

**PLEASE FEEL FREE: SENSATION, AWARENESS, AND  
CHOREOGRAPHY**

**by**

**Matthew A. Nelson**

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## ABSTRACT

How can attention to lived experience through somatic practice deepen the choreographic and performative process? Somatic practice is a first-person approach to sensing and moving that can help provide a balance to the objectified view of the body that is common in Western culture. Through the process of choreographing *Please Feel Free* for the 2007 Graduate Dance Concert at the University of Utah, I attempted to bring a somatic point of view to my choreographic process and the performance of my dancers. This thesis document explores somatic theory, the methods through which I applied somatic practice to the choreographic and performative processes, and the outcomes of my research.

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## INTRODUCTION

This thesis addresses the question: “How can attention to lived experience through somatic practice deepen the choreographic and performative processes?” I have investigated this question both theoretically in the form of literature review and creatively through the practice of choreography. In this document I will provide a theoretical overview of the subject and then apply this information as I describe and critique the process of choreographing my work *Please Feel Free*, performed in the Fall 2007 Graduate Concert at the University of Utah’s Marriott Center for Dance. I choreographed *Please Feel Free* for three dancers, accompanied by live music performed on stage by composer Aaron Chavez and myself.

Somatic educator Thomas Hanna introduced “Somatics” as “the field which studies the soma: namely the body as perceived from within by first-person perception” (Hanna, 1986, p. 341). The somatic point-of-view is a present centered phenomenon of one’s own sensory experience. This contrasts with the second or third-person perception that is necessitated when addressing another’s body, and commonly used when addressing bodies in contemporary culture. For example, when a doctor assesses a patient and prescribes medication, the doctor’s third-person observations of the patient are primary. How patients feel in their bodies is given less significance than what the doctor observes of the patient through testing, especially when extreme actions such as surgery are indicated. As a somatic therapist I’ve noticed that the view that someone could learn to affect the function of his or her own joints and organs through a practice of first-person perception is often overlooked. Hanna points out that the human soma, in tandem with its ability for awareness, “is acting upon itself; i.e., it is always engaged in the process of self-regulation” (Hanna, p. 344). In my own experiences with somatics, and in the writings and practices of Moshe Feldenkrais, F.M. Alexander, Deane Juhan, Ida Rolf, and innumerable other somatic practitioners, I have repeatedly found that the self-regulatory process that the somatic perspective offers has potential for systemic change in the body equal to or beyond that of surgery. Somatics is not a replacement for the third-

person perspective. The first-person somatic viewpoint is an additional way of perceiving with its own benefits.

Somatic techniques aim to better the connection between feeling and moving through awareness of sensation. In practice, one's reflections on what has taken place in one's own soma are related back to the experience of the movement itself. I am motivated to explore the somatic point-of-view in choreography and performance because dancing is a present-centered movement act. When I choreograph, I create a movement score that the dancers inhabit in their experience of performing. In order to consciously explore the role of first-person perception in creating and performing choreography I have brought attention to the sensate elements of the choreographic and performative experiences both for myself and for my dancers. Three parties are implicated in this investigation: the choreographer, the dancers, and the audience. I cannot know what others experience directly, so I will concern myself here with my own role as choreographer, my interactions with the dancers, and my intentions for the audience.

Choreography is “the art or practice of designing the sequence of steps and movements in dance” (New Oxford American Dictionary, 2006). There are many stages in a choreographic process, and no two works will likely follow the same process. Yet, I can claim for my own work the necessity of creating movement and then also making decisions about how that movement is related to other movements in time and space. The process of creating movement can be an entirely first-person pursuit. When I see dance I have a first-person experience of watching, yet the second or third-person point of view is also essential to the decision making process of choreography. A choreographer must see the work, tell the dancers what to do, and optimally formulate an intention for what the audience might see. My relationship to the dancers of *Please Feel Free* was always in the second or third person. For the purposes of this document I will call this point of view the “choreographic gaze.” In a previous choreographic work of mine, *lamina*, I was the sole dancer, and used my sensations while dancing as an important influence on the choreography both in the creation of the movement and in the decision making process. I organized my movements in time and space often because it felt right to dance the work in a particular way. In that dance, I always maintained a first-person relationship with the dancer (myself), and so a somatic perspective was particularly relevant.

Even still, I often watched myself on video to better perceive the movement from the outside. My interest in creating *Please Feel Free* came from a desire to further explore the usefulness of the somatic perspective even when the third-person point of view was inherent to my relationship with the dancers.

In the process of my work I intended to create somatic exercises for the performers, draw movement material from these practices, and then use the practices to support the performance of the work. I sometimes participated in these experiences first hand, and always acted as a leader who identified the process. Part of my intention was to separate the performers' movement experiences from any direct choreographic instruction on my part, so that their movements would evolve out of their own sensory awareness within the structure of our improvisations, and not be the result of my own choreographic gaze. In this thesis I will examine how my avoidance of the choreographic gaze related to my investigation of somatics in the choreographic and performative processes. I will describe in this document where my process was useful, where it wasn't, and how an integration of a somatic perspective with the choreographic gaze is possible.

## **DANCING: PERSONAL MANIFESTO**

I dance largely because it is the hardest thing I've ever done in my life. I wonder at my own limitations and at my own ability to learn. I was a scientifically minded psychology major at a small liberal arts college when dance took me completely by surprise. I spent many years learning to reason, analyze, and connect ideas, so that I now take these skills largely for granted. They have been quite useful in my dancing, and I have constantly been amazed, too, that they are not enough in themselves. I am so grateful that I came to dance because it has provided me with a fuller connection to the world and its people, inclusive of my own self.

I believe the study of art brings specific challenges of understanding not encountered in other academic fields as readily: we examine subjectivity. The validity of any artistic idea cannot be exalted as truth or proven false. Because our research is grounded in our own consciousnesses we must articulate the indefinite. In studying dance I can examine my experience of ideas, and in dancing I practice being my whole self. My movement reveals me. My body manifests my ideas. For me it is the feeling of dancing that makes dance worth doing--the freedom that comes through direct practice of my own kinesthetic being in the world. As living beings we move constantly, from our breathing and heartbeat to the almost imperceptible movements of our body in thought. Life in perfect stillness is impossible, so the practice of movement supports life.

## THEORY

### Dance and the Objectified Body

We commonly objectify and mechanize ourselves in Western culture. We talk about “running on empty,” or “spinning our wheels,” as if the automobile has become a part of our human anatomy. As a somatic bodyworker and massage therapist I consistently hear from my clients that their bodies are “broken,” and they ask if I can fix their damaged part, which they commonly refer to as “it.” These clients talk about their bodies as objects instead of identifying themselves through their bodies. To say “My body is broken,” objectifies, where the sentence “I feel broken,” does not. This second statement implies an inhabited soma where the first implies ownership of an object.

Objectification of the individual is not limited to bodily form. Our civilization systematically objectifies us. Foucault writes that “Discipline ‘makes’ individuals; it is the specific technique of a power that regards individuals both as objects and as instruments of its exercise” (Foucault, 1984, p. 188). I wonder at the obligatory nature of our schooling system. We are taught ideas from a very young age about what is true in our world. Requisite education declares that our own perceptions are not equal to what we are told by our teachers, and testing enforces our awareness of these expert views. Early education teaches us to be “docile,” as Foucault describes, and in turn to hand over our ability to inhabit our own selves from the inside. There are many positive effects and abilities we gain through this process, but my experiences as a somatic practitioner suggest to me that our systematic tendency to discount the first person internal perspective that Hanna defines as somatic is out of balance.

Dance and somatics scholar Sondra Fraleigh writes “I exist my dance” (Fraleigh, 1987, p. xvi). My dance is directly of my body. I always experience the world as my own body and can never experience it as someone else’s body. When dancing I participate in my embodied experience. Dance has the potential to help integrate the first-person point of view back into the human experience because in dancing I cannot escape the necessity of my own experience. While I have seen dancers appear to tune out their experience

or subvert the sensations of their dancing with a blank stare and dull movement, the physical nature of dance makes it difficult to do so: It is easier to avoid one's sensate experience when reading, writing, or watching TV than it is when dancing.

It is striking to me that so many people in our culture do not dance—that dance has become something most people only watch, and that even this is uncommon. Mary Whitehouse, an early dance therapist, discusses the “repression of all physical emotion,” that typifies our culture:

Joy in the voice and face is all right, grief in the voice and face is understandable, anger around our shoulders, the sight of a body rocking back and forth with grief, the sudden eruption of a stamped foot or a book slammed violently down on a table, all upset us....  
(Whitehouse, 1952/1995, p. 44)

All of these expressive movements would be appropriate within the context of a dance on stage. These actions might still cause discomfort for the dance audience, but the theater creates a container within which bodily experience is accepted more readily. In the relationship between dancer and audience, the body is allowed to communicate more fully than in everyday life. A dancer's body is a feeling body, and it is imbued with a level of humanity that I believe people regularly disallow themselves. Fraleigh writes:

The body is not the instrument of dance; it is the subject of dance. The body cannot be an instrument, because it is not an object as other instruments are. Even when it is objectified in dance, it retains its subjectivity. (Fraleigh, 1987, p. 32)

The humanity of the dancing body rests largely on the ability of the performer to be present in the experience of their dance. Fraleigh writes that “The dancer is at her best (she becomes her dance) when she is present centered” (Fraleigh, 1987, p. 23). When the dancer becomes the dance, the dance is necessarily human. There is no particular requirement for how a performer expresses their experience—no exacting set of rules for the interaction between performer and audience. A performer with great skill can walk onto a stage, stop, and captivate the audience with stillness. Another performer may be incapable of using stillness, but can hold the audience's attention by executing summersaults in midair. The audience's perceptions of a dancer's actions arise from the necessity of the dancer's lived embodiment. While the audience cannot know exactly what the dancer is feeling, the coherence of the dancer's performance depends on everything he or she experiences on stage. A kinesthetic and performative consciousness-in-

action is required for the dancer to reveal this subjective humanity to the audience in movement, and yet the presence of the dancer becomes limited if he or she becomes too self-conscious.

### Why Somatics?

Somatic practices offer methods for the cultivation of kinesthetic consciousness. Seymour Kleinman, a somatic researcher at Ohio State University, introduces the concept of a kinesthetic phenomenology, a philosophy intended to incorporate what Eastern philosopher Yuasa terms “bodily recognition of realization” (Yuasa, 1987 in Kleinman, 2006). Kleinman offers that the key elements of kinesthetic phenomenology are “movement and awareness,” and that it is able to “incorporate experience, wholeness, cultivation, practice and achievement” (Kleinman, 2006). Phenomenology suggests that consciousness in action can be followed by reflective consciousness (Van Manen, 1997, p. 41). Kinesthetic phenomenology is particularly attuned to the consciousness of movement, connecting the lived experience of moving to a reflective process of sensate awareness. The practice of this consciousness is somatics. The inward perception of the body is lived experientially, and is therefore subject to phenomenological reflection.

I have applied somatic practice to the choreographic and performative processes because they are rehearsal oriented. Dance rehearsals require of dancers the intention to hone the specificity and quality of their movements. A somatic perspective offers that the dancers can enhance the rehearsal process through attention to sensation. As I choreographed *Please Feel Free* I made an assumption that the movement material and structure of the choreography would have to be generated through attention to somatic experience in order to fully explore the usefulness of somatics in the process of rehearsing and performing the dance. While this assumption has some faults, it is one the reader should keep in mind as I continue to present some background on somatic theory and practice.

The field of somatics is comprised largely of practices to better the connection between perceptive experience and kinesthetic experience—feeling and moving. The cultivation of mind-body holism through practice is central to the field. Ron Kurtz describes holism in the context of Hakomi, a technique of somatic psychotherapy: “Holism is a recognition of complexity and the inherent unpredictability of the

whole by the parts. It is the recognition of the influence of each aspect of living on all the others” (Kurtz, 1990, p. 30). Somatic practitioner and scholar Peggy Hackney offers a more specific example of holism in somatics. She describes Bartenieff Fundamentals, another somatic technique, as “an approach to basic body training that deals with patterning connections in the body according to principles of efficient movement functioning within a context which encourages personal expression and full psychophysical involvement” (Hackney, 2002, p. 31). I appreciate that Hackney declares the importance of the psychophysical aspect of body training, and have made a point to explore numerous ways to incorporate this aspect into my research. The choreographic rehearsal process is a form of body training, and I have attempted to bring psychophysical holism to my choreographic process.

In somatic practice the entire psychophysical being, inclusive of kinesthetic, cognitive, emotional, and imagistic abilities, must be considered in its relation to how one moves, and how one feels. The lived experience of a performing dancer is multidimensional: A somatic perspective suggests that movements are associated with ideas, emotions, and imagistic awarenesses. This interconnection of different forms of consciousness is a useful tool for somatic practice. As I will detail in the next section, I have used a somatic approach in rehearsals for *Please Feel Free* in an attempt to assist the dancers to interweave kinesthetic, cognitive, emotional, and imagistic elements of our rehearsal experiences to support the performance experience. I have aimed to create a rehearsal process that provides a holistic context for the movements of the dance.

#### Body-Subject / Body-Object

Bodily objectification is actually an important part of the somatic perspective, and can be addressed from both the first and third-person viewpoints. Body-subject and body-object are phenomenological concepts that make up the process of somatic awareness. Sondra Fraleigh clearly defines the two states of consciousness:

Body-subject is a transcendent principle in phenomenology, because it eludes our full knowledge. It refers to the body lived wholistically and prereflectively as the self. It is a temporal concept, describing the time in which consciousness is present centered, or prereflective. The body-subject can be sensed in dance and through the dancer when she

is unified in action; that is, when she is not reflecting on her self or her action but living the present-centered moment in her dance as a unity of self and body in action....

Body-object describes a conscious, intentional position taken toward the body as an object of attention.... And it is the reflective position I necessarily take when I become aware of my body as something to be reckoned with in dance. When I focus on my body—when I look at my hand and consider it, for instance—it becomes an object of my attention...the body so regarded and reflected upon may be termed body-object. (Fraleigh, 1987, pp. 13-14)

As a cycle of moving and feeling, somatic practice alternates between these two forms of consciousness. It is the ability to notice body-subject sensations from the first person body-object point of view that defines the somatic perspective. When I become aware of my own sensations then I can hold an intention toward my movements in response to these sensations. Somatic practices develop the ability to affect one's movements through awareness.

I began many rehearsals for *Please Feel Free* with breath awareness because it provides a clear interplay of the body-object / body-subject experience. Breath awareness is an important component of every somatic technique I have encountered, and in describing it I hope to illustrate the relation between somatic theory and practice. We breathe automatically and constantly, yet we can also consciously interact with our breath. Our breath can become the object of our attention and we can observe its movement. However, Fraleigh points out that “I can never fully become the object of my own attention” (Fraleigh, 1987, p. 15). Although I breathe, it is also I who observes my breath. As soon as I observe my breath I cannot know if my awareness has changed its flow. My body-subject state of being is immediately affected by my body-object attention to what I'm experiencing and vice-versa. If I choose to stop breathing, I will eventually pass out, incapable of continuing to make the choice. The breath offers a way to consciously interact with all that we do unconsciously by giving us an experience of our unconscious body-subject selves that we can choose to affect. Hackney points out that “We breathe automatically, but breath can be influenced by and is reflective of changes in consciousness, feelings, and thoughts” (Hackney, 2002, p. 51). Her observation is important—when we become conscious of our breath we have a window into our being as a whole. Noticing that my breath is shallow and quick I might find that I am nervous. In turn, “we can consciously choose to alter our breathing to affect our feelings, thoughts, and patterns of moving”

(Hackney, p. 52). As I make meaning from my awareness of my own breath (body-object) and realize my state of being (body-subject), I can choose to take a slower breath. I may experience a sense of discord in that moment—the slower breath may feel odd or difficult, and may force me to become more aware of my nervous state (body-subject again becoming object). My decision to take a deeper breath might lead me to notice a sensation of tightness in my belly or chest. My awareness doesn't necessarily lead to immediate resolution, but it may offer me choices that I didn't know I had. In this case I could choose to breathe more deeply into my tight belly or chest, and might even choose to move these parts in some other way. I like to think of the body-object / body-subject distinction as a continuous polarity in which there is a constant interplay between the two extremes instead of a Cartesian split. This concept of polarity is borrowed from Dr. Charles Johnston's Creative Systems Theory. His theory provides a structure for understanding the progression of living systems such as the human soma.

#### Creative Systems Theory

Johnston introduces Creative Systems Theory as “a comprehensive theoretical perspective for understanding how living systems organize themselves, grow, and change” (Johnston, 1994, p.1). A few elements of his theory are particularly relevant to somatic awareness and the choreographic process. These are the concept of aliveness, the bridging of polarities, and the creative cycle. Each of these ideas is based on the premise that as living beings we are not mechanical. In a generative flow of constant change we are more than the sum of our parts.

Johnston defines aliveness as “a measure of the amount of creation, the amount of that fundamental formative respiration, embodied in a system at a particular moment in time” (Johnston, p. 10). Aliveness is a way to address the connectivity and dynamism in a living system, and is concerned with the flow of the generative process in contrast to an objectively quantified value of truth. Somatic observations are similarly subjective, so aliveness is a useful term when describing their importance.

Polarities arise when we attempt to define the truth about something. Body-subject and body-object present one such polarity. Johnston writes that “creative dynamics evolve as plays of polarities. A Creative Systems perspective thus inherently provides a third space vantage, a way of viewing experience

in terms of the larger wholes that polar pairs are parts within” (Johnston, 1994, p. 15). From a creative systems viewpoint both polarities must necessarily coexist for a system’s aliveness to be increased. Debating whether a process of the body-mind (another example of polarity) is in any one moment a body-subject or body-object oriented consciousness is likely to bring up some important information and could be an exploration characterized by aliveness. However, neither view alone represents an integrated whole. Johnston writes that “polarities are expressions of the tension necessary to bring the new into being” (Johnson, p. 15).

Johnston provides a specific model for how creative systems pattern over time. The phases of this creative process do not necessarily take place in linear form. Often the creative process necessitates jumping from one phase to another and back again. Within the entire creative cycle there are two phases that Johnston labels the ‘differentiation phase’ and the ‘integration phase’. In the differentiation phase a polarity is created between two seemingly opposite ideas. The differentiation phase essentially corresponds to the entire process of creating and performing *Please Feel Free*, and this phase includes a pre-axis, early-axis, middle-axis, and late-axis component. I will address these specifically as I describe the process of my work in the next chapter. In approaching my creative work I polarized a somatic first-person perspective that investigates the performer’s sensate experience with the third-person perspective of the choreographic gaze. In doing so I discounted and avoided my first-person experience as the choreographer, capable of having my own relationship with the dance separate from my relationship to the dancers.

The writing of this document begins the second half of the creative cycle, which Johnston calls the ‘integration phase’. Through the integration phase both aspects of a polarity are reintegrated into a more comprehensive whole. My understandings of somatics and choreography have grown significantly as I have integrated what I experienced in the polarizing process. Full integration is ongoing, and will continue as I take this work into my other activities.

The pre-axis stage is one of wholeness. Johnston describes how in this part of the differentiation phase “truth and nature exist as, in essence, a single thing” (Johnston, p. 24). The pre-axis stage is organismic and undifferentiated because a polarity has yet to develop. In relationship to my work this is nothing less than my whole self, my background, and the training I have had that has brought me to this experience.

## PLEASE FEEL FREE: THE CREATIVE PROCESS

### Early Axis: Generating Movement Material

Early-axis is the stage of the creative process that I am most affined to, and I categorize much of the process of creating raw movement material for *Please Feel Free* as Early-Axis. A phase characterized by inspiration, polarity begins to take form as possibility. Having polarized the dancers' first-person experience of moving with my own third-person relationship to them, I sought movement informed by the dancers' sensate participation. Johnston describes Early-Axis as a phase of magic and play, where "Truth shifts its primary mode of expression from the kinesthetic to the symbolic. Its most eloquent voices here are myth and metaphor" (Johnston, 1994, p.25). Early-Axis processes are pre-verbal, relating sensory information to the self, and for this reason I believe that the somatic perspective is most applicable in this stage. The movement material for *Please Feel Free* was created largely through these activities, and they also acted as inspiration for many of my later aesthetic choices. In this stage I hoped the possibilities for what my work could become would surface from the tissues of our moving bodies.

### Authentic Movement

In my Laban Movement Analysis training with Integrated Movement Studies, I was introduced to a movement therapy technique developed by Mary Whitehouse called Authentic Movement. It offers a basic model for generating movement somatically. I will first describe Authentic Movement itself, and then how its conceptual framework became part of my choreographic process.

Janet Adler, a student of Whitehouse who developed the work more fully, describes the core of Authentic Movement:

(Authentic Movement) is movement that is natural to a particular person, not learned like ballet or calisthenics, not purposeful or intellectualized as 'this is the way I should move' to be pleasing, to be powerful, to be beautiful or graceful. Authentic movement is an immediate expression of how the client feels at any given movement. (Adler, 1972/1999, p. 122)

While there are no set requirements for how the mover finds this movement, Whitehouse had some clear ideas about what takes place:

It originates in what Laban calls an inner effort -- that is, a specific inner impulse having the quality of sensation. This impulse leads outward into space so that movement becomes visible as physical action. Following the inner sensation, allowing the impulse to take the form of physical action is active imagination in movement... (Whitehouse, 1987/1999, p. 52)

“Active imagination,” originated with psychologist Carl Jung. It is “a process in which, while consciousness looks on, participating but not directing, co-operating but not choosing, the unconscious is allowed to speak whatever and however it likes” (Whitehouse, 1979/1999, p. 83). I consider this a rhythm of body-subject and body-object consciousness in which body-subject takes precedence; the dancer’s consciousness of self is present but not emphasized. Active imagination requires me to trust a part of myself I am not immediately conscious of. My sensations guide me in action. If I reflect too much I lose the immediacy of body-subject consciousness. Fraleigh writes that the “spontaneous body,” “does not *have* a consciousness—rather, it *is* a consciousness....The body is intensitive; it is implicated in, rather than separate from, will and freedom” (Fraleigh, 1987, p. 15). The practice of Authentic Movement aims to draw out this embodied consciousness and bring it into expression.

The framework of the Authentic Movement process utilizes the relationship between a mover and a witness. As the mover engages their active imagination, the role of the witness is to stay present to what the mover is doing.

The witness, especially in the beginning, carries a larger responsibility for the consciousness as she sits to the side of the movement space. She is not ‘looking at’ the person moving, she is witnessing, listening, bringing a specific quality of attention or presence to the experience of the mover. (Adler, 1972, p. 142)

When the mover is finished moving he or she may reference and reflect on the movement experience verbally with the witness from a first-person body-object point of view. The witness is then able to respond to the mover, but must always speak in the first person present tense, talking about his or her own perceptions and sensations without projecting these experiences on the mover. As a witness one must differentiate one’s own first-person body-object reflections from one’s third-person observations of the mover, which are body-object by definition. An important aspect of the Authentic Movement practice is

the understanding that whatever associative process the witness experiences, the associations are his or her own and cannot be ascribed to the mover or the movement itself. It is impossible for the witness to perceive the mover's body-subject experience, yet the witness can reflect on his or her own. Both mover and witness reference the same movement and maintain individual interpretations of the movement's meaning.

The ability of Authentic Movement to bring movement forth from the body-subject is personally meaningful to me because I am particularly prone to a cognitive precedence; trusting my body-subject self gets me out of my head and into the more inspirational creative realm that characterizes the Early-Axis creative phase. As I have learned to work from this more holistic and somatic source my movement has become more kinesthetically connected and interesting to me. I chose to generate movement material with authentic movement based processes in the hope that the dancers would experience this somatic source for themselves while linked in community with each other.

My use of Authentic Movement in the choreographic process was not pure to the form as used by dance therapists. I was primarily interested in the "active imagination" element of Authentic Movement, and with it the depth of associations that the Authentic Movement process can provide for the mover. Authentic movement facilitates differentiation within the body-subject and body-object polarity because it allows each participant to invest particularly in one end of the polarity without having to hold responsibility for the other. From the body-subject comes movement, and from the body-object comes recognition and interpretation.

In the form of this work that I have used in the studio, a dancer or a few dancers first move from their own bodily sensations while being witnessed by the rest of the group. When the dancer or dancers have finished dancing, they and the group reference the experience. For the mover, this referencing can happen kinesthetically through attempted repetition, and verbally through emotional, imagistic, or temporal description of the movement experience. The witness or witnesses can respond through similar means. Then, the witness and mover roles switch, and when the former witnesses move they hold the intention to reference their experience of observing the previous mover. It is key that when the former witnesses move

they do so from their own first-person experience of witnessing in order to maintain their body-subject consciousness as they move. For example, if I saw a movement that in my perception referenced a mother figure, then when I moved I would use the idea of motherhood to lead my movement. As the alternation of roles continued I ask the dancers to try to remember specific movements, moving toward a more reflective body-object consciousness. A vocabulary of movement motifs develop through this process. Also, I believe a simultaneous holistic development of associations among the sensate, cognitive, emotional, and imagistic elements of the experience support the movement with personal meaning for the participants.

I experimented with this Authentic Movement based process over the past year, and much of the movement for *Please Feel Free* was created while compressing and overlapping the procedural and conceptual elements I have described. Once the dancers understood the process, the witnessing and moving phases didn't need to be entirely distinct from one another. I had the dancers witness each other, dance, and interact in a more fluid body-subject / body-object rhythm. The interactions between the dancers become more complex when they were both moving and witnessing simultaneously, as each was tuned to experience both self and other. As the dancers moved together, the boundaries became less clear. Still, the holding of an intention to motivate movement from body-subject consciousness through active imagination played an important role. While the dancers were not often physically connected, the dynamic was similar to that of contact improvisation, in which the kinesthetic sense and the interaction of one body with another are the primary variables used to create immediate movement. The body-object/ body-subject rhythm quickened and integrated so that in each moment the dancers perceived their dance and lived their dance equally as much as possible.

While I found this practice rich with ideas in motion, and quite possibly an interesting teaching tool, setting choreography from this complexity of interaction was difficult for me. The body-subject consciousness that is so important to active imagination is not a reflective consciousness, so it was difficult to remember movement that took place. In a one-to-one observer / mover relationship the observer assists significantly with memory. In this more layered situation an intention to remember what was taking place could significantly hinder active imagination. I often joined the improvisations myself, and thereby took

the same role as the dancers, investing heavily in my body-subject consciousness. In the future, I will instead observe from a more external perspective of choreographic decision-making. From this point of view I can make note of movements and interactions between the dancers that I find appealing, and then return to them later to set choreography based on the improvisation. A video camera would also be helpful in this situation. While I have used video to assist me in the past, I've found it an unsuitable substitute for the observer role, lacking the full quality of being present in the moment. However it would be a helpful addition, allowing me to go back and re-create movement that appealed to me while observing the group.

### Moving into Sensation

The practice of embracing the body-object / body-subject lived duality was the centerpiece of my early rehearsal process for *Please Feel Free*. At the beginning of each rehearsal we would warm up with a practice that I call "moving into sensation." The basis of the exercise was to follow our sensations as we moved in an attempt to intensify our sensate experience. Leading the process, I always began by bringing the dancers' attention to their breath, usually while they were lying in any comfortable position on the floor. Breath awareness, as previously discussed (p. 9), is a common and important somatic tool for participating in one's experience of embodiment. My intention in bringing my dancers' awareness to their breath was to provide the simplest possible way to draw their attention inward. Breath awareness also activates the more relaxed parasympathetic side of the nervous system, thereby assisting awareness of subtler and more internal sensations (Hendricks, 1995; Levine & Frederick, 1997). I asked the dancers to notice the sensation of gravity acting on their bodies, and to use the sensation of their bodies moving against the floor with each breath to help them feel this gravitational relationship.

In the next step of the *moving into sensation* improvisation, I asked the dancers to shift their relationship to gravity in any way, including a change of level when possible—that is lying, standing, jumping, sitting, or somewhere in between. Then I once again asked them to sense their breath and relationship to gravity, noticing that different body parts were now in contact with the floor. I had them repeat this process, and suggested that their shifts of weight be initiated by bodily sensations. While any sensation could be valid for this purpose, some examples I've experienced are: a contact point with the

floor, a part of the body that feels like it's stretching, a part of the body that feels tense, or the feeling of a breeze across my skin. The movements resulting from these investigations were raw and sometimes unpredictable, speaking to me of their organic, sensate motivations. As we continued, I asked the dancers to speed up their movements until they were moving almost constantly, using their sensations as the impetus for movement.

Sensations are not static. The moving into sensation improvisations were often erratic in form: As I've described the practice so far, sensations would change so quickly that the movements appeared to be thrown away. The investigations lacked depth. To bring more continuity into the work I asked that the dancers attempt to intensify their sensations, staying with related sensations and connecting them when possible instead of immediately moving to something completely new. For example, if I became conscious of the contact of the floor against my foot I could do a movement that particularly emphasized this sensation for me. In the process of doing this movement I might become aware of movement in my hips. I would then move in a way that accentuates the sensation in my hips connecting to my foot on the floor. If I noticed that this made my neck feel wobbly then I would connect the sensation from my foot through to my neck. Feeling connections through our bodies became the subject of these improvisations, and thus became a theme for *Please Feel Free*.

While some of the movement material for *Please Feel Free* came from setting improvisatory material from the dancers, I choreographed a number of phrases for the work by *moving into sensation* myself. In order to provide the dancers with a somatic context for my own phrases, I often described verbally what I felt in my body while doing the movement. My intent was to give the dancers specific sensations to seek in their own bodies. I made an assumption that if they were able to find for themselves the sensations I described, then their movements would have aesthetic clarity. As I have come to understand the nature of sensation more clearly I think a more useful way to engage their sensation-seeking abilities would have been to teach them the movement and then ask them what they felt while executing the phrase. This method represents a rhythm of subjectivity and objectivity more in tune with body-subject / body-object theory. I can never know what someone else is experiencing subjectively, so I cannot expect

that my dancers could or should feel the same thing I do when they copy my movements. Their own sensations are most relevant to their movement experience.

There were some other elements that I added to the basic moving into sensation improvisations. The most effective of these was expanding sensation-derived movement more deeply into space. In the language of Laban Movement Analysis, a comprehensive system for analyzing movement in which I am certified, I would describe much of the sensation-derived movement as “Shape Flow.” In the Laban System this is an attitude towards the shaping of one’s body that relates the intention of the movement to the self. It is opposed to other ways of shaping the body, such as “Arcing,” or “Carving,” that evidence an intention to interact with objects or spaces outside the body. I had essentially asked the dancers to hold this attitude towards their bodies by defining sensation as the only reason for moving. I became interested in expanding the dancers’ movements, and their inner intention toward those movements, into a fuller relationship with Space. I asked the dancers to extend their lines distally as they followed their sensations. My request was aesthetically motivated—it made the dancing more interesting to watch. I noticed in my own movement that the sensation of moving this way felt fuller as well. By carrying my sensations outward in longer lines I interacted with the space that surrounded me. I think this perspective also helped the dancers to find and dance with each other while still moving fully in their own bodies—their attention to the space outside their own bodies made it possible to attend to each other. This situation exemplifies the importance of a rhythm between the first-person and third-person points-of-view where both are present. In the final rehearsals of *Please Feel Free* I came back to this improvisation and used it to help warm the dancers up for the performances.

Another addition to the moving into sensation improvisation was verbalization of sensations. I asked the dancers to finish the sentence “Right now I am aware of...,” as they moved. An important realization came out of this exercise: Verbalization of sensation requires cognitive interpretation of simpler body-object awarenesses. One such body-object consciousness could be “Right now I’m aware of the pressure of my right leg on my left leg (lying sideways on the floor).” A more cognitive and interpretive experience could be “Right now I’m aware of moving as if the space is full of molasses.” The second

example requires me to create an image and participate with that image kinesthetically. Then, in order to speak about the image I create meaning from it through an interpretive process of cognition I call *interpretive imagery*.

Verbalizing an image derived from movement is interpretation because it requires the dancer to form the sensation of their movement into an intellectual object of expression. The dancer must see their experience as something definable—to see themselves as if from the outside: “I am the one who dances as if in molasses.” As the dancer repeatedly embodies his or her image in movement, the boundaries of the image become possible boundaries for the movement vocabulary and vice versa. I can’t move quickly in molasses, so quick movements must either be left out, or could inspire me to adjust my concept of the image: “I am in molasses up to my waist and am flailing with my arms trying to get someone to help me out.” The *interpretive imagery* work was important to my choreographic process because it provided an objective and discreet way to address the preverbal world of sensations. Something of the sensate consciousness is lost in the cognitive process. Fraleigh writes that “Some of these feelings we can name, and some we cannot, since we associate feelings with language only when we name them. The body lives sentience on a preverbal level” (Fraleigh, 1987, p. 53). Yet, I think the use of imagistic language is an essential tool to help bring Early-Axis inspiration into the more objective organizational processes that the craft of choreography often requires. *Interpretive imagery* was particularly important to my process because it provided a way to abstract sensations taken out of their original context, and also to share those sensations with each other in *sensation-seeking* improvisations.

### Sensation-Seeking

In *Please Feel Free* there were some phrases that the dancers learned together and then used as impetus for verbal *sensation-seeking* improvisations. We then inserted movements from the material of these improvisations back into the phrasework. *Sensation-seeking* was a skill I attempted to develop by reversing the *interpretive imagery* aspect of the *moving into sensation* process. While all of this work is sensation-seeking in the sense that the dancers and I intended to feel, the speaking of sensations made greater specificity possible. Whereas the *moving into sensation* work used bodily experienced sensation directly to create movement, *sensation-seeking* was a process using verbal communications of interpreted sensation to instigate movement. In some improvisations I asked the dancers to attempt to find in their own bodies the last sensation voiced by anyone in the group. If someone said “I am aware of dancing in molasses,” we would all inhabit the image and explore its sensations for ourselves. In doing so I might feel a way in which I rotated my shoulder while inhabiting the image, and say “I am aware of rotating my shoulder socket.” The group would then take on this awareness, seeking for themselves sensations in their shoulder sockets until somebody else verbalized another experience.

The *sensation-seeking* process differs from what I described in teaching the dancers my own movement. It didn't fall into the same pitfalls because the dancers weren't required to move these sensations in any particular objective choreographic form, but rather they were to find their own movements that the verbalized sensations inspired. This process was successful for expanding movement phrases, and I attribute that success to the ability of the dancers to find their own movements while holding a common image or idea that linked the material. The ability to name the sensations we were seeking made the process less abstract.

### Frisbee

The formative influence of Authentic Movement and the moving into sensation improvisation are both open grounds in which any type of movement or sensation is invited. While this is wonderful for self-exploration and learning, one exploration generally yields a very different movement vocabulary from another. With three dancers and myself involved in the choreographic process, I was hoping to find a

unifying vocabulary of movement from which we could derive our own sensations. I also sought an activity with a purpose beyond the context of dance movement—I felt this could support the authenticity of the sensate experience. I chose playing frisbee because I enjoy the free-spirited communal movement that tossing a frisbee around creates. There are many ways to throw and catch a disc, and doing it well requires movement through the whole body. I also simply enjoy the feeling in my own body when I play. A game of frisbee necessarily connects people in space as well. When I throw a disc I must connect my throwing movement into the space directly if I want it to go to someone. When I catch a frisbee, I coordinate my movement with that of the person who threw the disc: the disc itself becomes a medium by which we communicate. The communications are simple, and yet there is a very clear interaction. I chose playing frisbee as one subject around which we could organize our developing skills with sensation into choreography.

Over the course of our rehearsals I helped coach the dancers to improve their frisbee skills. We mindfully practiced different throws and catches, honing the skills necessary to get the disc from one person to another so that those same skills could later be used and abstracted in the choreography. Connecting spatially to the person to whom we were throwing was important. Another important theme, the essence of most throws, was the wrist flick at the end of a horizontal planar motion of the body through space. One of my favorite frisbee activities was practicing what I called “catch/release” phrasing where the movement of the catch led directly into another throw without completely re-initiating the movement. This became an important phrasing characteristic in *Please Feel Free*.

The skills of the *moving into sensation* improvisations were put to use in our frisbee explorations. We practiced verbalizing our awarenesses. For example I said “Right now I am aware of how the shift of weight from my back foot to my front foot moves through my body and assists me in throwing the disk.” This is a combination of cognitive interpretation and simple body-object awareness. I directly felt the change of weight, but the observation that the weight shift helped me throw more effectively definitely had an interpretive element. In coaching the dancers I asked them to seek the sensation of their lower body weight shift through to their hand. Working with this sensation helped them to improve their throws. We

also wrote down our awarenesses and observations. Thus, when we returned to the studio we worked with the same sensations, now addressed through language, as when we were throwing the disc outside. For example, we worked with feeling a weight shift in our lower bodies motivate planar movements in our arms. We used our sensate experience with the disc to motivate movement that felt similar in a sensation seeking practice. I created phrases that I believed used the sensations of frisbee throws and catches and incorporated them into the dance. My ability to see the movement objectively from a movement analysis perspective was important in this process. Because I saw the quickness of the release of the disc, the planar motion of the body in preparation for the throw, and the directness that must complete the arc of the movement, I coached the dancers to move this way. Our attention to sensation helped us to know which of these movements felt alive for us, and also created an internal context for the quality of the movement.

The interpersonal dynamic of playing frisbee was also inspiration for *Please Feel Free*. There are many interactions in the choreography modeled after the throw-catch interface. In some of my favorite moments, the dancers timed their movements throwing back and forth in an ongoing catch/release phrasing. These interactions created an interesting line between conversation and competition. I developed what I call the “conversation” section around this dynamic, creating a gestural vocabulary from the frisbee movements and sensations. We began this process by improvising with small gestures and attempting to find the feeling of a frisbee toss through multiple body parts, passing gestures from one person to another. Having established this dynamic I tried to isolate what worked: Frisbee specific movements appeared mimetic and out-of-place. Instead it was the sensations and movement dynamics that guided us. A flicking of part of the body grounded by another part of the body was one of the most dramatic frisbee sensations with which we worked. Another favorite of mine was the “flub”. In frisbee this occurs when catching the disc badly causes a dis-coordination of limbs. In the conversation we created a few flubs for different body parts. The flubs in the choreography were emphatic, and supported the sense of competition. The catch/release phrasing created for me a sense of on-going conversation, and gestures that came toward and away from the dancers’ centers provided me with a feeling that the dancers were communicating with each other from their core beliefs. As the conversation grew over the course of many rehearsals it became more

whole body and less gestural in appearance. While the conversational dynamic of the frisbee toss was a useful source for movement, my thesis committee described to me that the choreography needed something more varied and inviting to the eye than I had provided. I found I had trouble seeing the movement itself, taken outside of its original context. In this way my intention to hold on to the frisbee experience made it difficult to choreograph the actual movement of the work. Using the frisbee toss as inspiration was effective for finding a particular set of movements and movement qualities, but having found those ideas our energy would have been better spent expanding their use more completely in the studio than continuing to practice them in the frisbee context.

### Hair Washing

The conversation section was also affected by the experience of having one's hair washed by others. My interest in hair washing came about because I experience such a wealth of sensation when I have my hair washed. The hair washing idea was conceptually different from the frisbee experience because it was completely passive-- no movement was required by the person having the experience. As a passive activity, I expected the creation of movement from the hair-washing experience would require a high level of personal *sensation-seeking* from the dancers. In turn, I imagined this to be the most abstracted version of our process: We used the sensation of having one's hair washed as a stimulus for movement by seeking the sensations of the hair washing experience in improvisations. Each of the dancers had a chance to have their hair washed, and then we went into the studio. What followed was an open-ended sensation seeking improvisation inspired by Authentic Movement. I asked the dancers to move with the hair washing as inspiration, and to be witnessed by each other and myself.

This was one of our least effective improvisations. Many of the ideas that had supported our other improvisations were missing: We had no actual movements to investigate through sensation. With the actual hair-washing twenty minutes in the past, by the time we got into the studio the sensations we were trying to work with lacked any body-subject immediacy. The *interpretive imagery* process of naming sensations might have supported the improvisation had I taken specific "Right now I am aware of..." observations from the hair washing experience and working with them in the studio independent of their

origin. Still, the dancers were not as taken with this experience as I was, and had relatively few such comments. However, I could easily have used my own ideas, such as “a ripple of energy up my spine that explodes behind my eyes.” I could have repeated the improvisations myself outside of rehearsal, and should have created phrases as I did in other parts of our process. At the time I was deeply invested in the dancers’ first-person experience, and contributing my own sensations and movement seemed like a misuse of the process. Correctly using the process I had devised was more important to me than working directly with the aesthetics of the dance. While I was beginning to understand the necessity and relevance of my own point of view, both as an embodied dancer creating material, and as third-person organizer of choreography, I had depended on the structure of the improvisation to create the choreography instead of making movement choices myself. When the structure failed, I was overwhelmed.

#### Middle Axis-The Creation of a Dance

In creative systems theory, the middle-axis phase is the “perspiration,” that follows the “inspiration” of early-axis. A form is being created, and the process is characterized by struggle, emotion, and contradiction. Johnston writes that “Reality exists as a polar isometric between at once opposite and conspiring forces” (Johnston, 1994, p. 26). Having strongly polarized the first-person body-subject and third-person body-object perspectives, I had a lot of trouble finding their relationship to each other while organizing the choreography in this stage.

The most difficult aspect of constructing my work from its raw pieces was coming to understand the difference between my intentions and the dancing taking place in front of me. Having been primarily concerned with the performers’ experiences in their bodies, I had focused on creating processes through which the performers could generate movement by attending to sensation. I had placed so much of the choreographic burden on the dancers that I had little vision for the piece. I was interested in communicating sensation to the audience, and had made an assumption that generating movement from sensation would accomplish the task. Had I intended the work to be a structured improvisation, such an approach may have been somewhat more effective, but as set material the dance looked dead and disorganized. I hadn’t truly seen the movement objectively from the third-person perspective, nor had I

investigated my own first-person experience of watching the dancers. It was incredibly hard for me to watch the video of the work-in-progress salon showing for the modern dance faculty a month before the performance. I had difficulty concentrating when I'd watch: Not only did the movement not pull me in, but also my own willingness to participate as an observer was missing. I had not developed my own skill with the choreographic gaze. Having polarized my position as third-person outsider in my relationship to the dancers I didn't understand the importance of my own experience with the work itself. In this middle-axis part of the process the true relevance of somatic practice was noticing my own first-person body-subject reactions to seeing the work. When I finally forced myself to pay attention to my own discomfort, I understood that I had to make more immediate choreographic decisions. I had depended on the experience of the movement in its improvisatory context to choreograph the dance for me, and had suspended my own crafting process. Outside of the improvisatory context the sensate impetus for the movement ceased to have importance. Whitehouse speaks to this phenomenon:

Spontaneous movement, rehearsed and repeated, loses the very thing it shows: that inner processes take physical form and can be seen, their meaning apprehended, their value received by the person out of whose body the movement comes. (Whitehouse, 1979/1999, p. 85)

By asking the dancers to attend to their sensations while rehearsing the movement without being specific about what exactly the movement was, the dance disintegrated. To recapture the meaning and value of the movement I needed to shape and relate the movements in the context of the work for the dancers. The weaving of the choreography required that I notice my own reactions and be specific about what in the movement I found effective.

My work with the hair-washing concept bears a telling description of my struggle. I constructed a duet using movement from the hair washing improvisations from which only a few movements surfaced in the final work. However, the hair washing idea remained an important part of the choreography. Having failed to use the idea in its abstracted form, I decided to have the dancers literally wash each other's hair on stage. The hair-washing process held a ceremonial nature for me and I hoped that I could communicate this sense onstage. I bought metal bowls to be used for the water, and choreographed a section in which Aaron, the musician, participated by playing a bowl as it was held by one of the dancers. Another dancer washed

the hair of the third, who held a backbend position over the bowl. While there was some sense of ceremony in this version of the hair-washing scene, it was too static, and appeared more like an execution than an exploration of sensation. When the dancer's wet hair was dried with a towel I was left with little evidence that anything had taken place, and no explanation for the importance of the event. No matter how I shifted the scene around it looked exactly like what it was, with no sense of drama, metaphor, or even a particularly interesting structure of movements. While I find the sensation of having my hair washed quite dramatic, watching it from a third-person point of view proved to be uninteresting the way I was presenting it. The sense of ceremony that I sought was not to be found literally in the act of washing hair. In retrospect I believe it was the interrelationship of the dancers appearing to create and experience sensations with each other that I was after. I wanted bodies writhing in tandem with each other, but I didn't yet understand that I had to create the image and allow the dancers' experiences to follow.

I tried repeatedly to find a way to use the hair-washing event. Only two weeks before the performance I had the dancers throwing water all over the studio. This in itself was fun to watch, and seemed to provide the kind of sensate appeal I was looking for, but the water made the floor too slippery for anything else to happen in the dance. In a moment of simplicity the solution was suggested by one of my dancers—keep the movement, but get rid of the water. I realized afterward that this change exhibited exactly what was effective conceptually in my work. The dancers had repeatedly practiced throwing water with their bodies in many different ways. The clearly delineated movements had come directly from their experience with the water. Without the water they still had a history of sensate experiences that could support the present-centered necessity of their performance.

Another specific challenge of constructing *Please Feel Free* was that the elements we rehearsed came from relatively unrelated places. While the basic sensate improvisations, frisbee movements, and hair-washing all originated from my investigation into sensation and the experience of first-person embodiment, they had very little to do with each other from the outside. My intention to use somatic awareness as a central concept for my choreography guided my creative process, but could not function as the central theme for the work itself. When I started working with these disparate elements of raw material,

I hoped that some metaphors would become apparent to me and that in these metaphors I would find the binding elements of the work. This didn't happen. I was left with independent ideas that I couldn't interweave. Finally I discovered that throwing water helped to connect the frisbee and hair-washing movement vocabularies because water can be flung like a frisbee. The movement itself holds similarities. Gradually, I was able to find connections, and the boundaries between the sections started to dissolve. The key to this process was that I let go of the original separations, saw the movement itself from an objective third-person point of view while simultaneously noting my own reactions to it, and made my decisions from there.

The collaborative process of creating the music for *Please Feel Free* with percussionist and composer Aaron Chavez mirrored the struggles of the choreography. My preconception of the process with Aaron was that he would attend rehearsals and improvise as we worked. His music, I thought, could evolve through improvisation similarly to my concept of the choreography, first as smaller sections that fit with specific parts of the movement, and then as a fully knitted quilt. However, Aaron didn't recognize the movement, and just as I discovered with the dancing improvisations, he couldn't reproduce much of what he improvised. The choreography seldom stayed the same for long as I reevaluated the water, sections, spacing, and timing. Finally, a few weeks before the performance Aaron and I met and created some patterns of gong hits that I could play to hold a constant rhythm in the background. Aaron improvised playing metal bowls, some of which held water, and with specific rhythms he signaled me to change my patterns. While the water that had covered the stage only one rehearsal before was now gone, we kept a watery feel in the music through the use of the gongs and the water filled bowls. Just as with the choreography, when necessity forced us to make decisions, the music took shape.

### Late Axis: A Completed Form

A week before the concert I finally had a complete choreographic work, but the dancing still did not look right. The dancers were at the right places at the right time, but they didn't look like they were dancing fully. It seemed to me that their investment in the movement was missing, although I understood that they were trying very hard to fulfill the choreography. This investment was exactly what I had hypothesized would be enhanced by my somatic approach. The qualities of the movement were muddy and undefined, and the movements seemed to get stuck in their bodies rather than moving through them. I had expected that our attention to sensation would assist the dancers to embody the movement qualitatively with whole body participation, and the opposite had taken place. It had taken so long to set the choreography that the dancers were unsure of their memory. I knew that running the piece repeatedly would help, but also that doing so was not enough. How could I assist their qualitative investment?

I was performing in the piece as a musician, so I couldn't focus on watching the dance during many of our rehearsals and had to rely on video to see the dance from the audience's perspective. I decided to try one more somatically oriented idea modeled after some work with polarities that I experienced in my Laban Movement Analysis training with Integrated Movement Studies. First we did a short *moving into sensation* improvisation with *interpretive imagery* in which I asked them to find images to support their movement. I had them alternate between moving primarily from sensation and primarily from their more cognitive imagery in an attempt to clarify the experience of moving from the image. I also had them find an opposite image, something as different from the original as possible, and attempt to move from that image. I hoped this polarization would clarify the characteristics of their original image. Then I asked them to 'go over the top' with their original image, investing in it as fully as they could. Their movement became much more differentiated and clear than it was when we began the exercise. Then we began rehearsal of the choreography itself, and I gave the dancers an assignment to apply the process from the improvisation to the choreography, finding images and using them to support full investment in the movement. This was definitely more useful to some of the dancers than others but overall I think it was effective in clarifying the movement, and I could have used more time to experiment with the idea.

The dance became dramatically more clear when Kaye Richards, faculty in the dance department and chair of my thesis committee, came into rehearsal for two hours. With a practiced choreographic gaze, Kaye dealt directly with the dancers' movements in tandem with their sensate experience. She asked them to plie more here, watch each other more there, and lengthen their lines throughout. Where I had asked the dancers for an abstract investment in images, sensations, and past experience, Kaye sought out specific movements to which the dancers could connect their intention and full commitment. She looked at the dance visually and noted to me her own first-person subjective lack of excitement at certain moments in the work. With small changes to my choreography she then created more interesting and dramatic timing, fuller use of the space, and added specificity to the movement where it was lacking. At the end of two hours the dance looked more fully embodied, and I perceived the dancers as moving with more complete investment that carried through beautifully into the performances. Kaye did not ignore the sensate or imagistic elements of the dance as she worked, but instead of asking the dancers to find the image or sensation abstractly, she worked with the movement itself and then asked the dancers to find the sensations or imagery that supported the more complete movement.

Watching Kaye work with the dancers helped me understand the process of connecting my choreographic gaze to the specificity of the dancers' movements. While the dancers can contribute much to the process of creating and setting movement, it is important that I take my own observations into action. I must notice in every moment of my choreography when a quality is missing or a movement unfulfilled, and then figure out exactly what needs to happen. I can demonstrate, explain, and rehearse with the dancers to fulfill the movement. Sensation and imagery support this level of specificity in movement, but cannot replace it.

## INTEGRATION AND CONCLUSIONS

When I began choreographing *Please Feel Free* I made an assumption that the movement material, and to some degree the organizational structure of the choreography, would have to be generated through attention to the dancers' somatic experiences if I was to fully explore the usefulness of somatics in the process of choreographing, rehearsing, and performing the dance. My choreography had no overarching aesthetic or social theme at its core. Instead, I attempted to address sensation and awareness directly as the subject of my choreography by organizing my choreographic process around somatic exercises. In order to do so, I strongly polarized the dancers' first-person subjective experience of their dancing against my third-person objective point of view as the choreographer. By separating and polarizing the somatic and choreographic perspectives I discounted and avoided my own first-person experience as the choreographer, and I've found that understanding my own first-person ability to notice my own reactions to watching my choreography integrates the original polarity of my exploration. From my self-awareness I gain perspective about what in my choreography is or isn't working for me.

As a choreographic process my original intention to work from the dancers' sensations was self-defeating because I removed myself from my own choreography. Stephen Koester, a faculty member in the dance department serving on my thesis committee, told me that "All good dancing is sensate" (Koester, personal communication, December, 2007). The presence of some level of somatic sophistication in dance is universal, as the lived body cannot be avoided in dance. As I comprehend the nature of first-person sensate perception in dance more deeply I see that my assumptions about how to explore the role of somatics in the choreographic process were self-limiting. Yet, by struggling with these limitations, the pursuit of this project has taught me much about how sensation, awareness, and choreography integrate.

Choreography is a relatively new discipline to me. My choice to work with sensation and the somatic perspective to create *Please Feel Free* was motivated in part from an incomplete comprehension of effective choreographic processes. My unwillingness through the process to work specifically with the

dancers' movements and to instead ask the dancers to clarify their own movement through sensation, imagery, and experiences such as playing frisbee, came partially from my inability to track a high level of specificity myself. As I continue in my choreography I will more carefully observe my dancers and embody the movement myself whether or not I generate that movement. Then I can ask questions of my dancing: How does the movement connect through my body? What is the timing? Where exactly does it move through space, and how does my body change shape to make that happen? I will still ask myself how the movement feels, and I will still look for imagistic and emotional connections, but I will not expect that these more holistic elements can dictate the structure of the movement on their own.

While I was particularly concerned that the movements in my choreography be motivated by the dancers' body-subject sensation, in this rigid polar investment I was missing the true nature of body-subject consciousness: Sensations of somatic experience come directly from body movement. The exercises and improvisations that I used in my process with the dancers provided a forum for conscious somatic investigation, but they were not capable of clearly structuring movement without my choreographic intervention. No part of the relationship between choreographer, performer, and audience can directly communicate sensation. Somatic practice is by definition self-centered. There are, however, a number of somatic tools that do increase the relevance of sensation to choreography.

I can notice how I feel when I watch dancers moving. The decisions about what constitutes aesthetically effective movement come from my own experience and reflection. I cannot feel or move for the dancers, but I do have my own relationship to their dancing. When I notice my own sensations while observing the dance then I can make decisions about the dancers' movements from the somatic perspective that I inhabit. In turn I can embody the movement myself and teach it to the dancers.

The medium of dance is movement. I cannot know what the dancers feel as they move, nor can I tell them what to feel while moving as a substitute for working with the movement itself. Yet, if I am clear about the movement then I can help the dancers to notice their own sensations while moving with clarity. Also, in a pursuit distinct from the decision making process that defines choreography, asking the dancers to seek specific sensations in improvisations can spawn interesting movement. Using that movement as

raw material for choreography I can again notice what I feel as I watch the dancers move. Then, I can define the exact nature of the choreographed movements. The positive effects of Kaye Richards' rehearsal with the dancers was clear evidence of the importance of consistently working directly with movement.

Using somatic exercises as a teaching tool, I can encourage the dancers to feel as they move. Peggy Hackney declares that "Intent organizes the neuromuscular system" (Hackney, 1998, p. 43). Somatic awareness applied to dancing can provide sensory intent that supports fuller dancing. If dancers are skilled at self-awareness then they can note how movement feels in their bodies when they are told that they have completed it correctly. They then have an internal reference point for future performance.

An interplay between sensation, imagery, and cognitive interpretation can assist movement investment and clarity. Dancers are trained to self-regulate their movement choices. Somatic awareness can assist dancers to notice and clarify their own choices in collaboration with the choreographer. Imagery and sensate cognition are possible tools with which the dancer can attend to their own process of clarifying and bringing intent to dance movements.

The integration phase of the creative cycle is at least as significant a process as all the steps I have described of the differentiation phase put together. Johnston writes that "The second half of the creative cycle is marked by the gradual reconnecting of the new creation with the personal and social source and context of that creation" (Johnston, p. 28). The writing of this document is the first representation of this connection. The polarities that have been alive for me in this investigation will continue both to differentiate and integrate with each other. As I share my knowledge my ideas will integrate with others. This document marks the beginning of a journey as much as it describes the end of one.

Authentic Movement, *moving into sensation*, *sensation seeking*, and *interpretive imagery* have all expanded my own ability to feel and connect my body in creativity. I have found an increased ability to be mindful of my movement without interrupting the flow of my active imagination. I also saw this change in my dancers through the improvisatory parts of our rehearsal process. These processes will continue to hold a place in my choreographic activity, and also in my own self-practice. As I choreograph in the future I will take my own place as participatory observer, seeing and demonstrating my movement choices to the

dancers with greater specificity. I will consider my own perspective primary while still providing a space for the dancers' experience. In addition, and perhaps most importantly, I will use these processes to teach dancers and choreographers in the future. These exercises develop an ability to cycle between sensation and movement reflectively, bringing awareness to one's own creative embodiment. I think this is an important skill both for choreographers and for dancers.

Choreography is a pursuit integrating subjectivity, objectivity, first-person experience, and third-person observation. A somatic perspective, while inherently relevant to choreography, is only part of its whole. Attention to lived experience through somatic practice can serve as a fully embodied springboard for choreographic creativity capable of accessing pre-verbal consciousness. Both the dancers and the choreographer can take a first-person viewpoint in the choreographic context. This type of attention is also capable of supporting the dancers' investment in the performance of choreography provided that the movements themselves have clarity. This methodology offers a balance for the objective and mechanistic tendencies of our culture, and perhaps my teaching of these ideas will help unlock the creative embodied intelligence of my students

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