reach sigh sigh

Person 5: (Enters at the second count of third set of eights)

Step step step step stop stop stoop stoop

Person 6: (enters at the third count of the third set of eights)

Step step step lean kiss

Person 7: (Enters at the fourth count of the third set of eights)

Step step step step step step push push

Person 8: (Enters at the fourth count of the third set of eights)

Step step steplift skirt

1) Person A is walking, person B following and trying to stop person A. Person B wraps her arms around A's waist and throws all her weight into him. Person A drags B for a couple of feet, then takes her arms and throws her a few feet away from him, turns and walk away to the next person

2) Person A grabs person C and places his head on her chest. She grabs his head and pushes it down, using his back to jump over him.

3) Person D runs and slides down person A's leg, wrapping herself around his leg. He spins around and yanks his leg free. He shakes his head at her and walks to the next person.

4) Person A comes up to person B again and this time he wraps his arms around her waist. It is the same pattern as in 1).

5) Person E runs and slides down person C's leg. Same as 3).

6) Person F grabs person B and places his head on her chest. Same as 2).

These are just the beginning notes for the blocking, but most of this will have to be figured out when I have the actors in front of me. This will be blocked like a mass battle, so a lot of it will rely on the visual aesthetic of the actors' bodies.

Also, not all of the pairs are opposite sex. I would like some same-sex relationships in this piece.

I CHOOSE LOVE

This was one of the pieces that inspired me to base this play on personal events. It emerged from a real situation that I experienced a few years before I wrote this play. The relationship was so passionate and romantic that I felt it was theatrical in its own life. I also knew that people would be affected in different ways to the topic. The scene was going to be about a man who is in a marriage that leaves him empty and unhappy. He falls in love with another woman who is equally in love with him. Their love and passion for each other is so strong that he is left with the option of staying with his wife and never seeing the other woman again or leaving his wife and jumping into the unknown with this other woman. At the end of the scene, he essentially chooses to leave his wife. The scene ends up in the air. We see that he chooses the woman, but we do not see a happily ever after. The life of this couple really begins at this point. I wanted the end of the scene to be slightly ominous and unsettled.

The goal when I wrote this piece was that no character was to be portrayed in a negative way. I did not want the wife to be a hateful person that drives her husband away, or the other woman to be a heartless home wrecker, or the man to be viewed as manipulative and evil. I wanted the audience to be able to relate to the side of each character, and to invoke opinions about this situation. The objective was to allow people to see another side of the situation that they had never thought of in the past. I did not think about being safe with the content in this scene. The more emotions that

emerge from watching an artistic piece, the more conversations take place about theatre, art and most importantly, life. I believe this is the beautiful thing about being an artist.

The following is the original description of “I Choose Love”:

This is a story about three unfortunate people involved in an extramarital affair: a man, his wife, and his girlfriend. It is very important that no one in this scene is portrayed negatively. I don't want to audience to hate any one of the characters. The acting has to be honest and genuine. When he rubs his wife's feet, he can't be rolling his eyes. He must really want to do these things for her, but feel empty inside while doing them. We see his inner life explode when he is with his girlfriend. She brings out a side of him that maybe he always wanted to explore.

This story is about a man who is unhappy in his marriage. He finds himself in his relationship with this other woman and decides to leave his wife.

~Lights come up on a woman coming home from work to her husband. He kisses her and takes her coat and purse and puts them away for her. Then he leads her to the couch, sits her down, and begins rubbing her feet. She looks tired. He seems content, but something is missing. He sits next to her and they watch TV together...split scene...another woman is reading a book. She looks up, seems to be impatient, and begins to pace back and forth. The wife gets up and takes the man's hand. She leads him into the bedroom.

~The girl is still pacing back and forth as the man walks in and sees her, she runs to him and jumps into his arms laughing and kissing him, then they run to sit together, talking excitedly. They begin to star gaze. Split scene, his wife appears facing the audience, crying and upset. He reacts; He isn't able to continue without getting emotional. The woman comforts him, holding him as he cries in her arms. The wife is still upset as the scene changes to her screaming at him.

~We see the man standing with his wife in their house; she is breathing heavy and looks full of rage. She is screaming and throwing things at him. He just stands there and takes every word that she has to say. He looks her in the eye and stands his ground. She stops screaming and stands. He picks up his suitcase and leaves.

~He walks and the scene around him changes to the girlfriend's house. She is very surprised to see him. She takes his bag and puts it down, leading him to the couch and sits him down. He looks very weary, like he hasn't slept in years. She begins to rub his feet with warmth and love. He lets her pamper him for a while, and then realizes what she is doing. He takes her hands and pulls her onto the couch next to him. He embraces her and she looks out towards the audience, heavy with the realization of what has happened.

JOINED AT THE HIP

“Joined at the Hip” started as an idea I developed from watching the work of Moses Pendleton. He pushes the envelope when it comes to abstract ideas in movement, and he creates some of the most unique images I have seen. His actors become tangled many times in the choreography, and at one point I saw an image that led me to create scene of my own. What I saw was a woman and a man playing with illusions. He placed his legs where her legs would have been, and it appeared that her legs were hers but moving strangely. Then she lay down on the ground and his head popped up with her legs on either side of his torso, now becoming his legs.

When I saw this, it seemed to blend well with another idea I had for a scene. I wanted to portray a couple that was physically attached at the hips, and create a stylized movement for them. When I brought this idea to David, he suggested that the idea was very abstract and it needed more tangible symbolism. He asked me to think about why this couple was attached at the hips, and to create an actual story around these two characters. I decided that the two characters had a relationship that was completely co-dependent. The two people could not function without being in constant contact with the other. I enjoyed the abstract nature of the scene and wanted to leave it open to interpretation, so I focused on the actual relationship between the two characters and focused less on making the story specific.

As will I explain later, this piece was completely cut from the final product of the show, but the following is the original description of “Joined at the Hip”:

This piece involves two people who literally are joined at the hip. This is their obstacle. They actually aren't able to separate. There is music to accompany this scene. The fact that they are joined at the hip is a symbol of their co-dependence. They don't know how to function without each other.

~We see a form under a sheet (It is a man and a woman. At first she is on the bottom and he is on top, and then eventually she is on top of him and they are both facing up). It seems to be writhing and bobbing up and down at times.

~Then the sheet raises and we see a woman (Now she is straddling him facing the audience-away from him). She is sitting up and her legs are still covered by the sheet. She begins to caress her legs. She lifts up her skirt and her legs are exposed. She continues rubbing them. She keeps shifting her legs in different sexual and suggestive positions, but she keeps her focus on the legs.

~The woman bends forward over and folds herself on what we think are her legs. The sheet goes over her head from behind her and a man's head pops up. The woman's real legs are now his legs. He starts to caress them. We now realize that she is on top of him and they are rocking back and forth.

~They roll around the stage, but their hips remain connected. This takes them to many different positions around the stage while they share weight and make interesting shapes.

~At one point they fall apart, and look at each other in fear. They look completely lost and disconnected. They grope around the stage looking for some sort of direction. Eventually, they back into each other. They turn around to face each other, trying to get back together again, but things don't fit as they once did. They have now seen what it is like to be apart and individual. This changes the relationship. We will find an ending with the rehearsal interactions, but I think I would like each person to end up alone.

PAIN OF GLASS

This piece went through the most difficult process of all the pieces. I knew I wanted the story to be hinged on a relationship that takes place from either side of a pane of glass. Originally, the story was very abstract and complicated, and when I brought it to David Leong, he gave me advice about making the scene clearer. He told me to decide on a reason for the glass to be there. Paul and I sat for hours trying to create the metaphor for the glass. We asked the questions that David gave me. Why is

the glass there? What does it represent? How does it move? Do the actors know that the glass is there?

Together, Paul and I created a storyline and metaphor around the idea of two people being separated by something in their relationship that causes them never to fully commit to each other. It was very difficult to write this piece, since we had no idea what the prop was going to look like or how it would be able to move. Eventually, we settled on the following description, knowing that actually having the glass in front of the actors would inevitably change the entire piece. The following is the original description of the piece “Pain of Glass.”

The story behind this piece is the love affair that takes place with a pane of glass between the characters. The characters don't know that anything is wrong, though. They do not see the pane of glass because it is symbolic. It is simply an obstacle. This is the way things are done in their world. I don't want it to seem like I placed two people from our world into this situation. I want them to create this lifestyle. What kinds of new movements would have to spring from this situation? At the end of the scene, he realizes that this relationship cannot be, and the man decides to go back to his life without her, leaving the woman behind.

The glass acts as a symbol for pain. The two people are trying to have a relationship, but can't get close enough to each other. They just can't be completely open to each other. They don't see the pain until the glass turns and they see their own reflections. The only way they can open up to each other is to first open up to the idea that they must know themselves. This is the reason they can never get close enough. When one of them finally sees his own reflection and is able to examine himself, he realizes that the relationship cannot work and decides to leave.

The glass I am planning on using is something I am getting help with at this point. Ron told me to contact a company in New York to find out about a piece of glass that can also be a mirror. I am planning a trip to a hardware store to find out about the price and durability of different materials. I would like something that can be reflective and see through, depending on how the lights shine on it.

~This piece contains two actors, a glass pane, and possibly two other actors controlling the glass pane. I want to rotate the glass and the actors on either side so that it can shift during the scene. Four actors may be involved in total: two characters, and two to move the glass.

~The piece starts with lights up on a glass in the middle of the stage. Two actors are standing on either side, a man and a woman.

~They see each other and we understand that they have met before. Not only have they met, but also they seem to have a very intimate connection. As this is gradually established, neither is able to actually touch one another because the pane of glass separates them. As they try to find ways around the glass, they remain on opposite sides of the glass. The movements become very sexual. They are groping for the other person through the glass.

~They begin to get frustrated with the glass. They begin beating at it and getting angry. Then they begin to get frustrated with each other. Their anger is very clearly directed at the person behind the glass now.

~This fight escalates back into a sexual energy that is more intense than the first one. They have a need to get to the other person on the other side of the glass.

~They begin to get frustrated again and begin to fight. This time, they are much more angry and filled with rage. The movements build and build until...

~The lights change and the woman is frozen in a position of beating and groping the glass in slow motion (it is dark on her side of the stage). The man is in light and moving in real time. He has stepped back from the glass and is looking at the woman fighting on the other side.

~As he backs away, the glass rotates so that the man is down stage looking upstage at the glass and the woman behind it. Then the lights change and the glass becomes a mirror. The man looks into the mirror and examines himself. He touches his own reflection. He realizes that the only way that he can be happy is if he knows himself.

again, and as she does, he begins to back away from her to leave.

~The glass rotates so that the audience is on the same side as the woman looking at him as he leaves. It is a pane of glass at this point.

~After he leaves, the woman is left alone on the stage longingly looking after him. She turns and faces the audience, alone. The lights change again and the glass is a mirror again. She turns and looks at her reflection. She begins to look at herself in the experience of being left by this man. She puts her hand to the mirror...lights out.

Once each of the pieces had relatively strong foundational stories, I felt we were ready for rehearsals to begin. The pieces were by no means finished, but I was prepared

to allow them to develop with the actors. Looking back, I do not feel that there was much more preparation I could have done in the writing process. Some of the scenes evolved into something almost unrecognizable to the original script. I made sure that each scene retained my own personality and experiences. At this point, Paul and I felt we were ready to cast the show.

CHAPTER 4: Reflections of Red in a Mirror of Desire

The following chapter is a written documentation of my self-written, directed, and choreographed play, “Reflections of Red in a Mirror of Desire” which was mounted in the Performing Arts Center of Virginia Commonwealth University in B72 on February 20th, 21st, and 22nd 2006. It is my record of the experience of the events that occurred before, during, and after the performance.

RECRUITING AND CASTING

The casting process for this show was difficult. I posted a sheet in the student lounge of the theatre department to see how many people were interested. I had at least thirty people who expressed an interest in doing the project. At first I was only going to cast five people, which turned into seven and finally eight. The difficulty in casting was that I could not use any students that were going to be in the main stage shows. This would be complicated, since both shows had relatively large casts. With the support of David Leong, Paul and I were able to sit in the main stage auditions to watch everyone. It amazed me to see how easy it was to pinpoint the people that were comfortable in their own skin. For the most part, the second they walked into the room we could tell if they would be a good candidate for the show or not. I was looking for people who

seemed to be physically confident while at the same time able to portray emotions with their bodies.

I eventually had my list of about twenty people and it turned out that many of them were cast in *Three Sisters* and *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*. Amazingly, I found eight other actors that were wonderful people and artists with which to work. They were Keith Alexander, Alison Haraczak, Joy Newsome, Catalina Lavalle, Corey Roberts, Joe Carlson, Mary Vreeland, and Brandon Crowder. These people were a very diverse looking group, which was what I was hoping to have. Also, they all were very excited about the project when I revealed to them the subject of my thesis.

I explained to them that I wanted to have full cast rehearsals at least twice a week so that we could all share energy and support each other to create an ensemble. I knew that the topic of the show would be difficult for them to handle if they did not feel comfortable with each other. I also told them that I worked very openly and was interested in their feedback and ideas. I wanted to give them permission to speak when I was choreographing so that I could give them movement blocking that felt natural to them instead of making it an imposition. As I was hoping, they seemed to be very receptive to this. It was exciting to me because this was the way I preferred to work with a cast, and it was my first chance since being an undergraduate to have full rights and responsibility for a group of people. At this point, I had a good idea of the actors I wanted to cast in each role, but I told them that I would not cast them specifically into parts until I saw them work together for a little while.

REHEARSALS

The following section is a shortened form of the rehearsal process that is described in detail later on in this chapter. During the first week of rehearsals, I was fully able to choreograph “Beginnings” and “I Choose Love” and the first two minutes of “Fantasy at the D.M.V.” I showed the two that were blocked to the cast on one of the nights. At this point, I opened a discussion on the clarity of the pieces, the messages we wanted to portray, and what each piece added to the show. We all agreed that “Beginnings” was essential to the play because it was describing the first steps of the sexual journeys of two young people. “I Choose Love” portrayed a kind of negative side of falling in love to which we felt many people could relate. We concluded that both had a place in the show.

During the second week of rehearsals, we were able to finish choreographing two more pieces, “Joined at the Hips” and “Remember.” I was also able to add more to the D.M.V scene, and I began working on “In Love With Love.” At this point, I felt good about our progress.

The third week of rehearsals was a rough one. We were still trying to build the set piece for “Pain of Glass” and were having scheduling conflicts with the scene shop hours. For this reason I actually had to cancel rehearsal a few times to work on it. I hated to cancel rehearsal, but I knew that there was not much I could improve without the glass. I spent the rest of this week’s rehearsals finishing up every piece and focusing on very tiny details.

It was at the end of the fourth week that David came to watch a run of the show. There were still three pieces that were not complete at this point. After he watched the run, he gave me several pages of notes. Some of the notes were optional changes that I had an option of fixing, and other notes were not options. I remember feeling very overwhelmed at this point. Most of the notes were either in complete compliance with my notes, or notes that I agreed with and changed. One piece was completely cut and another was shaved down to half its original time.

In the fifth week, we roughly had every piece finished and were able to run them all except for “In Love With Love” and “Fantasy at the D.M.V.” Patti and I discussed that she would be out of town for the performance, and we tried to set up a time for her to come and watch a run the weekend before we went up. We attempted to schedule a time, but there were technical difficulties that day with the space, I and asked her if I could push back the run one hour. She told me that she had previous plans for the evening and would not be able to make it. We both decided that the only option was to have her watch a videotape of the performance. This was upsetting for both of us, but there was no other choice at this time.

On top of this, I was not able to rehearse in B72 until the day before we opened because the main stage was using the room as a green room between scenes. I know this is not unusual, but this was a huge added stress, because the space really changes the energy of the show, and my actors were still getting used to the change when we opened.

The rest of the dress rehearsals were a little rough, and I was still finishing the final moment of the D.M.V. scene. Since we did not get into the space until the day before we opened, there were still blocking issues getting worked out. I felt very rushed and stressed for the entire weekend, and we were rehearsing for about eight hours each day. I recruited the help of some good friends to help put finishing touches on the programs and the audience seating situations.

Despite the fact that I felt this was a horrible tech experience, I learned a lot from this situation. In the future, I will be able to put into perspective how much time it takes to choreograph such a large movement based piece such as this one. When we choreographed movement pieces to music during our second year, it took us about a month to rehearse and fully choreograph one six-minute piece. I had seven pieces and five weeks. I realize now how huge this project really was.

THE FIRST REHEARSAL

Our first rehearsal was really a “get to know each other” and “introduce them to the world of movement” rehearsal. I began the evening with a physical warm up, stressing isolation of the hips and ribcage. I explained that Americans are generally very stiff in the hip region. In other continents, especially Europe and Africa, the hips are much more commonly a dominant trait. When dealing with sensuality and sexuality, the hips are very important and should be loosened. This also made them laugh and broke the tension very early.

The first exercise I had them do was one that I have been forming for the workshop I taught at SETC this March. After stretching for a while, I told them to lie on the floor in their own space. I had them breathe with their eyes closed and told them to be very aware of which parts of their bodies were touching the surface of the floor. Then I had them touch all the parts of the backs of their bodies to the floor. I told them to make sure everything touches the ground, including the crook at the back of the knee and all the surfaces of the neck. Then I guided them through touching the sides of their bodies to the floor, and finally the front of their bodies. I stressed that they had to touch everything to the floor including the surfaces between their legs. Next I told them to begin rolling towards the person near them. When they made contact, I told them to begin touching all the surfaces of their bodies to their partners' bodies. I told them to keep moving and not to be afraid to share weight if needed. Next, they were to roll toward the center of the room with each other until the entire cast made contact. The objective was the same, but this time they were to make this a group effort. Everyone was to make contact with every one else. This exercise looked like a slithering amoeba. They were having a lot of fun with this, and it was a great icebreaker for the subject matter of the show.

They ended the exercise laughing hysterically on the floor with each other. I was really able to watch them and see which ones had problems committing to this. Most of the cast was pretty comfortable. Some of them took a while to warm up, which was fine. It gave me an idea of the energy of the group.

After a short break, I paired them up and we did a little bit of the “Water Meets Water” exercise I explained earlier. I wanted them to get used to touching bodies with full contact before moving on to the next exercise. I taught this very similarly to the way David Leong taught it to me, but with the one exception that I set the mood for sensuality. It is interesting to see how the work changes with just the one change of thought. The work became much more intimate and I had to tell them to slow down much less. At first I had them work in lines, and then I told them to imagine a circle around them. I find that when their boundaries are on all sides of the pair, it becomes more intimate and sexual.

The next exercise I did with them was another one that I had fashioned for the workshop at SETC. It is another variation of an exercise taught by David Leong. I told them to make a circle and asked two people to come to the center. Then I told them to send energy towards each other with sound and movement. I had one person receiving and the other person sending energy. At first, I let them begin each scene with improvisation. Then I gave them emotions to use. The emotions used were generally either related to lust or violence. Then I switched back and forth between them. I wanted them to see how easy it was to switch from an intimate emotion to a violent one. Also, that switching from a violent emotion to an intimate one is very difficult. It is not just the switch that is difficult, but also the initial attempt to begin with a violent energy. I asked them why they thought this was the case.

Corey replied that love comes from the chakra in the chest, and rage comes from the hips. It is easier to make the journey from the chest to the hips than the opposite

way because it follows the natural path of gravity. It takes effort to go the opposite way. I proposed to them that hating a person first was also difficult to begin with because of the natural progression of a relationship. In life, in order to have such strong negative feelings about someone, this is usually preceded by intimate feelings. In other words, in order to hate a person, you must have loved them at some point, or had some kind of intimate connection. They agreed with this statement. The word betrayal was used many times throughout this exercise, which insinuates a closeness that was destroyed by an event.

During this exercise, I was able to see the actors in many different states of emotions. Also, I could observe their natural physical mannerisms. I had to cast the show at this rehearsal. At the end of the evening, I gave them their roles and played some of the music that I had chosen with my assistant director, Paul Wurth.

Something that I began to find in rehearsals was the sheer versatility of David Leong's exercises. It was always clear to me how they could be used to choreograph violence and bring strong emotions out of people, but using them for the purpose of bringing sexual energy to the table was interesting to watch. From the first day I tried David's contact improvisation exercises, I felt that the connections between any partner and myself were always such a hybrid of violence and lust. It was refreshing to me to be able to communicate the sexuality of the work to my actors, and to ask them to focus on that side of the emotions emerging.

THE JOURNEYS OF THE PIECES

I began to think of each piece as a separate play since they were rehearsed individually. Each story had a journey of its own. The following is a full description of the rehearsals of each piece.

Beginnings

I cast Alison and Keith for this scene. Both of them were the youngest looking actors in my cast and both were able to pull off the awkwardness needed for two teenagers who have not experienced sex. In the first rehearsal, we sat down and discussed the idea of having a dialogue with their bodies that did not involve gesturing or indicating. Not having had taken David's mime class, I only knew what seemed clear to me without extensive training in that kind of mime. I relied on my eye for movement in other areas to choreograph this part of my show. I needed to make sure that the dialogue was natural while at the same time clear.

This piece was the only scene not to be performed to music. I wanted it to be a break in the musical pieces. It also contained many comedic moments that could split up some of the heavier pieces. After I had the conversation with Alison and Keith about the dialogue, we created the characters.

We discussed the energy of a first kiss and the awkward excitement that goes along with it. Each one of us shared our first kiss experiences. Together, we talked about the first time someone held our hands romantically, and the rush of energy that surges through the body the first time the hint of sexuality is introduced. It created an energy of trust in the rehearsal room, and everyone in the room was able to bring

themselves back to that time when it was absolutely exhilarating to just hold someone's hand, and nothing more. I decided that this scene was crucial to the show, because it was such an opposing view of sex than the other pieces. It is a concept to which everyone can relate. How could I put up a show about all sides of sexuality without portraying the innocent beginnings of it? This is where the title of this piece emerged.

After the emotions became clear we developed an internal dialogue for the two characters. I did not want them to speak, so creating the dialogue made the blocking much easier. It provided a script for the actors to follow. Looking back, it was much like making a score, but with less detail. Patti D'Beck later suggested that this process may have been easier if I had scripted words for the actors first and then turned the words into gestures. She suggested that this might have lessened the amount of indication in the final product. I asked the actors to stand in the space and use improvisation to find natural blocking. We would explore a few seconds at a time, repeating the blocking that worked.

I chose to have Keith entering Alison's room and they essentially made several awkward attempts to kiss until Keith finally decided to muster up the courage to give Alison a "real" kiss. I had the two actors improv much of the original blocking, while Paul and I chose the portions that worked and tweaked from there. At times, Paul and I would act out what we wanted so that the actors could see. This helped relieve some of the tension between the actors. During this initial blocking process we created many real and beautiful moments between the two, but the one thing I could not make sense of was why the mother could talk if the two teenagers could not. I spent a lot of time

contemplating this question. Then, I finally decided to discard the idea that the mother knew the teenagers were in the room. I altered the story so that Keith snuck into Alison's room in the middle of the night.

Once I made this choice, the two actors found more obstacles around which they could work. They each began to find more moments of comedy in the scene. I was pleased with this, but a little worried. I realized that the difficulty in choreographing a comedic movement scene without music came in the repeatability of the scene. How was I going to make the scene the same every time? The actors were doing a fantastic job at being in the moment. They were adapting to every little change that occurred each time they ran the scene. Sometimes these choices were funny, and sometimes they were not. I told them which moments I wanted to keep, and which ones I wanted to lose. They agreed, but then in the middle of the runs they would still discover new moments. This was a dilemma for me. I loved that they were constantly aware of what was happening, but I did not want a scene that I didn't choreograph to be the final product. I wanted the funny parts to be universally funny, and not just an inside joke. This was a lesson I learned from my undergraduate stage combat teacher, director and friend, Steve Vaughan. Now, I feel strongly that writing a specific score for the scene would have solved many of the problems in this scene. The score should have contained thoughts, actions, breath, and vocals. This was a skill that I was able to develop in my clowning classes during my first and third years.

I invited David to watch show the Monday before we opened, once all the other pieces were freshly choreographed. David saw the piece performed when it still needed

a bit of work. It was nine minutes long, and I knew that it needed to be cut down. I was completely prepared to be open to changes, because I was not satisfied with the tempo of the scene. David's notes about "Beginnings" were that it needed to be cut down to half the length that it was. He also said that both actors were completely indicating everything they were doing, and he was very frustrated with the scene. At this moment, I considered cutting "Beginnings" completely, but I thought it was still salvageable with David's notes. David did not give me an option when he told me to cut down the scene because it was slow and had many unclear moments. He said I needed to make it about five minutes long.

The next step I had to take was telling the actors to help me cut the scene. At the time, since I was still finishing choreographing one piece and tweaking another, I needed the actors to cut the scene for the sake of time. I told them to make the scene move faster by removing unnecessary blocking. They did so, and came back to show me what they had changed. From this point, we began to run it with the cuts and I gave them my notes. I was not extremely pleased with the final product because it was slightly unpredictable, but I did feel the essence of the message we were trying to portray was still there, and it proved to be a valuable piece for the show.

When the show went up, I feared that this scene would not be received well. I felt it was one of the weaker scenes. But the audience responded to this scene. They found moments funny that I had not intended to be humorous. It gave them an opportunity to laugh among so many other heavy scenes.

If I use this scene again when I put this show up in the future, I can see it going in a slightly different direction. Perhaps I would let it take on a less realistic energy. I would like to try the original idea I had before the scene evolved to “Beginnings.” I also might keep this scene and let it evolve in the direction it is already going, while putting up the original scene I wanted to choreograph with the two people bound in conversation while being physically intimate. I think it would be closer to my aesthetic. Overall, I am glad this scene was as successful as it was, keeping in mind that the majority of the members of the audience were college students. The reactions gave me confidence that removing “Beginnings” from the play would have been a mistake.

REMEMBER

This was a scene for which I had most of my ideas before entering rehearsal. I knew I wanted the relationship of the older couple to be established for the first half of the song, and then have the younger couple enter as a memory. I cast Brandon Crowder and Mary Vreeland for their maturity as the older couple and Alison Harazcnak and Joe Carlson for their vibrancy and innocence as the younger couple.

I began the process by explaining the scene to the actors. I had to get into a lot of specifics for Brandon and Mary, mainly because their movements and postures were to be very different from their own. I had to explain in detail the side effects of the medications that Mary’s character was on as well as the traits of the disease itself. I explained that kidney disease leaves its victim completely drained of energy and strength. I also had to go into detail about the process of dialysis. It involves a tube

that is inserted into the patient's abdomen and stays coiled in the peritoneal cavity. This cavity is filled with a solution that is designed to take the place of the kidney. It draws out impurities from the body and retains them in the abdomen until the liquid is drained. The belly must remain full of liquid at all times, making the patient constantly uncomfortable and usually in pain. It severely restricts movement in the torso, and it is comparable to being pregnant. As well as these internal struggles, dialysis patients also wear masks to keep germs away from the open end of the catheter. This is crucial because if germs get into the tube, the patient can suffer from peritonitis. Peritonitis is a dangerously severe and painful infection. (Baxter)

Mary's blocking consisted of unsuccessfully reaching for a cup of tea. She could not reach it for lack of energy and her belly full of dialysis solution. I sat in a chair next to Mary to show her the movement and energy level. Visuals were essential when working with Mary because at times the interpreters had difficulty translating. Brandon helped her by picking up the cup and bringing it to her lips as she drank. He set the cup back down and replaced the mask as she looked at him lovingly. I played the music repeatedly while choreographing because the timing was so important. Each move was very slowly paced and married to specific points in the music. Brandon was extremely helpful in this scene because of his fluency in sign language. I instructed him to give Mary visual cues so that her movements could also be timed with the music. Mary and Brandon were very easy to work with and grasped the movement notes quite quickly.

The next part of the choreography involved a memory sequence. The younger couple entered representing the older couple at an earlier time in their lives. Alison and Joe enter with a sense of youth and wonder at the fact that they are “young again.” I needed to work this section several times with them, because I needed to make it truthful, yet stylized. It began with the two entering from different sides of the stage, seeing each other and jumping into each other’s arms. This changed soon after since the embrace looked too similar to the one in “I Choose Love.” Paul suggested that instead of an embrace, they ought to just touch their hands together and take each other in at arms length. He and I physically demonstrated this move. Once the actors tried this, all of us felt that it was a much stronger choice. This became the final decision. I was able to choreograph most of the intimacy for this piece without physically showing them moves, but there were a few intimate moments that needed to be demonstrated. Paul usually knew what I needed to express to the actors and was very helpful in these moments.

This scene was one of the pieces that could be choreographed in one day. It was finished during the second week of rehearsal. The next step was to marry every action to the music. I went through the scene moment to moment and we found places for the actions to follow the exact rises and falls of the song. Any changes that were made later involved the specificity of the younger couple. Knowing that the younger couple was the most abstract part of the scene, I needed to make Alison and Joe’s movements portray a memory and not a present event. I had them look in wonder at their own

bodies as they entered the stage, and I used breath to emphasize their sheer emotion and wonder at seeing each other young again.

When David came the week before we opened, he gave a few notes about the emotional connection of the older couple. Also, he said that the memory needed to be more potent. I did not have the time to change the choreography for the entire piece, so I worked with Mary and Brandon to establish their emotional connection further. I gave them a few gestures they could use to show their affection for each other. Once we had the energy of the audience and actual space of B72, I felt this scene really came alive.

This was a very personal scene. Not only was the inspiration from a source of two of my greatest role models (my grandparents), but it also hit very close to home for me. This scene is what I see my distant future to be with my husband. I felt that this passion came across to my actors when we were rehearsing it, and it brought a respect and reverence for the piece. One comment I received from a colleague was that “Remember” was the only piece that did not look as if it was something I had experienced. He explained that he could tell the other pieces were events in my life, and this piece seemed more distant than the others. I think this comment was an honest and perceptive piece of feedback. If I use this scene in the future, I will focus on improving that aspect of it.

IN LOVE WITH LOVE

With this plot in mind, I had to cast a woman who could play several different ages. She needed to be about seven years old, nineteen, and in her twenties. When

presenting this scene to David in the early stages, he suggested using some kind of device or hook to age the girl. I decided to use a red scarf. This scarf would prove to be much more than just a device to tell her age. We discovered a much deeper use for it in rehearsals.

The next step was to find a piece of music that would illustrate all of this and still have enough emotion behind it to carry the scene. Paul and I decided on a Sigur Ros song called Saeglopur. It is a six-minute piece that has a lot of dynamic moments within it. The song inspired me to start choreographing as soon as I first heard it, and I knew it would be a great choice.

I decided to cast Catalina Lavalle in this piece as the woman. I knew that she had a very sexual physicality to her and could easily get into a character that needed to flirt with as many men as she could find. Catalina has a great sense of reckless abandon when it comes to emotional commitment. I needed all four men in my cast for this scene, and I knew I would need to find a way to make the men “faceless” in the second portion of the scene. I contemplated using masks or keeping them turned upstage for parts of the scene.

I had a dilemma about scheduling with Catalina. She was also involved in a production of *The Vagina Monologues*, so I was not able to have her in rehearsal as much as she was needed until less than three weeks before the show opened. This made me very nervous, but I had faith that we could pull it off. She was a hard worker and had a vested interest in the scene.

The first day of rehearsing this scene, we had to bring to life the three events that caused the downfall of this woman. We spent a long time discussing these characters before starting the choreography. The story began with the sexual abuse this girl suffered at a young age. I cast Keith Alexander as the young man who abused her. I knew that Keith felt a little strange about having to violate a little girl in this fashion, so I made sure to choreograph the scene with a lot of support and open discussion. I also thought that the audience could get the idea of what happened without showing the entire abuse so I demonstrated to Keith how I wanted him to place his hand on Catalina's knee and run it up the inside of her thigh. I coached him to keep his hand upstage of her leg so it was masked. Once his hand began to slide up her thigh, I told Catalina to freeze and tense her body. These actions told the story that Keith was making her extremely uncomfortable, and the audience could imagine the rest of the story without showing them every detail.

Next, I choreographed the transition into the next situation. Joe Carlson was playing the part of the boyfriend. I had Keith stand and back away from Catalina with his hand outstretched to her, and Joe simultaneously entered and took his place, keeping his hand in the same position after Keith backed off stage. Catalina spun in a circle on the ground as she moved her scarf down around her hips as a belt, symbolizing her age jumping to her later teens. I told her to grab Joe's hand so he could help her up and guide her around the stage without making eye contact with her. He essentially portrayed a neglecting boyfriend from whom Catalina desperately tried to seek attention. He left her and the scene jumped to the girl's early twenties, the party phase.

Catalina spun and brought the scarf around her shoulders like a wrap. Corey, who played her good friend, entered just in time to catch the drunken girl in his arms and brought her to the couch to lie down. As he turned to leave, she grabbed his arm and pulled him down to the floor. I wanted to imply that they had sex while sticking with the abstract theme of the piece. I told the couple to embrace while rolling downstage into a spooning position. As soon as they reached this position, the music changed into a single slow piano sound. The music indicated to me a realization. It was at this point that I had Catalina wake up sober and not know where she was. She grabbed her scarf and turned to leave; disgusted with herself once she realized what had happened.

The next section of the scene consisted of a sequence of the girl running from her own past and being confronted with the memories of the same three men. Each one stepped out in front of her path and trapped her downstage as she disturbingly reacts to them touching her. She pushed them away with a cue from the music and made a decision to turn against men to use sex as a weapon of revenge. This was the end of the blocking for the first rehearsal of this piece. I was very pleased with the progress we had made in such a short time, but I knew we would not be able to return to this piece for a while. Catalina's schedule had many conflicts due to the other show in which she was performing.

I choreographed most of this scene from the stage. I felt I needed to be physically close to the actors, because it kept the energy contained in the space. It also seemed to make the actors more comfortable with the sexually disturbing sequences.

Much of this piece was choreographed under a bit of pressure. I blocked the rest of it in about three rehearsals. Catalina was a wonderful choice for this role. She threw herself into it and made her best effort to understand this character. This piece contained a lot of sexual contact between Catalina and the four men. There was one sequence in which she moved from one man to another after having a sexual encounter with each one. In each of the situations, in order to find specific moves I had to try some myself before allowing Catalina to attempt them. I did this for three reasons. First, the goal was to make her as comfortable as possible, and the best way to do that was to allow her to watch me try the moves before her. I found this very helpful. If I put myself into the choreography first, it showed that each move began as blocking without emotional commitment. Secondly, if I could feel the blocking, it was easier to explain how to make the gestures safer for the actors. Lastly, it allowed her to see exactly how I needed her to move her body before trying to learn the move herself. I felt that this was the fastest and most effective way to choreograph. In some cases I stood in for either Catalina or the men so that each could feel what energy was needed on each side.

I found a few ways to demonstrate specific moments of choreography. For example, at one point, I instructed Catalina to jump into Joe's arms with her back turned to him and slide down his torso. She was to wrap her legs around him to keep herself connected. When I stepped in for her to show them, Joe expressed that he did not know where to place his hands as I slid down. I told him to begin at my waist and slide up my torso as he helped me place my feet back on the ground. I asked Catalina if I could

show him where I wanted his hands by touching her myself. I slid my hands up her torso and framed her breasts with them while explaining to him that directly touching her breasts was not as interesting as almost touching her breasts. For another moment, I wanted Catalina to straddle Corey and undulate on his lap. She did not understand what kind of undulation I meant, so I asked Paul to demonstrate with me so that she could watch me and follow along. This not only gave the actors a visual, but it lightened the mood of the rehearsal as well.

This piece was not finished in the last week when David came to watch rehearsal. However I did receive notes from him that the beginning was too fast and that some moves were muddled. In response to this I took some of the gestures and simplified them in order to make the scenes more clear. We finished the choreography about five days before we opened. I felt very pressed for time for this piece by the end of the rehearsal process. Luckily it came together rather well, and I felt it was strong enough to be the first number of the show. I wanted the show to have a powerful beginning, and this scene was perfect for that.

My friend who was the inspiration for writing this piece was able to come into town to watch the show. It was a very emotional experience for both of us to sit together and watch this scene. It was also interesting to share a real life experience with an audience. Afterwards, the friend told me that seeing the scene was very therapeutic for her. I could not have been given a more powerful compliment.

FANTASY AT THE DMV

At first, this scene started as a movement piece without much of a plot. The more I thought about it, the more I wanted to write a story to go with it. One night, Paul and I created the scenario for “Fantasy at the D.M.V.” Mary Vreeland, a movement graduate student and one of my cast members, is older than the rest of the cast. I wanted to involve a sexual piece that did not discriminate against age, gender, or people with disabilities. Mary is deaf and communicates with sign language. Instead of ignoring her condition, I wanted to showcase it. Upon researching Anne Bogart, I found a statement that helped form an idea for a scene; “If we embrace rather than avoid stereotype, if we enter the container and push against its limits, we are testing our humanity and our wakefulness”(Bogart 111). I created a scene that began with a very chaotic and noisy scene in an office. Then I wanted Mary to enter the space and have the actors continue moving as they were, but now completely without sound. This would place the audience in the mind of a deaf person.

Once Mary’s character became comfortable in the space, I wanted her to begin to fantasize about all of the people in the room. She would see the couples around her and in her mind see them perform sexual acts. The rest of the scene involved movement that I choreographed using all of the information I learned during the semester we created mass battle scenes. I needed to take each couple and move them around the space in interesting patterns and rhythms. During the first rehearsal, we only choreographed the first minute of the song. There were eight people in the cast, and it took more time than I had planned to give each person their specific choreography. I

also found it difficult to control the energy of the room with such an intense piece. It became very noisy and chaotic many times. This actually helped the piece when we were running it but made for unorganized rehearsals. I hope to improve this aspect of my directing for the future.

The first part of the scene involved a kind of partner switching which involved the cast being manipulated by Mary. She causes the rest of the actors to move around the space and make contact with all of the other people in the scene. There were many moments in which I asked the actors to create gestures for themselves. Upon watching what they created, I was able to change minor details to make them more emotionally charged and filled with tension. At the end of this sequence, I choreographed the three women to come to the middle of the stage, link legs and caress each other with every part of their bodies. I did not need to physically demonstrate anything for this portion of the scene. The women had no problem doing this. I needed to keep reminding them to lead with their chests and hips instead of their extremities. This small note transformed the movements so that they were much more sexual and intense. Then I told the women to pull the men into the clump on the floor. This developed into the portion we called “the Amoeba Orgy” (and later “the Amorgy”), which was named after the exercise we used during the first rehearsal involving group contact improvisation. After this, Mary joined the group in the center and the intensity continued to mount until the group exploded into chaos. It was this chaos section that took the longest to choreograph. I wanted it to demonstrate unbridled sexual energy and the freedom that comes from actions that are free of consequence. This was fun to explore for all of us.

The chaos section was difficult to choreograph and took a lot of focus. I began by giving the cast destinations and telling them to take an indirect path to get to each one. Once the movement patterns were discovered, I worked with each person to find a sexual gesture during the travel and at the destination. I wanted the actors' movements to create contrast for the big picture. If one couple was on the ground, then another was in the air. This helped create levels and contrast. I also directed each of the actors' rhythms to be constantly changing. If one couple spun quickly, another couple would have a slow and sustained gesture. This technique kept the focus constantly switching around the stage to different interactions. I also wanted the actors to include chairs into their choreography. I instructed each of the actors to shift or move the chairs at least five times throughout the piece so that the actions appeared unintentional. We discovered much of this choreography with improvisation that I molded and set so that the actors took the same paths every night. We also rehearsed several emergency gestures for each actor in case there was an accidental delay.

We rehearsed this scene at least twice a week every week. However for two of those weeks, Mary was not able to be at rehearsal and this held us back in many aspects. I had to choreograph the piece around her and plug her in when we were finished. This made it awkward for Mary because she was not a part of the process. The rest of the cast grew to be more comfortable with each other during the rehearsals for this piece, and Mary was not able to be a part of that. I felt that we had created an ensemble, and Mary was on the outside of it. This was disappointing for the cast and me since the ensemble was such an integral part of the rehearsal development.

This scene was incredibly sexual and involved intense physical contact. One night in particular, there was so much sexual tension in the rehearsal room that the energy was beginning to take on a chaotic tone. I took this opportunity to talk to the cast about the topic of my thesis. I explained to them that my thesis was not about directing and writing a show, but the safety and confidence of my actors. I also discussed with them the dangers of sexual content in acting scenes. I told them that what they did outside of rehearsal was up to them, and this was just movement choreography. I advised them to take the sexual energy we built in rehearsal home to their significant others and to pay attention to feelings brought on by the show. This discussion brought on a kind of reality check for the cast, and I was glad to have addressed it.

We worked on this piece more than any other piece because it involved such complex movement patterns and techniques. I needed to give each person a place to travel, different partners with which to interact, and a physical gesture to perform. One note I kept repeating to them was to take the “dance” out of their movements. I did not want this to look like a dance recital, so we took certain dance moves and changed them so that they were supporting the story. This was a challenging scene to block, and the cast helped me by suggesting sexual gestures that felt natural for their positioning. This collaboration made the process much easier because I was able to focus on the placements of the bodies as well as the stage pictures. It felt good to give responsibility to the cast members, and they seemed to appreciate the opportunity to follow their own impulses.

When David came to watch this scene the week before we opened, he gave me several notes. A few notes were about cleaning up certain moments. He also told me that the piece either needed to be specifically choreographed to the music (Peter Gabriel's "The Heat") or the movements needed to be pulled back so that it was not so "dancy." He told me that this scene took a jarring directional turn from the other pieces, which were about intimacy. He expressed to me that nothing was unexpected and that the scene should take the audience on a journey. The scene did not have a proper ending when we showed it to David, so I believed that once that was established it would provide the scene with the clarity and closure it needed. I also felt that once it was completed, the journey would be much more apparent.

During the last week, we tweaked the scene so that it could be more specific overall. We also rehearsed the ending so that it would be stronger. One night, Paul and I discussed the fact that the choreography was completely solid with all of the cast members; it just needed the unbridled sexual energy we found in the early rehearsals. I decided to have a talk with the cast at this time. I refreshed their memories about the early rehearsal when I had to literally distract them from going out of control with the sexual tension in the room. I challenged them to bring that energy back to the scene, and told them to allow themselves to be aroused by the scene. I told them to start with the "Amorgy" to which we then added deep voiced breathing. This really seemed to intensify the entire remainder of the scene. From this point on, the scene was always exciting to watch, and this became our warm up for each performance night.

I CHOOSE LOVE

I wrote this scene before finding the music, and it was one of the only pieces that did not change to fit the music I chose. The music had to compliment the scene exactly because I did not want to change the story or the message. I chose a song from the movie *Cinema Paradiso*. It is called “Love Theme For Nata.” Looking back, I think I would have chosen a longer piece if I had more time to look. This piece was a little over four minutes, and it could have been longer to establish some of the characters a little more.

I cast Brandon Crowder as the man in this scene. I felt that he was the best choice of the four men in my cast to play a tortured husband. Joy Newsome was cast as the wife because I knew she had strong emotions to add to the scene. Alison Haracznak was my choice for the other woman. I wanted this woman to look a bit younger and to have a sense of not realizing the consequences of a situation like this. She needed to be a girl in love that did not seem malicious, but she also needed to be mature enough to know the magnitude of the relationship.

I did not tell the actors the exact origin of this scene right away. I wanted them to own the scene before I told them it was based on something that was very real. I felt that if they knew who the characters represented, they would have been distracted when trying to own the scene. I began by describing the scenario to them. We then discussed the relationship between the man and his wife. I told them I wanted the marriage to be safe and comfortable, but devoid of passion. I directed Brandon to make his character so uncomfortable with his marriage that he did not feel he could be himself around his

wife. I told Brandon we needed to see an actual physical change in his body when his wife walked into the room. Joy's character was content with the marriage, but only because she did not know that anything better existed. Later, when choreographing the end of the scene, Joy found a moment that allowed her character a realization that this was the best option, and I kept this as a part of the scene because it gave her character more dimension.

Next I described the relationship between Alison and Brandon's characters. I told them that they fell in love and tried to stop it from evolving, but they had such strong feelings for each other that they were consumed with emotions. We discussed that neither had experienced this kind of love before meeting each other. I told them that when they touched, it had to be so intense that it brought them to tears. I wanted to portray the moment of the couple being in public and having to keep their love a secret. I explained that the energy between them needed to be electrical even if they were not touching.

I began to choreograph the scene after the character discussions by blocking the section with Brandon and Joy at home on a typical day. I did this by playing the music and giving the actors blocking to follow the music cues right from the beginning. I felt that the music dictated many of the details for the scene, and constantly referring to the song made the blocking easier. Then I blocked the scene with Alison and Brandon having a secret meeting. I told Joy to watch as I choreographed this scene so that she could find pain for her later scene.

When I blocked Brandon and Alison, the scene called for a very intense running leap by Alison into Brandon's arms, which led into a passionate kiss. Since I had already introduced the intensity level language from teaching "Water Meets Water" in the first rehearsal, I was able to tell them exactly what kind of kiss I wanted. I told Alison to run and jump into Brandon's arms, wrapping her legs around him in an emotional embrace. Then Brandon was to make a half spin while holding her, which led directly into the kiss. The kissing was to begin at an intensity level of a 9 and keep contact while spinning again. When the music cue came to let her down, they were to gaze at each other and for a few seconds before Alison was to leave the stage. I directed them to feel as if they had to tear themselves apart. The actors were very responsive to the intensity language. It helped them keep a confidence in the choreography so that they could concentrate on the acting of the scene.

This scene was the most developed in my mind before walking into rehearsal, so the blocking for it went faster than the others. The skeleton was mostly finished after one rehearsal, but the acting was one of the most intense of all the pieces, so I needed to focus on making the emotions real and not forced. Also, the movement language I chose was more dramatic than a realistic piece of theatre. I told the actors to make each move larger and more sweeping without making it melodramatic. When actors are moving to music, the choreography cannot be dancing but it also has to be a stylized form of acting. The metaphor I gave the actors was "Shakespeare for movement". I also had to marry the movement to the music that I had chosen. When I explained this to the cast, they understood, but Brandon was the best at really finding moments in the music that

told him when and how to move. He had an extensive dance background that certainly helped in this area.

I needed to coach Alison about keeping her feet grounded during this piece. She had some mannerisms that came across as very young. These mannerisms worked in the teenager scene, but she needed to play a completely different character for this. I had to keep reminding her to keep her arms at her sides to stop them from wandering and rocking back and forth. At the same time I told her to focus on keeping her feet more firmly planted when she paced. She worked on these things, because by the end of the rehearsal process she seemed more naturally grounded.

David Leong came to see this scene about three weeks before opening, and we never discussed any changes, so I continued in the same direction. I had to change some blocking when we moved to B72 because it is such a different space than our rehearsal space. For example, I needed to move the embrace with Alison and Brandon downstage because it seemed far away in B72. Other than that, it did not change dramatically.

When David came back to see the rehearsal the week before we opened, he had a few suggestions. He told me a few things that I knew needed fixing, such as the transitions and the button on the ending. He also gave me a suggestion about Brandon's character thinking about the other woman while he is having sex with his wife. He suggested that I stage a love scene in which Brandon's mind is wandering to the other woman. I understood what David was trying to say, and I gave the idea a lot of thought. However, in the end, I decided that it would change the story of the scene. I did not

want Brandon's character to be thinking about the other woman while making love to his wife because that would have made his character seem shallower. I also did not believe that this was the case for this situation because I wanted to portray the notion that Brandon's character was torn in many ways. If he were thinking about having sex with Alison while having sex with his wife, it may have read to the audience that his relationship with Alison was about sex and not love. The scene is about love, and obstacles that get in the way of love. It was for this reason that I decided not to make this change. Although even if I had wanted to, I did not have the time to make such a foundational alteration in the story.

We were able to use all of David's other notes. I changed the transitions to make them smoother, and I adjusted the timing for the ending so that the actors had less time in the final embrace. Both of these things were minor changes, but I felt they fixed the clarity problem as best as I could with my particular time restraints.

I was very happy with the way this scene turned out. It was personal to me, and I felt I put a lot of my aesthetic into it. The actors could feel how important this scene was, and made many efforts to do the scene justice. When I watched the reactions of the audience members, I saw many tears. I could only hope that this was because they related to the characters and felt for them. Nobody wins in a situation like this, and that was the message I wanted to show the audience. I was moved every time I watched it.

JOINED AT THE HIP

I cast Catalina and Corey as the two actors in this scene because Corey had dance experience and Catalina was small and had strong talent in sharing centering. I predicted that this scene would have the most physically strenuous choreography of all the pieces. First, Catalina, Corey, Paul and I sat down and discussed the scene, and divided it into two parts. The first part consisted of movements under the sheet and maneuvering each other around the stage while being connected at the hips, and the second part was the traumatic separation and possible reconnection of the two characters.

I wanted to create the bond between the two characters before separating them, and majority of the early rehearsals were dedicated to this. We created a scene for the actors that took place under a sheet. I wanted this to look like a sexual act that was slightly hidden and suggestive. The actors were very open about being physically close to each other. This made the scene much easier to choreograph with more options to explore. We choreographed about three minutes to establish their relationship. Much of this was improvisational exploration of body positions and shared centering. I took the positions and created a short and playful scene. The sheet kept in constant contact with both of them throughout this part. My hopes were to rehearse this piece enough to make it look effortless for the actors since it was such a difficult piece. I wanted the characters to move together as if they were never separate beings.

In the middle of the scene, I wanted these two characters to “accidentally” detach. I taught Catalina how to do a backwards flip over Corey’s back. This flip

separated the two, and they were forced to drop the sheet on the floor between them.

This led into the second part of the scene. I wanted to showcase their codependence the moment they became separated. My idea for this was to make the two characters suddenly blind and unable to stand up. In order to prepare them for this, I had them play a game of Hunter/Hunted. In this game, Catalina attempted to find Corey while they both kept their eyes closed, forcing them to use other senses. From this game, we found several things that were used for the choreography. First, we found that Corey was trying to find Catalina until he came across the sheet. When he grabbed the sheet, he tried to find the end of it, desperately hoping to find her at the other end of it. He put the sheet on his hips and placed himself in one of the positions that we saw earlier when they were connected. Realizing that she was not there, he threw the sheet across the stage in despair. Catalina felt the sheet brush across her hand, and picked it up. She desperately tries to find him on the other end of the sheet, and finds nothing. From this game, we discovered that the sheet was a wonderful tool to use throughout the rest of the scene.

From this point, I wanted to make the scene a bit more clear, so I suggested that when Corey threw the sheet across the stage, that he felt betrayed that she let was not at the end of it. The sheet became a symbol for their relationship. At this point, a story was beginning to emerge clearly. Two people were so desperately in love that they could not see anything beyond their own relationship. They were completely codependent and happy this way. Once some traumatic event occurs (perhaps a fight), they both lost sight of each other in the situation. When Corey came back to the sheet,

or “relationship,” he found that she was not there and blamed her for giving up on them. In reality she was trying to get back to the relationship but found it too late. At this point, she was desperately trying to find him and fix things, not understanding why he threw the relationship in her face.

During another improvisational exploration, Catalina found Corey and tried get into one of the old positions with him. He denied her and pushed her away which ended the scene with the couple remaining apart. This exploration moved us all to tears. At this point, I knew I could use a lot of what we had found together if I could make it all more clear and specific. So the four of us discussed the story behind what happened in the exploration. We decided that when Catalina reached Corey, he was so blinded by his pain that he did not want to see her. Catalina was so desperately happy to have found him that all she could do was cling to him, which was really just pushing him farther away emotionally. It was a case of hopeless miscommunication, an event that reminded me of a relationship I had once. I was excited about this discovery because I knew that people would be able to empathize with these two characters. These people were deeply in love but could not see past their own needs.

Once we had this wonderful foundation for the scene, we were not able to rehearse it for about two weeks due to conflicts in the cast. Also, one of the cast members had health problems that made such a physical scene difficult to perform without pain. This was an unfortunate circumstance, but we were so enamored by the scene that we felt it was strong as it was. I take full responsibility for this mistake.

When David came to see our rehearsal the week before opening, he saw this scene and did not understand any of it. The relationship between the two characters was unclear and the scene took such a drastic turn of mood that he felt it did not support the rest of the show in style. His suggestions for repairing the scene were so drastic that it would have been impossible to fix them before opening. He therefore advised that we cut the scene altogether. My first instinct was complete panic because this scene was one of my favorites. I also knew it would break the hearts of the two actors who had worked so hard to find these amazing emotions. After David left the theatre, Paul and I discussed our options and we both agreed that we did not have the time we needed to fix all the unclear spots. I addressed the cast that night and told them our situation. I felt that I had to approach this conversation carefully. I wanted to involve all of them in the decision to cut the scene. Reluctantly, we all agreed that our only logical option was to cut “Joined at the Hips” from the show. This night was the last time we ever saw this piece performed.

I know that I will use the ideas that came forward during the rehearsals of this scene. What we saw was far too strong to forget, and I feel certain that “Joined at the Hips” will find its way onto the stage in the future. It saddens me that we were not able to share the experience with anyone outside our cast. At the same time, I feel lucky to have experienced such a powerful piece of theatre, even without an audience.

PAIN OF GLASS

When I cast this piece, I wanted two people that physically looked very different. I cast Joy Newsome and Joe Carlson. Joy has very dark skin and Joe is very fair. This proved to add a lot to the aesthetic quality of this piece. At the first rehearsal of this piece, I tried to find qualities of movement for the two actors that would make them seem even more different as if they came from completely different worlds. During this first rehearsal alone, the plot of the scene changed about five times. Each time, we made an extremely complex story that was difficult to portray clearly. Finally, I choreographed a scene that involved two people meeting each other for the first time and trying to touch, but discovering a pane of glass that separates them from physical contact. Not having the actual glass, the relationship became the most interesting thing about the scene. This gave me the idea to wait until the glass was made before blocking the scene.

About two weeks later, the glass arrived half made. Originally, the plans were to make a pane of glass that was on a platform with wheels so that it could stand up independently and travel with little effort from the actors. The glass that Paul brought to the rehearsal was just a plexi glass board with a wooden frame. I took one look at it and fell in love with the possibilities. The entire scene changed in that moment. I gave the glass to the actors and we began to choreograph a much simpler and more moving scene. We found several pictures with the glass that were very beautiful and powerful and formed a scene around the pictures.

Together, we made a story for the two people. It was about a couple that lived happily with the glass between them. It was a part of their lives. The glass was maneuvered with them throughout their usual day. They shared intimate moments and played with the glass between them the entire time. Then the energy between them turned into a strong sexual energy, and they began to notice the glass. They both tried to keep the glass a part of the sexual act, but Joy's character began to get frustrated with the fact that she could not directly touch Joe. We decided that she turned away in frustration, and decided to try several endings in our explorations of the scene. We created several endings, but the strongest one involved Joe trying to get Joy to come back to the glass. When he could not succeed at this, he left the glass for her to carry. She grabbed it and tried to pick it up but failed. She could not carry the glass by herself. At this point, she begged him to come back and help her. He gives in to her pleading and comes back to the glass, where they apologize, forgive and comfort each other. The scene ends with a similar picture that began it. After we found the story line, I told the actors to take the glass and find interesting ways to work with it. As I watched them, I would give them pictures they could make with their bodies and the glass. This provided the blocking for the scene when we connected the pictures.

I sat down with the actors and we discussed a tangible symbol that the glass portrayed for them. They were both so emotionally connected to the glass, and I wanted to make the prop a tangible metaphor. We all agreed that the glass was symbolic of what their relationship was. It was a relationship filled with conflict, but a conflict that they learned to incorporate into their lives, such as a disability. They were

happy with the way that they lived and the difficulties that were unique to them. They lived with a “pane of glass” between them. This couple had a challenge within the relationship, and they developed a trust in each other. They knew that no matter what happened, they would choose to stay together no matter how difficult the challenge became. In the scene, Joy got frustrated with the challenge and turned away for a brief time, and Joe kept reminding her of the promise they made to each other. He then got frustrated at her for turning away and handed her the “problem” for her to deal with herself. She had no choice but to take it from him because the problem could not go away by simply ignoring it. Finally, she begged for forgiveness and tried to get him to come back to the relationship.

What made this scene so strong for us was the fact that we each had our own interpretations of what the glass represented for us. I really loved this because despite the fact that it was so specific for my actors and me, the audience could see the scene and interpret it in a way that was personal to each of them. When David came to see this scene the week before we opened, he gave a few notes about the specificity of the details. He said that this scene was one of our strongest scenes. I agreed with this. As we worked the final week, we were able to make each choice more clear, and this scene turned out to be one of the most talked about scenes of the show.

THE PERFORMANCE

On opening night, the technical elements of the show were just about ready for the opening and we were still trying to get all the sound and lighting cues right for the

special performance for David Leong. There was a scheduling conflict with my own show and the performance of a guest artist. For this reason, we did a run of the show right before the actual opening so that David could watch the show with all of the complete details. I had mixed feelings about this because I knew the energy of the actors with an audience would change the show, but at this point it was too late to change any of that and I would rather that David watched a live performance as opposed to a video of one.

Once the run was over, my technicians were able to rehearse some of their cues before we opened the house. At this point, I was very calm, knowing that my job was for the most part finished and that it belonged to my actors now. I welcomed the audience as they entered, and was amazed at the sheer amount of people that arrived. At the first show alone we had about sixty people, which proved to be the smallest audience of the entire run. I was extremely surprised by this since I did not advertise my show as well as I could have. Word of mouth proved to be more effective in this case.

The show began and I sat back to watch with a sense of relaxation and pride. I was very happy with the product, and I was proud of my actors. Clearly there were things that could have been better, but that is the case with every show. I worked harder than I ever had to get this play up and running, and I felt that my hard work paid off. To be honest, the best part about watching our show was the fact that I had finally found the confidence to believe in myself as an artist. I was proud of my work and the way I

worked with my actors. I had learned about my aesthetic as well as where I stood in my journey as a person.

The fact that the reactions from the audience were positive was not what made me so satisfied that I had done what I wanted to do. I heard people asking the people around them what they thought each piece said to them. I heard comments such as, “What was your favorite piece, mine was...” At this moment, I felt that I had succeeded in making a piece of theatre that could open up conversations about life and love after the show was finished. What more could I ask for as an artist? My work did not disappear for everyone when they left the theatre. People were asking me what my interpretations of certain pieces were and sharing their own interpretations. Some people even set up appointments to speak to me about how the show had spoken to them. Many of these were people I had never met. I felt these were some of the best compliments that I could have received, because some comments were about what they felt was lacking in the show. All of the feedback was helpful, and I was open to it.

The next three performances were even better attended than the first one. Not only did we have to seat people on the floor, but there were some people that even had to be placed around the sides of the stage and stand in the back of the room. Overall, there were about two hundred and fifty people that came to see the show, including repeat audience members.

CHAPTER 5: Developing a Technique

The following chapter explains the usefulness of some of the techniques as applied to acting. All of my experiences with my thesis and other workshops have led to a few conclusions about teaching acting classes in the future. I plan to use some of these exercises in my own movement and acting classes.

One of the most rewarding outcomes of my show was watching the actors involved growing as artists. During the beginnings of our process, one of my actors came up to me at the end of the night and told me that he had never really thought about what it meant to be sexy. This actor is possibly one of the most sexually attention-grabbing men in the theatre department. For this particular actor to make such a statement was very interesting to me. Instantly, I thought about the impact of such work getting actors to be more comfortable with their sexuality.

This made me think back to when I was an undergraduate at Niagara University. I was very self-conscious with almost everything about myself in the beginning of my sophomore year. I took stage combat that year, and fell in love with it. It was fashioned more as an acting class than a skills class. It brought out many emotions in me that I had never tried to explore. Showing rage and anger was empowering for me and the other actors in my class. It helped me become a better actor because of the

confidence that it brought to me. So much of acting has to do with being vulnerable and exposing parts of the soul to other people. This became much easier after an entire year of physical risk taking and exploration of such strong emotions.

I began to think that if that was the case for me and the other actors, then it should have the same effect to explore lust in the same way as violence. I kept this in mind during the course of our rehearsals. By the end of the show, I had watched the actors grow much. Other teachers began to approach me and tell me how much my actors had changed in the classes my cast members were taking. The actors seemed to be more confident and really began to stand out.

One faculty member gave me an analysis of one of the actresses in my show before our rehearsals began. She told me that this particular actress was very good, but never stood out. As a teacher she had no choice but to watch her, and when she did, the girl was always doing good work. It was just that she never caught her eye unless she made the point to look at her. After the show went up, people were telling me that they could not keep their eyes off of this same actress. She was so present in all of the pieces-especially in the piece that involved the entire cast-that at times people watched her more than any one. I felt that the techniques and mere exploration of the subject matter had a lot to do with her growth.

I feel strongly that when I develop a movement curriculum, I will involve sections of both sex and violence. I feel that it would be a unique and useful approach to the essential risk-taking portion of a movement class. I feel that this theory was proven as helpful and effective for my actors.

CHAPTER 6: Principles of Movement Direction

There are many lessons that I learned throughout the directing process of our show. Many of these lessons were first taught to me in my choreography and movement classes with David Leong, Aaron Anderson and Patti D'Beck. Every time I was confronted with a difficult situation, I decided to rely on my instincts and the knowledge that had been tested and retested in my educational process. Through these circumstances I learned that my three years at Virginia Commonwealth University have well prepared me for the next steps in my career.

DIRECTING/CHOREOGRAPHY

I found most of the lessons in movement that were taught in my classes were applicable to directing. The following is a list of the principles of movement that were applied to *Reflections of Red in a Mirror of Desire*.

- ▶ When choreographing a stylization of time passing, a simple turn can indicate a jump to the future. There needs to be something to show this transition. This also applies to a flashback, dream or fantasy. For example, in the piece, "In Love With Love," I choreographed three instances in which Catalina turned in a circle to signify time passing.

- ▶ I have found that many times when choreographing sexual blocking for younger actors, it is necessary to demonstrate a move to the actors. This can be used to lighten the mood as well as to instruct. Many times, this can make the actors feel much more comfortable with the content if they watch someone else treat it as blocking. I used this technique with almost every piece in the show. There are potential dangers with this approach, and being observant of the energy of the actors is the key to this technique.
- ▶ When choreographing a sexual scene, try to keep the mood comfortable with humor and understanding. If the choreographer shows that they are embarrassed, the actors will be too.
- ▶ Dynamics of movement need to be utilized. This can involve a change of tempo, rhythm, energy and speed. This was most apparent during “In Love with Love” and “Fantasy at the D.M.V.” In both situations, I choreographed tempo and speed changes for the actors to add a dynamic nature to the scenes. More specifically, if one couple performing a move that was long and drawn out, I would choreograph the next move to be quick and short.
- ▶ Preparing for each rehearsal is essential as well as the ability to completely change the preparations. Ann Bogart states, “If you don’t get beyond the homework, the outcome will become academic. Academic art simply validates the research. It does not challenge it” (Bogart 133).

- ▶ One should pay attention to the focus so that the eyes follow the important events. Tone down the events that are supposed to be in the background. There were several occasions in which I choreographed background movement to be smaller or slower so that the focus could stay with the main action, such as in “In Love With Love.”
- ▶ Sometimes simplicity is best as far as plot goes. The simpler the story, the more the audience will relate to the characters. Many times I found that the concepts were becoming too complicated, and when they were simplified there was much more success. The best example of this was “Pain of Glass.” We started with such a complicated storyline and kept running into problems making everything clear. Once we made the plot simpler, the scene was not only much easier to choreograph, but it was more universal and moving.
- ▶ Imagery is a useful key when it comes to making stage pictures. Some of the concepts for entire pieces began with an image. For example, “Pain of Glass” started with an image I obtained from a piece I watched at the Lincoln Center Library by Matthew Bourne involving two dancers and a glass door.
- ▶ Expect the unexpected, and be ready to work with it. Aaron Anderson refers to these as “Happy Accidents.” Our glass set piece was a problem for weeks until it was half built. Paul brought it to rehearsal and we decided to use it without finishing the original plans. It turned out that the unexpected problem became an asset.

- ▶ Breath can be just as expressive as words. The audience breathes with the actors; so choreographing breath is vital to the scene. Every scene contained moments in which the most effective choreography was an intake or outtake of breath. For example, in “Fantasy at the D.M.V.” I told the cast to breathe heavily during the “Amorgy.” This relieved some of the tension that had been building for the cast and the audience as well.
- ▶ Keeping comedy the same every night is very difficult while simultaneously trying to react to new events in the moment. The actors have to react as if each moment is a discovery while being faithful to the choreography. Scoring can make the scene more specific and repeatable.
- ▶ Movement to music has to match the style of the song (For example, long sweeping movements as opposed to short and quick moves). When choreographing “I Choose Love,” I had to ask my actors for larger gestures because the song was more dramatic than some of the others. In “Fantasy at the D.M.V.” the movements had to be filled with a sexual energy that was much more intense, and this was supported by the music (“The Heat” by Peter Gabriel).
- ▶ Sometimes letting go of a piece for the greater good of the entire show is necessary, no matter how much attachment there is to the scene. We did not have enough time to polish “Joined at the Hips” in time for the performance, and we decided that the best decision was to cut it. The rest of the pieces would have

been neglected in the process of trying to get it where it needed to be for the show.

- ▶ Sexual energy appears and disappears, and being able to harness it is the key to getting the scene to go from good to great. “Fantasy at the D.M.V.” began as a very sexually charged scene when we started to choreograph it. As the rehearsal progressed, it became choreography and lost the intensity. To solve this, I needed to have a talk with the cast to get them excited about the scene again. I not only gave them permission to be sexually aroused by the scene, I told them that being sexually aroused was the goal. The run after this talk was the best one I had seen to that date and the energy stayed close to this level for the remainder of the run. In her book, *A Director Prepares*, Anne Bogart states, “You cannot create results; you can only create the conditions in which something might happen.” (Bogart 124)
- ▶ The mass battle rules apply to other forms of movements of groups of people. For example:
 - The actors should take the most complicated path to the destination unless the choreography calls for specific timing that indicates a quicker arrival. This can be a tool for placing bodies into aesthetically complex patterns.
 - Make sure the focus gets moved around the room and that it does not stick with one person, unless they are supposed to steal focus. This can

be done by diminishing the size, speed or location of movements that are going to be considered “background.”

- Make sure that all dimensions of the stage are used, upstage, downstage, stage right, stage left, and vertical levels.
- It is not about the techniques that take place between two actors, it is the movement that joins them together. The actors need to keep traveling instead of stopping for long drawn out interactions.

Along with each of these lessons there were also aspects of directing that I was not ready to handle, and unfortunately did not handle well. The majority of my education that I have received at VCU has been focused on movement, and many times there are claims that movement students inherently learn just as much directing as we learn movement, since they are one in the same. I feel that my movement background has prepared me to pursue directing, however there are many aspects to directing this show that I was nowhere near ready to handle. I knew that writing, directing, choreographing, and producing a production from start to finish is much more complicated than I was prepared to handle, and I was willing to completely throw myself into this ocean of an experience and try to find my way to the surface. My mentors warned me that I would be overwhelmed by the experience and they were absolutely right, but I still loved every moment of it.

I was not adequately prepared to deal with the technicalities of the production. Lighting, sound, space, set design and construction, programs, scheduling, costumes,

and storage were all decisions that I had to make from little or no experience. In most cases that I did not ask for help, it was simply that I did not know who to ask. The mistake I made was that I should have just gone to my mentors for advice on these and other things. In retrospect, I wish that I had taken a few directing courses during my experience at VCU. I was not able to express the specifics of what I wanted for the technical sides of the show. The production fell together with the help of the cast and people involved in the process, but it caused a lot of anxiety and even a few actual stress and steroid-induced panic attacks. I developed a new understanding and respect for directors.

All of these positive and negative experiences were extremely helpful to my overall process. I rediscovered a love that I have for directing, and plan on pursuing this in my career. I also have a better idea at what I need to work on in order to have an easier time with the next project I attempt. As much as the negative aspects of this experience were painful, they helped me discover my strengths and weaknesses. Every lesson I take with me is just the beginning foundation on which I plan to build for the rest of my life.

COLLABORATION

As I explained earlier, the collaborative element of my process was not adequate when it came to seeking the help, support and opinions of outside sources, mainly my mentors. I did not include them as was expected of me. The collaborative element that I did use occurred among my assistant director, my actors, my friends and me. I do not

claim to have done this project entirely by myself. Paul Wurth was with me every step of the way, supporting and giving feedback and input where needed. I was constantly asking him for his opinion every time we finished a sequence. I also gave my actors the freedom to give input when I was working with them. It was a personal choice, and I preferred to work this way. I enjoyed the energy it created and I felt that the actors could consider themselves a part of the creative process.

Collaboration is important in the creative process because it is very intimidating to take on a project of this magnitude with only one set of eyes correcting. This does not work well because once the show has been in rehearsals for a while, the people watching and involved become used to the scene as it is. For this reason, I asked David Leong to come in to watch a few rehearsals so that he could give me outside feedback. Some of his notes were very helpful and I agreed fully with them. Some notes opposed to my own aesthetic so I made the decision not to use them, and other notes were completely valid but could not be changed due to the time constraint. In the instances where I chose not to institute the letter of the note, I still tried where possible to adhere to the essence of his advice.

During my rehearsal process, I did not have Patti D'Beck and Aaron Anderson come in to watch any of my rehearsals. There are a few reasons for this. Upon evaluation of my own journal entries and statements of philosophy from my early years at graduate school, I found several entries that contained statements pertaining to my lack of faith and confidence in my own work. Due to the specific dynamic of the other students in the movement program, I never had the opportunity to utilize all of the

lessons I had obtained. This year was my chance to take initiative and apply my talents in order to create something that I would be proud to admit was my work. This is one of the larger reasons for taking on such a difficult task and feeling the need to work as independently as possible. After my show was finished, I was not only proud to admit it was my work, but I was proud of my process that was founded in the many lessons instilled by my mentors. However, during the run of my show, I suffered from a panic attack that caused me to lash out at my mentors. At the time, I looked at my project with a bias, and this clouded my view of the whole picture. It took the rest of my final semester for me to step back and see the situation from all sides. I have now taken the entire experience as a lesson that was essential for me to learn.

I can see how having even more feedback from my other mentors could have been helpful, even though at the time I was unaware of the consequences of these actions. At the weekly movement meeting two weeks before our show opened, David told the movement students that if one is going to invite a guest to watch a rehearsal, one must make sure that he or she has something for that guest to see. I took this advice and waited until I had six finished scenes out of the seven to invite David to watch. It was because of this that I was extremely overwhelmed by the notes that I had received from David the week before we opened, since by then I was still choreographing one of the scenes. By this time, it was too late to have any other notes given to me by outside sources. I would not have been able to apply any of the notes; since I did not even have time to fix many that David had given to me.

Looking back, as a collaborator, I should have had a meeting and made a schedule with all three of my mentors. I needed to first find out what was expected of me once rehearsals began. If it was the choreographing process they wanted to see, I could have set up a time in the very beginning of the process for them to observe. If it was a finished product they wanted to see, then I should have set up a time for them to come in during that last week of rehearsals. Unfortunately, I was entirely consumed by the show once we started rehearsals, and this mistake led me to be forgetful of the entire picture. Despite this fact, I am not ashamed of my product. I only wanted to create something that could be a documented record of my own progress and growth.

CREATIVE PROCESS

Much of my creative process is based on compassion and support for my actors. I want to take care of them, because I feel that having positive and supportive energy within the company can improve the quality of the show. If the actors are comfortable with me and with each other, they are more willing to take more risks on their own. Intimidation, another way of accomplishing this result, is useful but I have not yet become comfortable with this method of working. I have experienced both kinds of energies, and I have found that different people respond to different kinds of approaches. I feel that nurturing and inspiring my actors with my energy creates the environment in which I am most comfortable working. I tend to get distracted by negative energy.

One evening, one of my actors came in obviously upset at another actress. As everybody was warming up, I realized that they had both left the room, when I left the room to find them, I heard them crying and screaming at each other down the hall. At this moment, I had to make a decision. As much as I appreciated the fact that they took their problems away from the cast, I knew that this would affect the work for the rest of the evening. I decided that since neither of them was needed right away, that I could give them a few minutes to calm down before interrupting. A few minutes later, I went over to them and told them that we were going to begin the run in ten minutes. They both said that they would be ready, and apologized. I asked them if they were all right, and hugged them both. One of them cried in my arms, thanking me for understanding. Even though it was three days before opening and we were in a crunch for time, I needed to take the time for these actors. They told me that they would be fine for the run, and I told them to get some water and join us when they were ready.

The rest of the run did not seem affected by this event. I feel that the worst thing I could have done was to be upset that they were bringing their problems to rehearsal. I had spent a lot of time pushing them to use whatever energy they were filled with on any given day to be applied to the work. Since sexual energy is so primal, I find it can stem from many other forms of emotions. Anger and frustration into passion and lust, as we discovered early on in rehearsals, is one of the easiest and most direct conversions.

As part of my compassionate energy, I joke with my actors a lot when directing and choreographing. I make fun of myself, especially when sex is involved. This takes

a topic that can be embarrassing and transforms it into something lighter and more accessible.

As always, strengths can also be weaknesses. My compassion and empathy for my team can come back to hurt me. Many times, I make many allowances, and it becomes expected. Because of this, my students and actors ask for more than they actually need. At this point in my life, I am not comfortable with saying “no” as often as I should. I know that this will change as I get older and have more experience, but for now I am allowing that process take its natural course. Also, I have a tendency to become so consumed by a project that I have an inability to see beyond my work, and I neglect friends and family and forget to ask for help. This, as I mentioned earlier, was my unintentional downfall in the aftermath of my thesis production. I do feel that I have made progress in both of these areas, since I did ask for help during the rehearsal process more than I would have three years ago.

There are some interesting observations I have made about choreographing different types of movement styles throughout this process. First of all, choreographing anything of a sexual nature changes the way I move as a coach. For example, I cannot slump or appear self-conscious when I am choreographing something intimate. I have to take on the energy that I am expecting them to portray. Likewise, if I am choreographing a fight scene, I don't use as much sensuality in my movements. I have to show a different kind of strength and ground myself. Awareness of what my body is doing constantly when I am in charge of a group of people has become almost second nature to me. This awareness has come from the extensive movement analysis I have

done on myself in classes along with my life changing health experience this year. Both have caused me to be constantly aware of the story my body is telling internally and externally. For this reason, I need to take the posture of a woman confident in her sexuality so that I can show them subconsciously what I am expecting from them.

As I mentioned earlier, I keep a kind of open forum when I am first blocking a scene. I want the actors to be able to tell me if something does not feel natural, or if it is uncomfortable or feels dangerous. There were several moves that had to be changed for a member of the cast who was experiencing liver pain. I was more than happy to accommodate these changes for him, since I completely understand the pains of living with a disease that limits the body. I was glad that he was able to tell me not only the fact that he could not do some moves, but the reason why this was the case. I felt there was a lot of trust between us.

Once I choreographed any one of the scenes, I asked the actors involved to perform the scene for the rest of the cast. I wanted this to be a habit so that they could all be involved with the process. After they watched the scenes, I asked them what they thought about what they just saw, and if anything was unclear to them. Most of the times, they had really good feedback and eventually I could see them learning how to see which moments were working and which were not. In this case, I suppose I was acting like a teacher as well as a director. I really wanted the actors to feel like they really owned all of the show, even the other actors' scenes. I think they appreciated this. Of course, my opinion was always the final say as to whether or not a moment was working, but I was always open to outside opinions. I stuck to the concept that I was

taught by my mentors, the “yes and” method. This is described as, “Yes I will accept your idea, and I will add to it this...” This happened on many occasions.

AESTHETICS

For my first two years at VCU, I had been desperately searching for my aesthetic. Even now, it is by no means complete, but I feel I have made great strides toward finding what it is. This, I feel will be a life long journey. Directing, writing, and choreographing *Reflections of Red in a Mirror of Desire* was one of the most helpful steps on the quest towards finding myself and refining my artistry.

One of my biggest strengths as a choreographer and director is my desire to create honest and truthful relationships on and off stage and to challenge the actors with whom I work to continue learning about themselves. I always hope to leave my actors and students hungry to learn more. Anne Bogart, in a speech delivered at the Orlando SETC conference keynote address stated that actors “should attempt to explore something new every day that they work.” I share many of my aesthetics and views with Anne Bogart, and she has through her own work and writings inspired me to make theatre a lifestyle choice and not a career. I believe that this is the source of my passion.

My aesthetic has been influenced by a wide variety of sources. My mentors and colleagues at VCU, my family at Niagara University, Anne Bogart, Stephen Wangh, the emotions that emerge from music, experiencing and observing human relationships and behavior, my brushes with death, religion, my hospital life, and the romance and

passion of my Italian culture have all added to the importance and strength behind my artistry and character.

I approach each project with an enthusiasm, warmth and desire that energizes the people around me, and I hope to turn my artistry into the ability to make theatre that inspires change. I have aspirations to create art that challenges the audience to reflect on their own lives and appreciate the moments they get to spend with people they love.

My mentors and friends at Virginia Commonwealth University, David S. Leong, Dr. Aaron Anderson, and Patti D'Beck, have challenged me to raise the bar of my expectations about my own work and to search to find the aspect of my work that makes it unique. They have supported, guided, and challenged me while at the same time giving me the freedom to make mistakes and learn from them. Their "tough love" has helped make me a much stronger and more confident person, and I appreciate them more than they will ever know.

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VITA

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