

ABSTRACT

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Pleated, rich in technicolor, full of imagination and wistfulness woven together with sincere characters, raw relationships, and a rock-n-roll soundtrack, is a piece about family, memory, and place. *Pleated* reverses the Dance Theatre of the Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center and inhabits this odd space by dancing in front, inside, and on top of this tall vertical wall of folded red, purple, and gray theatre seats. Costumes in crayon box colors react sharply against the strange backdrop. The clashing gives off a vibrant burst of energy, reminiscent of a messy, adolescent bedroom. A non-linear narrative unfolds slowly, following three sisters as they revisit moments of their past together. The dance shifts seamlessly through a series of vignettes, which culminate in an emotionally volatile scene of accusation and forgiveness.

PLEATED

By

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Thesis submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the
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of the requirements for the degree of
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Dedication:

This paper and the performance that it documents are dedicated to my family; to my mother, father, Erin and Mary. And to my husband Jimmy Miracle who has stood beside me on this journey.

And to Sara Pearson who has taught me to follow my heart into the dance.

Acknowledgments:

This process would not have been possible without the support and direction of my dedicated thesis committee: Sara Pearson, Karen Bradley, Sharon Mansur and the honorable members Patrik Widrig and Paul Jackson. Their insight and wisdom brought clarity and perspective into my work. Along side them I would like to recognize Miriam Phillips, Anne Warren, Alvin Mayes, Adriane Fang, Leigh Smiley, and Leslie Felbain for their great influence on my work at the University of Maryland. The tremendous cast of performers and their open hearts, from which sprang the life of the work: Robin Brown, Nicole McClam, Patty Mullaney-Loss, Chelsea Brown, Unissa Cruse-Ferguson, Phyllis Liu and Liz Barton. My rehearsal assistant and trusted friend Kate Folsom. Collaborator Emma Jastor and the magic she brought into *Pleated*. The team of designers: Max Doolittle, Lydia Francis, Tyler Gunter, and Jeff Dorfman. Cary Gillet who championed my vision and found ways to make things happen when they seemed impossible. The Center staff and the TDPS administrators who worked behind the scenes to make it all happen. Photographer Zachary Z. Handler. Videographers Nguyen K. Nguyen and Jared Schaubert. The cast of *Figure Eights* and David Schulman. Dramaturg Drew Barker. The climbing coach Andrea Burkholder. Acting mentor Margrit Wong. My unbelievably talented cohort Ana Farfan, Erin Crawley-Woods and Jessie Laurita-Spanglet and all they have taught me over the past three-years. The undergraduate students who shared their beautiful writing with me. And to all the friends, family and strangers who came to see the performances.

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Chapter 1: An Introduction



Photo by Zachary Z. Handler

It is difficult to define the starting place of something. Coming to graduate school was a beginning, but it was also a continuation of the things that came before it. This was true of my MFA thesis work *Pleated*, a culminating project of ideas collected, memories dissected, and identity reflected. A complex, multi-layered site-specific choreography sourced from memories of my childhood and grappling with sister relationships, the creation process was roughly a year and a half long, beginning

when I submitted my thesis proposal in December of 2012, and ending after months of heartbreak and enchantment in March of 2014. The work displays an amalgamation of my aesthetic evolution, academic research, and personal history.

Pleated, rich in technicolor, full of imagination and wistfulness woven together with sincere characters, raw relationships, and a rock-n-roll soundtrack, is a piece about family, memory, and place. The audience was unusually positioned on the "stage" of the performance venue in the Dance Theatre of the Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center, casually seated on cushions and gym mats and gazing at the de-familiarized seating apparatus - a wall of contracted risers. *Pleated* inhabits this odd space by dancing in front, inside, and on top of this tall vertical wall of folded red, purple, and gray theatre seats. Costumes in crayon box colors react sharply against the strange backdrop. The clashing gives off a vibrant burst of energy, reminiscent of a messy, adolescent bedroom. A non-linear narrative unfolds slowly, following three sisters as they revisit moments of their past together. The dance shifts seamlessly through a series of vignettes, which culminate in an emotionally volatile scene of accusation and forgiveness. The work cascades through the beauty and brutality of sisterhood and lands on small, yet profound acts of grace that can occur inside a family.

This paper is an attempt to unpack and further examine my creation process from conception to completion, and how through this process I have discovered deep, philosophical themes in my work as a choreographer. I will discuss my journey from the initial seeds of an idea to the final project and beyond into seeds for new projects. The landscape of this project was influenced by a multitude of voices and unexpected

factors. Through a written account of rehearsals, artistic collaboration, and the ins and outs of the final production, I will synthesize this complex experience and follow into my future artistic goals. Directed to the community of dancers, advisors, collaborators, and creative mentors who witnessed the unfolding of *Pleated*, the purpose of this paper is intended to illuminate my style, aesthetic and working preferences. E-mails, drawings, journal entries, photographs, costume renderings and quotes sprinkled throughout this paper create windows into the evolution of *Pleated* over its yearlong formation. By articulating the lifeline of *Pleated* and the ideas surrounding it, I hope to uncover greater depth and meaning in my craft.

Broken into several chapters, this paper loosely follows the chronology of the creation process of *Pleated*. In Chapters 2 - 3 I begin with the original thesis proposal and trace various threads that have influence me personally and artistically. These chapters follow my choreographic projects from the past four years and how these projects led me to create *Pleated*. I then shift into a thorough account of the rehearsal process described through various lenses in Chapters 4, 5, 6. Here I discuss the challenges and discoveries made working with the material, the dancers and the collaborators throughout the rehearsal process. In these chapters I also discuss how the work I conducted in the studio represents a larger belief system and worldview. In Chapter 7 I articulate the complexities of collaboration especially within the context of a university setting. The final Chapters 8 and 9 are dedicated to the final production, my reflections on it and how it has shaped my next directions with my artwork.

As the process of creation and reflection is multi-dimensional and intricate, I will not attempt to detail every aspect of the experience. There are many aspects of the project that I chose to skim over or leave out entirely: the complications of scheduling, the minutia of administrative tasks, the miscommunications in production or the exact origin of each movement phrase. Instead my focus is to unearth essential landmarks along the journey and how they relate to my artistic beliefs in a larger sense. It is important to note that the choreography I constructed is designed to communicate to its viewers visually, kinesthetically, and empathetically. To translate my original vision, the full creative process, and the final ephemeral performance into a text seems clunky and insufficient. The language I use in this paper is not meant to recreate the process but serves as a means to evaluate and illuminate my dance from another new perspective, perhaps even adding another layer of meaning to such a complex endeavor.

Chapter 2: The Known and the Unknown



Photo by Zachary Z. Handler

A Premonition

In the first semester of my first year in graduate school I had a dream. In the dream I was with Tere O'Conner, a well-established post-modern choreographer who had recently been a guest artist at the University of Maryland and has influenced my work over the past few years. The two of us were at the Kitchen, an avant-garde performance art venue in New York City, attending a performance by cutting-edge

contemporary dance maker Sarah Michelson. She had created a single room installation of multi-colored pillows attached to a pink wall. In the dream the pillows had been choreographed to sing and converse with each other. After watching the performance I exclaimed to Tere that it was the best performance I had ever seen. And then I woke up.

It was not until the actual week of my thesis concert that I recalled this dream from three-years prior and its remarkable connection to *Pleated*. Unknowingly or subconsciously I recreated my dream in the "Singing Seats" sequence of *Pleated* in which the wall of seats become a sea of faceless mouths. The cushions of the closed chairs are transformed into a choir, which performs a lovely French ballad. I accidentally fulfilled my nighttime prophecy through my own choreography.

I begin Chapter 2 with this story because it represents the magical beginnings of dances and how they are rooted to our history and our sleep. I strongly believe that the creative process is unfathomably mysterious and yet it is directly linked to every aspect of my everyday life. My approach to choreography, both with *Pleated* and with most of my work, is characterized by a sense of not-knowing-my-way paired with an undercurrent of personal history and intuition. Meg Stuart, an American-born, Brussels-based contemporary choreographer, writes of this enigma:

I am still learning to make dances. I don't feel I have a formula. But I do know that I don't believe that things happen during the creation process or on stage are ever random or meaningless. Ultimately I am looking for sense. Each piece seems to have its own kind of logic or meaning. You invite people into a

fiction or a set of circumstances so you have to honor that reality and care for it. Living a scenario, a specific fiction, whatever it is, whether it is articulated or not, identified or not - that's where it all starts for me. A place where things link up that you share with the viewer and not the other people dancing or improvising with you. This doesn't mean that you can always claim, 'I know exactly where I am', but you exchange your private truth for a collective agreement that prescribes a specific kind of behavior. You fall into a script and ride its waves (14).

What Stuart is describing was very true of my process in developing *Pleated*. I had a hunch, a gut feeling about WHAT I wanted to make but I did not know the HOW. The "how" grew out of a wonderfully messy journey of discovery.

The Proposal

In order for me to unravel this process I will start by revisiting the "what" of my original thesis proposal. In it I wrote, "I am interested in creating situations of wonder tucked within the folds of my experience of commonplace, everyday life. This piece will combine daring physicality and evocative imagery to create a world highlighting the tangible architecture of the performance space AND the infinite, unseen empire of the imagination." My goal was to create a 30 - 45 minute dance theater work using puppetry, text, movement and other theatrical devices to tell a story of three sisters learning to understand their relationship with one another, with

themselves and with the world around them. The piece would go back and forth in time shifting from a magic world to a harsher, everyday existence.

The proposal aimed to utilize the resources available to me through the School of Theatre, Dance, and Performance Studies and the Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center (The Center) as wisely and consciously as possible, particularly that of rehearsal/performance space. I wanted to move in and inhabit the performance space - the Dance Theatre at The Center. Like an extended artistic residency, every rehearsal leading up to the final manifestation of the work would be held in the same space that the project would be performed. The Dance Theatre space would be re-imagined beyond its traditional proscenium design. Audiences would sit on the "stage", where the dance is usually presented, facing the tall wall of folded seats. Like the screen of a television, much of the dance would occur against/on/within this odd vertical surface. Without the use of grandiose set designs, the existing architecture was to be transformed into scenes from my childhood home through the power of suggestion, inviting the audience to use their imagination and memory to project into the space.

I intentionally wanted to work with a cast of student dancers, as I felt they would be on campus regularly and more readily available for rehearsal. The movement I wanted to create with the dancers would magnify the visceral - communicating feelings and symbols through breath and tension in the body. The choreography was intended to highlight space and time in beautiful and unusual ways. I envisioned the movement as highly organized, like toys on a shelf or matching books in a series or neat little bows in a girl's hair. The flavor of the dance vocabulary would be detailed and intricate, quirky and expansive with texture and

colors. Big strokes and large splatters of paint. Tender and aggressive. Playful and full of sorrow.

Alongside the physical movement I also wanted to involve the human voice and text to clarify the narrative, to evoke memory, to add texture and to build tension within the relationships. I wanted the language to be essential - distilled but not contrived, rambling at times and at others extremely aggressive and straightforward.

All of these ideas and fantasies were written down in detail, packaged together and presented to a team of faculty and staff who said 'YES' to my ambitious, passion-imbued project proposal.

The Jewelry Box

I end this chapter with a quote from Erin Crawley-Woods, a fellow MFA student in my cohort, in which she describes my work as her childhood jewelry box:

In general your work conjure[s] up thoughts/memories of other places, times, and people for me - like you're spinning this whole world around you, one that I think often resembles a Wes Anderson film, even if it's just you on the stage. When I was home this weekend I went through some things in my old room. I found a jewelry box that I used to LOVE - it has a drawing of a boy and girl swinging on the front of it. The mirror inside is cracked and the little dancer that used to spin around to music is broken off, all that remains is a metal peg sticking up where she used to be. It is still packed with all sorts of treasures- jelly bracelets, friendship bracelets, a care bear pin and a Miss Piggy pin, pins

and buttons from various school events, plastic hearts, one half of a heart pendant that said "best friends", little rings of rhinestones, glittery earrings, a gold heart paper clip a boy gave me when I was 6. It is colorful and kitsch and precious and playful and poignant and broken and preserved. Each item alone has a whole story behind it. Together the collection is a relic of a 1980's girlhood. And I don't know if this helps you at all but if I had to pick one object and all the feelings attached to it to represent your work, it would be that box.

(from e-mail correspondence in April 2012)

I reference this e-mail because it captures the spirit of my choreography, and more specifically, the quality of space, time and relationships expressed in *Pleated*.

Although this description was written long before my thesis proposal it reflects how these images and ideas were present in even the small choreographic sketches that I was presenting.

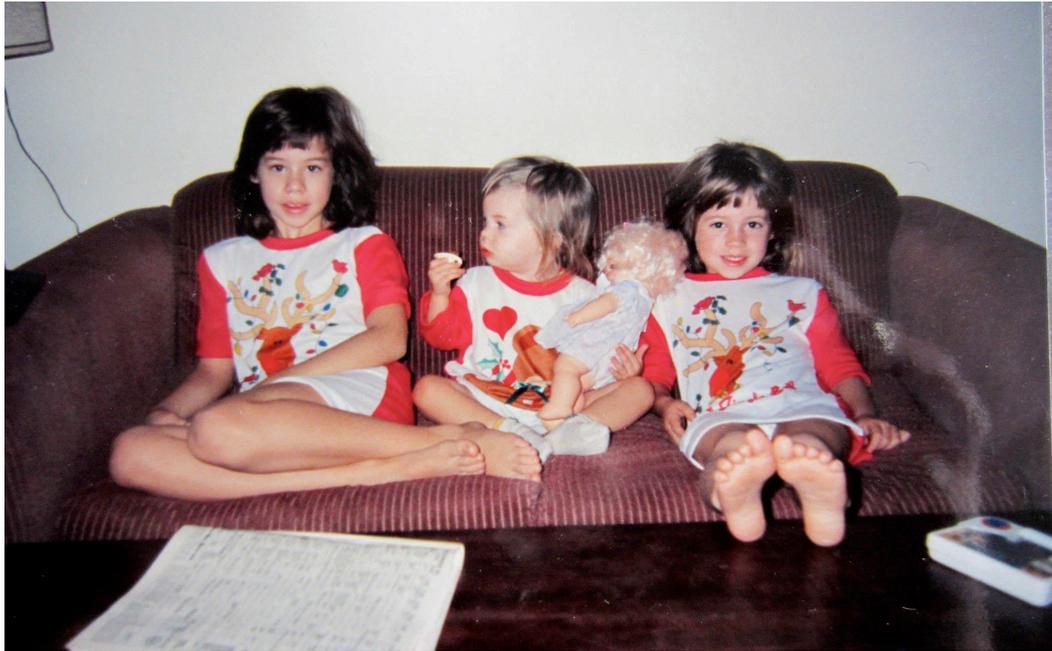
Chapter 3: Looking Back

Retrograde

My instinct after beginning the University of Maryland graduate program was to move backwards. With a deep fear of regressing instead of progressing I was worried that my dancing and artistry would begin to backslide now that I was no longer living in arts mecca New York City. Coming back to school after having spent several years working as a professional dancer was a big shift and with it came a crisis of identity. This anxiety provoked major questions: Who was I? Why was I dancing? What brought me to this point? In wanting to establish a strong artistic voice, unique to my interests I began to look to my early childhood to discern my essential "self". I had a sense that my dancing had become self-conscious and contrived. How could I dig past this and return to a time when I felt the creative spirit flow through me without judgment or pretension? With this objective in mind moving forward took a backward trajectory.

A clear example of this retro-gazing was in a research presentation for the Dance Across the Boards conference at NYU in early 2012. There I presented a video/performance piece called, "Dancing Backwards: Autoethnography through Home Movies". The research asked "Do I dance the same now as I did then?" A video collage of living room dances, nearly all of which involve my two sisters, depicts my original love of movement and the strong influence my family has had on my identity.

The Miracle Family



Me and my sisters, Mary and Erin, in 1991

In 1990 my father purchased a camcorder and began to obsessively record both the special and the mundane. These home movies have become a centerpiece in our family. When we are in the same place at the same time, which is not often because we live thousands of miles apart, we indulge in the epic collection of past holidays, random treasure hunts, company picnics, morning school rituals, pet funerals and a multitude of living room dances. Most of our family life is canonized through video. These films are proof of lost time that we long for but can never return to.

I come from a loving and supportive, culturally rich but cash deficient white family living in the center of the country: Tulsa, Oklahoma. My memories of growing up are magical. My mother was a passionate, patient, inventive kindergarten teacher

and my father was a social worker by day and a mystic Christian at all times. Our home was one of simplicity and whimsy. We could not afford name brand anything but treasured used clothing and furniture passed down through the family. I have volumes of stories of imaginary games with my sister, with friends and neighbors. My memories are in bright and vivid color. I can feel the wood of our tree house, the smell of grass in the backyard, the texture of the carpet at my friend Kate's house, the color of the plastic lawn chairs at the neighborhood pool, the agony of having to share my friends with my sisters. My two younger sisters almost always trailed behind me. With them I created hundreds of plays and dances, games and imaginary lands in our house. AND they got in my way, cluttered my life and annoyed me. Alongside numerous utopian memories of my childhood I have file cabinets full of tearful moments, hurt feelings, heaps of envy, disappointment, petty fights, and stinging wounds from venomous words that took years to heal from. These memories of my family, particularly my sisters, have created a strong representation of my identity.

Time/Memory

An urge to go backwards in time has dominated my artistic interests. Like a video that you watch again and again to reignite and find details in a particular memory, I have been drawn to using choreography as a re-creation process. Choreography in itself is a replication process that sequences movements and events. Many choreographers aim to make the event look like it is just occurring for the first time rather than a precisely practiced experience. The German experimental theater company Rimini Protokoll describes the nature of memory by saying, "remembering

itself underpins performative process. It ignites itself in the here and now with specific materials that it organizes as a constellation in space to create a logic through their use" (192).

Memories are loaded with emotion and sensation; incredibly delicate and often exaggerated, they are framed moments of our uniquely perceived reality. I am interested in using choreography to dive into these snapshots, to put them in real time and to unpack them and study them in space.



Recollecting Disappearing, Photo by Jimmy Miracle

In early 2011 I was commissioned by Dance Exchange and the MetLife Foundation to choreograph a new work related to healthcare. I was inspired to research dementia and other forms of memory loss after my Aunt Mary had been diagnosed with Frontotemporal Dementia. From this research and work with a multi-generational cast I created *Recollecting Disappearing* -a site-specific work from four vantage points, which deals with memory loss within a family. In the final, a simple

diagonal walking pattern is performed forward and backward repeatedly as the oldest performer removes herself from the sequence and is able to study the group and the gap her absence has created within the choreography.

In *Figure Eights Part 1 & 2*, produced by Dance Place in January 2013, I continued musing on the theme of memory. *Part 1* was a group work for ten dancers of various ages and from an array of backgrounds. The work was constructed from memories of place, especially that of a home. In my journal from early in the process I wrote:

It is not the specifics of the memories that I am interested in. I am more interested in the fact that we remember the specifics. I am interested in how a memory is both blurry and detailed. It's a very dreamy thing. I am interested in this dreamy texture. The use of the senses in creating and recreating memorable moments and events. (Miracle: 2012)

In my collaborative process with my multigenerational cast of ten dancers, we investigated the use of imagination in memory and how fuzzy images of our childhood homes could be manipulated, warped and bent in the act of remembering. *Figure Eights Part 1* was without a strict narrative structure, which created a gentler and more open sense of interpretation in contrast to what I would later attempt in *Pleated*. The characters were undefined and could shift roles easily. This left the piece feeling like a faint and distant song, one that is sweet and enjoyable but you cannot quite make out all of the lyrics to it.

Autobiography/Family

"If your work does not sufficiently embarrass you, then very likely no one will be touched by it" (Anne Bogart, *A Director Prepares*, 113).

Can my own personal story be relevant to others? Is autobiographic dance self-indulgent and too narrow or is personal narrative an honest form of art? As an audience member I have certainly sat in many dark theaters watching performances that were so focused on self that it seemed there was no room for anyone else to be present. Watching was awkward. Or the performance felt too sentimental or like an inside-joke.

The first semester of graduate school, my choreography professor and mentor Sara Pearson gave an assignment to "make a dance about your father". This task grabbed me by the heart and challenged me to take very personal subject matter and share it with an audience while maintaining a high artistic integrity. This resulted in a two-year process with seven different performed variations on the piece. Every version of the solo performance involved hundreds of handmade postcards, sent to me every day over the past five years from my father. The choreography moved in, around, under and through this visually striking landscape. The physical interactions with the postcards served as a metaphor of my complex relationship to my father. In this work I sought to connect to the audience by slowly bringing them into my universe; "I was being let in, bit by bit, on a piece of a secret" one audience member described. Initially, the observer has no way of knowing what the objects covering

the stage are. Gradually more information is given. I address the audience like a friend, verbally describing and pantomiming the interior of my childhood home. Absorbed in a childhood memory, I lapsed into a whiny tantrum, accompanied by original audio sourced from a 1992 home video of an argument with my father. The bulk of the music score was composed and performed live by violinist David Schulman, also the composer for *Figure Eights Part 1* and *Blind Back/Seen Seeing*. His sound in *Figure Eights Part 2* created another character in the piece. At times his tunes felt like the spirit of my home, then shifted to the voice of my father, and then shifted again into a more uncertain tone that suggested the relationships in the piece were still in progress. The work ended by inviting the audience to look under their seats where I had hidden a postcard under each viewer. I then collected the postcards and brought them into a final image suggesting an open-ended sense of reconciliation.



Figure Eights Part 2 at Dance Place, Photo by Nguyen K. Nguyen

This solo brought into question the validity of autobiographical content in the use of performance, an issue I would also deal with in making *Pleated*. In struggling with this question I found encouragement from Susan Rethorst's book *A Choreographic Mind*. In it she wrote:

I want to make and see dance that is not about you - your thoughts, opinions, politics, history. I want to see dance that is of you, that arises out of you, out of the logic of your mind that holds also, those opinions and thoughts, the body's mind that has alit on the need to do this thing now, here instead of all the rest of infinite possible things to do. The filter that those infinite possibilities have flown through is you. I like art to reflect the workings of a unique individual mind, and to allow me a glimpse into that mind. For my money, that glimpse is much more interesting than being made privy to a mere thought produced by that mind. (107)

Working through this highly personal content in a choreographic context laid the foundation to make *Pleated*, though it was not as explicit in its connection to my own family experience I began to trust that it was a valid subject to explore.

The subject of sisterhood is particularly rich for me. As an adult I am still very close to both of my younger sisters. The two of them possess an exceptional power that brings out the best and worst of my personality. Within their safety and our shared history I can expose the most vulnerable parts of myself, including the ugly. In *Sisters on Screen* author Eva Rueschmann explains, "because of the intimate nature of the relationship, sisters can come to embody for one another a unique source of

familial identity" and that even grown-up sisters remain "bound together through time and memory under the spell of their likeness and their difference" (11).

While researching for *Pleated* in the summer of 2013 I read John Steinbeck's *East of Eden*. I wrote in my process journal that *East of Eden* was "a delicious feast in the trials of siblinghood." The truthfulness of the heart is less easily concealed in families. Or maybe that is not always true. Maybe it can be felt without being explicit. Why is it so much easier to be jealous of your siblings? Who do we want to be loved by?

Inspired by the raw and dynamic relationships I have to my sisters I wanted to create a work that addressed ideas of family, jealousy, kinship, loneliness, regret, and grace.

Chapter 4: Inspiration and Influence

Mis en scene

Despite my love affair with dance I find that my most meaningful encounters with art, particularly narrative art, come through film. Films, alongside home movies played an equally important role in the formation of my personal identity and artistic interests. In my family we relished the communal experience of watching a motion picture together. Most commonly movies were rented and we piled up on the couch to view the film together. In general my family gravitated toward classic films, 1950s musicals, or wholesome movies that had a strong sense of artistry and message. I have vivid memories of watching the original 1961 "Parent Trap" starring Haley Mills, a film from my mother's generation. When we watched old movies as a family it sparked nostalgia in my mother that I loved - serving to peel back a layer of her identity, allowing me to glance into her memories of growing up. These movies became icons of a world I wanted to experience.

This strong appreciation for film has continued into my adult life and greatly related to my developing voice as a choreographer. When I speak of film that inspires my work I am referring to directors who focus on domestic subject matter, particularly familial narratives including Woody Allen, Wes Anderson, Jean-Luc Godard, Federico Fellini, Mike Leigh, Roy Andersson, Todd Solondz, Michel Gondry, Aki Kurismaki, Ingmar Bergman and Spike Jonz. These directors create films that are highly stylized and composed with attention to color, character, tone

and framing. Cinematic devices are used to blur, heighten, and question reality, alternating between the ordinary and the fantasy.

To me, "moving pictures" are the most successful at synthesizing the senses - utilizing composed images, narratives told through montage, character, landscape, detail within the camera frame, and the layering of sound on top of a scene. One aspect I love about film as a medium for is how highly controlled it is. The director has full manipulation on how the viewer looks into the world. What has made me interested in using these devices as a choreographer in creating live art, and what keeps me from becoming a filmmaker is the three-dimensionality of dance and the palpable empathetic response from a living breathing audience to the living breathing performers on stage.

In *Pleated* I sought to create a cinematic experience for the viewer. Highlighting the frame of the space and the flatness of the wall of chairs, I utilized the verticality of the space by creating double compositions with the lower space and the upper space. I utilized sound like a film score and soundtrack, layering underneath and on top of action or blatantly bringing sound into the same world as the characters. I also looked to film in terms of audience relationship, voyeurism, and empathy toward the characters.

The first vignette of *Pleated*, which I refer to as "Paperdolls", was inspired by opening credits in films, particularly 1960s films that used animation to introduce the film and refer to its plot line. In *Pleated* we created a simple improvised score that ended with the performers standing in line each holding up a letter, which spelled out

the title of the piece. This short overture was meant to give the audience a small taste of the relationships they would get to know in the work.

I intentionally utilized filmic techniques in the choreography in order to disorient the viewer. A strong example of this is in the section I refer to as "Rewind/Fast-Forward". In this scene the older sisters pause, stop, rewind, and play a memory of their past-selves as if with a remote control. In a performance review paper one student wrote, "the dance sometimes feels almost like a dream, where you can change and manipulate aspects of the physical world and events that occur in ways not possible in reality, like dancing with your younger self or pausing within a memory to have a conversation with your sister". The student goes on to say that "the nonlinear dissemination of these tidbit remnants of yesteryear, infuses a sense of whimsy and wonder".

The films of Wes Anderson were particularly inspirational to me in the development of the characters in the piece. His characters are always well developed and act in earnest with good intentions. They are humorous, not because they are ever trying to be funny but because they are transparent and their transparency is what lets the audience find a piece of themselves inside the character. In addition to this, many of Anderson's films, (*The Royal Tenenbaums*, *The Fantastic Mr. Fox*, *Moonrise Kingdom*, *The Darjeeling Limited*) use family as the core subject matter. Without attempting to imitate Anderson's film style I wanted to find a similar integration of playfulness and absurdity with profound revelations into sister relationships.

A stewpot of influence

I will not go into great detail to define all the educators, choreographers and works of art that have played an instrumental role in my development as a performer and dance maker. Included in a big bubbling caldron of dance experience are: the highly sensitive ensemble tuning, wild abandon and intricate site-work of PEARSONWIDRIG; Jeanine Durning's motor-mouthing and doubling experiments; the democratic idealism and jubilation of David Dorfman; the lush spatial patterns of Doug Varone; Tere O'Connor's quick and dirty, censor-free outpouring of ideas; the ferocious confidence of Nora Chipaumire; the adolescent spirit I connect to when watching Faye Driscoll's work; questions of presence and perception passed on to me from Deborah Hay; Liz Lerman's brilliance in finding connective tissue between dance and community; Nancy Bannon's humiliating yet empowering exercises; the in-depth, radical movement and psychological musings I discovered working with Shannon Gillen; Pina Bausch's heart wrenchingly honest, exposure of the human being; the hyper organization and anti-narratives that rule Laura Peterson's choreography; the cruelty and victimizing found in female relationships as expressed in Deganit Shemy's *Iodine* and my miserable experience performing that work; my search for self through the bones' connection to earth in Klein Technique; and the choreographic structures of Susan Marshall, which seek to find meaningful movement through the backdoor.

Every one of these dance experiences is housed in my body and I believe that these jewels of influences are also tucked inside one of those red, purple or grey chairs in *Pleated*. In addition this list are several key collaborators and advisors worth

mentioning: my cohort through the MFA program, Erin Crawley-Woods, Jessie Laurita-Spanglet and Ana Patricia Farfan; my fearless thesis committee headed up by Sara Pearson, who supported me through every aspect of this project; Leslie Felbain, Theatre professor at the University of Maryland, with whom I took an introductory LeCoq based mask class, the physical theatre concepts I explored in this class and while reading LeCoq's book *The Moving Body* were not drastically different from a dancer's understanding of space, time, effort, and shape but the mask work offered me a new lens through which to look; collaborator Emma Jaster, who was brought in through funding from the Henson Foundation to support UMD artists working with puppets, also comes from the LeCoq lineage; Margit Wong, a theatre pedagogue from Germany, who came in to work with the dancers only on two occasions - nonetheless the experience together was deep and impacting; and many others who added useful feedback and insight into the process.

Chapter 5: The Process



Photo by Jimmy Miracle

Eye contact. Staring contests. Truthfulness. Ugliness. Obedience. Disobedience. Wishing you could really hurt someone. Really hurting someone. Stealing. Sabotaging. Begging. Plotting. Playing. Playing. Playing. Having a constant friend. One you couldn't shake. They were always around bugging you. Someone you had to be responsible for and take care of. Playing at the pool. - Journal entry from 5/10/13

Rehearsal Culture: A mode of community development

The process of constructing a live art performance is delicate and tender as it deals with human beings. When I am selecting dancers for a project I consider the

emotional alchemy I want to achieve on stage. I am not interested in homogeny but harmony. There should be a certain amount of push and pull within the group.

In the interest of cultivating a group of artists who genuinely take any interest in each other we must spend time together, share meals, and create a sense of trust. The rehearsal process is intended to access the whole dancer, which includes physical virtuosity and range as a actor but it also includes the emotional and spiritual insight of the performer.

In my years of working as a professional dancer I have found that the intimacy of the dance community can often create a cliquish, gossipy climate. In my most susceptible moments I found myself wounded by the "insider" groups. Extremely sensitive as to how rehearsal can be a breeding ground for ill spoken words and judgments towards other choreographers, I did not want my rehearsals to be a place of talking about others behind their backs but rather a place of support and listening. I am interested in exploring ways to approach the rehearsal process that involve openness with out sacrificing clarity of artistic vision. A process that invites feedback, is sensitive to the needs in the room and is able to coach and challenge the dancers toward their greatest potential can create interdependence and harmony. These are qualities that I seek to nurture within the ensemble of performers.

Dancer and choreographer Sarah Levitt once wrote to me in an e-mail discussing my work, "There is an element of mystery and delight...that you and your performers are experiencing the uncovering of something as much as the audience is. And that you are enjoying the process--even the hard parts have some joy to them".

I work with dancers who are involved in many different dance projects both as choreographers and performers. I also work with performers who do not solely identify themselves as dancers but are involved in a variety of studies/vocations completely unrelated to dance such as plant sciences, public policy, education, technology, etc. It is my hope that the time spent in movement research and exercises designed to awaken the senses and develop empathy with the ensemble might impact the dancers in a resounding way, bubbling over into their daily lives.

Through the rehearsal process the dancers were stitched together. Like scraps of material threaded together into one, multi-colored tapestry. Below are a few selected quotes from the performers that reflect the effects of the collaborative process:

"Pleated was one of the most fulfilling processes of my creative life. I loved taking part in all of the twists and turns of this piece; beginning with a sunny day in the courtyard talking about our childhoods, taking our time in countless improv experiences, and finally presenting the work was a beautiful journey. We were given plenty of space to allow creativity to work but still found the structure to anchor the piece and our experience. Stephanie created an atmosphere in which the cast could grow and flourish as a dynamic unit. "

- Liz Barton

"We were able to cultivate strong bonds and a group dynamic through the movement and acting activities we did together. This experience helped me grow as a performer and as a human." - Patty Mullaney-Loss

"This piece had a soul - it was a living, breathing family spirit; there was a bond of sisters that lived in this space and in two different planes of memory and time. Yet the time and experience we all had was encapsulated not only in the final product, but in the rehearsal process. I felt how important characters and belief and investment were to this piece, how the movement had motivation, not necessarily to just be pretty, but to convey a message aesthetically." - Phyllis Liu

"This process is my favorite that I've ever been involved in...The exercises that we did in rehearsals helped me become more comfortable and willing to explore vulnerability. The rehearsals and dancers provided a safe atmosphere--similar to a sisterhood--that fostered all sorts of emotions. We explored anger, fear, sadness, happiness, excitement, guilt, disappointment, and many others. I grew both as a person, performer, and dancer thanks to Stephanie and this process and it has positively affected many areas of my life, even outside of the dance studio." - Chelsea Brown

As a choreographer I see my process as being an agent for change. Through the creation of trust and respect we are becoming more available to the world around us. By practicing the act of seeing each other we can offer our eyes to people who need to be seen.

I began the creation process with questions. Personal questions to my dancers: *What was the most memorable object in your childhood bedroom and what does it symbolize for you?*, as well as compositional questions: *how can I create an movement vocabulary that communicates the effervescence of youth without the dancers 'pretending' to be kids?* For months the dancers and I played with verbal free association games. These games were simply responding to the last word that they heard as quickly and honestly as possible while also doing a simple physical task such as walking forward in space in a line. Like the mind of a child who has not learned to edit her speech, I wanted to empower the dancers to commit to the first choice that their mind (or body) made.

From the beginning until the end of the process I worked with the cast on an improvisational score based on seeing and doing. In this score of spontaneous text and movement, we would begin by verbally describing what the eye was seeing in space - a red speck, the speakers, my blue socks, a clock on the wall. As these words were being spoken the body was also moving in space, simple movements as opposed to prescribed choreography. The next step was to describe what the body was doing. "I am moving my right hand, I am punching the floor, I am looking up at the ceiling..." A final step would be to add in what you are feeling, imagining or remembering. "I am remembering a small door that lead to the basement, I am feeling scared and a little embarrassed." All of these tasks would be layered into one improvisational experience that aimed to cultivate presence, spontaneity and responsiveness with the use of the senses while moving in space. Through these exercises we began to build a trust with the group in our witnessing of each other.

An emotionally provocative exercise inspired by Nancy Bannon was aimed to allow the dancers to open themselves up to an emotionally volatile place (anger, fear, sadness) by speaking spontaneously a repeatable prompt until it took them to an unexpected emotional place. Examples of prompts might be "I want...", "I am sick and tired of...", "I hate it when you..." In these the dancer stands in front of the group and is instructed to speak without pause to an imagined person in front of them. They are to stand still and breathe until they have hit an emotional peak after which I would let them know they could begin moving/dancing. For most performers this led them into unexpected memories and deep feelings. For others they maintained their cool and would employ self-preserving techniques if they encountered a moment of feeling too exposed.

We also experimented with improvisational duet scores involving contact improvisation. This score was to explore a range of physical touch from tenderness to aggression. The shift between the two extreme states could be sharp or gradual. In this we discovered a language of believable intimacy.

Rick Westerkamp's review of *Pleated* proves to me that the improvisational exercises with the ensemble paid off. In this section of the article he so keenly recognized the cultivation of the skills I seek in my performers and their relationships with each other:

"The cast of *Pleated* embodies the tenets of Miracle's work, from an outside observer's perspective of course. The dancer must embrace the idea of exhibiting a certain level of frenzy in the body without giving oneself over to

it wholly. The dancer should be an adroit technician with a strong sense of line in her own body. The dancer should possess a certain level of daring, both in their performance qualities and in being open to climbing on each other and the architecture of the space. A sense of physical and emotional abandon is helpful, but backed up with the sense of one's own body to know how far is far enough versus too far. The dancer should be verbally aware, able to speak loudly and clearly in performance, while also being able to ground the text in a sense of realism. Last, but certainly not least, the dancer should be playful and willing to go on an artistic journey. Now, these are not singular to Miracle's work, but the combination of these characteristics were adroitly and elegantly displayed by Chelsea Brown, Robin Neveu Brown, Unissa Cruse-Ferguson, Nicole Y. McClam, Phyllis Liu, Patricia Mullaney-Loss, and Elizabeth Barton in the performance of *Pleated*, making me think that these ideas would transfer to other artistic endeavors with Miracle (www.dcmetrotheatrearts.com).

In the final weeks before the premiere I received an e-mail from one of the performers expressing her connection to the *Pleated* cast, "I definitely trust them, which makes me feel great inside of the dance. This process has been the best thing I've ever been involved in ... working with you, Kate [Folsom], and the other dancers has taught me more than I even realize".



Photo by Zachary Z Handler

On Casting who was who

I intentionally resisted making a firm choice on character assignments until late into the process. Whereas in *Figure Eights Part 1* was more interested in the feeling of memory and less in specifics of character, I decided that *Pleated* would be clearer in who was who. The idea of doubling characters was inspired by my own interest in placing my present self next to past versions of myself. In a therapy session I once envisioned multiple versions of my past selves dancing in semi-unison together. Not bound by chronological time we could all align in space together. This vision is made manifest in the Swimming Dream section of the piece when all the dancers get into to a single file line and do what my mentor Sara Pearson would label "Twyla Unison", a term she uses to describe ensemble movement that is using the same choreography but is slightly staggered in time, living somewhere between unison and canon. The Swimming Dream is one of the only scenes where all seven performers dance the same material. I intentionally lit this moment with near-blinding

light directed straight on downward angle toward the audience. The light is so strong and confrontational that viewer is not able to look directly into the face of the dancer. Only splashes of color from the costumes are slightly discernable. In this moment the characters lose their distinction and become variations on a single body.

I selected Robin and Chelsea to play the role of the oldest sister. As the oldest of three girls this was to represent my role and my memories. This character would be a leader through the entire piece. I sought to highlight this person but not overemphasize her significance, as I was more interested in all of the relationships and the complexity of them rather than one single person's experience of nostalgia. Robin and Chelsea were also equally matched in terms of physicality and acting. Both performers did very well with the style of text that I was working with. Ironically, both Robin and Chelsea are younger sisters in real life.

Dynamically, the middle sister was not only very different from my personal experience of my middle sister but the two performers posed radically different skills. Unissa is a strong presentational performer and I found it very difficult to open her up in terms of vulnerability. She was often dancing on top of the floor rather than using the ground to source her power. This was the complete opposite of Nicole. Nicole is highly mature as a performer and very grounded in her physicality. She exhibits vulnerability. Opposite extremes: Nicole would cry easily and Unissa never cried.

Working with a multi-racial cast I am not shy to say that I specifically chose Nicole as the double for Unissa because of race. I did not however choose that the two of them play the middle statement as any sort of statement on race but simply because within the context of the cast they were the best fit for the role. Both Unissa

and Nicole had a powerful command as performers and I wanted to use their strengths to create a dynamic tension with the "oldest" and "youngest" characters.

Phyllis and Patty were also unusually matched. Physically the two differed most from each other. Patty is tall, fair skinned. Her personality is bright, bubbly, and highly intellectual. Phyllis is Asian-American, strong and compact. She has a youthful energy that is also concentrated and diligent. Their one commonality was short, black hair. Nonetheless their energies complemented each other in the piece.

This mix-match grouping of performer posed an interesting challenge as I attempted to cobble a family relationship together. Again, looking to film as a reference I found an essay by Murry Pomerance titled, "The Look of Love: Cinema and the Dramaturgy of Kinship." What stood out to me in the Pomerance essay was the idea of establishing an "implicit family". He writes, "In 'implicit family' films we root for the bonding of those whose claims to relationship are distinctly, troublingly insupportable but whose narrative development we wish to enthusiastically watch, since their claims are the claims legitimate people make" (299). I sought to establish meaningful relationships with the sister characters not based on physical look, mannerism, or character back-story but based on the expression of their needs to each other and the way in which they respond to the other family members.

The final cast member Liz Barton, playing the role of the friend was added to the cast with hesitation. Liz enthusiastically offered herself to me as an understudy for the piece. Dedicated, concentrated and easy to communicate with, she displayed all the ideal qualities of a dancer whom I was interested in working with. However, her technical and performance capabilities as a dancer were initially not what I was

envisioning for the work. I knew that she would not be well suited to play one of the sisters in the family but I had a strong feeling that I wanted to add an additional character to play an outsider, a friend character who was intimately involved with the family but not kin. The more Liz was present in rehearsals the more integral I found her energy and personality to the piece. Aesthetically she presented a very different flavor in the group dynamic and slowly she began to embrace her own awkward classical training. Her presence in the piece displays that of a young, only child desirous to be a part of a family community. She also represents the friendships that add richness and tension to sibling relationships. In the work Kate as character does not have an older version. In this way she displays the passing friendships that come into our lives and then stay someone frozen in time through our memory instead of transitioning into our present day lives.

The work we did together to create full characters and develop emotional vulnerability with each other had significant resonance in the final performances as one student audience member wrote in her class paper:

Each dancer completely captured and perfectly personified their respective characters, bringing the choreography brilliantly to life. Every imaginable human emotion and boundless amounts of energy were critical to the parts of this performance, and the dancers showcase these excellently through their deft body movements and facial expressions.



Photo by Zachary Z. Handler

Place/Space/Site

In my thesis proposal I requested to use the Dance Theatre space in an unusual way, altering not only the audience position but utilizing the architecture in the construction of site-specific choreography. The Guggenheim website defines site-specific work as, "an artist's intervention in a specific locale, creating a work that is integrated with its surroundings and that explores its relationship to the topography of its locale" (www.guggenheim.org).

The Dance Theatre was a place that I spent hours in daily because of my graduate school classes. My physical and visual relationship to this location was one of love and hate. In one way the space felt ugly and uncoordinated and in another way, I saw it as a giant playground that was inviting me to discover its charms. In *Pleated* I wanted to create a work that acknowledged the tangible features of the

space: the bright red panel above the chairs which separated "upstairs" from "downstairs"; the 50 ft white cinder block walls which created perfect silhouettes when bright light was cast; the slippery, smooth wood of the floor on which the dancers could glide across like water; the cubby holes in the wall perfectly fitted for a body to lay within; and the dizzying wall of retracted risers which could be climbed vertically like a rock climbing gym.

I wanted the space to be recognized for its standout features while also serving as surface on which the performers and audience members could project imagined details of child's bedroom, a swimming pool, or a neighborhood park. These settings would be described through the dancers' movement and language and not through the use of props.

One example of how I expressed imagined space in *Pleated* was the "Obstacle course" scene, which exploded into the space performed by the younger sisters and then is later repeated by the older versions of the sisters with a reminiscent quality. While at the 2013 summer Bates Dance Festival I was greatly inspired by a composition workshop I had taken with Doug Varone, an award winning choreographer known for his lushious, Jackson Pollak-esque slashes and swirls through space. Using one of his choreographic tools, I developed the movement for the "Obstacle course" by organizing props in the space for the performers to negotiate through and around. A spatial circuit was created so that each dancer had intricate, pedestrian movement with the same objects and along the same pathway. This movement score was intended to define the space and create a sense of playfulness in the space.



Photo by Jimmy Miracle

Character Development

Character development seemed to come slowly and tentatively. Instead of insisting that the dancers take on the roles of my sisters, their personalities, and my personal childhood memories, I attempted to cultivate a more natural regression into childhood. We did this by playing games with each other. Early choreographic games included creating imaginary scenes involving spaceships, dress up, adventures. I would often split the group into two teams. The first team would act out the scene and then the second group would try to replicate the scene as closely as possible. This was another example of the doubling that I was interested in.

For the character of June I looked to the heroine in a juvenile fiction book I had recently by Polly Horvath titled *My one hundred adventures*:

Perhaps I have had nothing to pray for until now. As if itchy and outgrown, my soul is twisting about my body, wanting something more to do this summer than the usual wading in the shallows and reading and building castles on the shore. I want something I know not what, which is what adventures are about. The step into the know-not-what. I want it so badly it is making me bad-tempered with Maya, who is too young to understand. She wants every summer the same, and so had I until this year. And my brothers are too young to care about anything like this for a long time. I am twisting all alone. (4 - 5)

This section from the book not only related to my personal experience as the oldest child but it also related to the choreography of the oldest-sisters duet - "Shaking All Over", which twists and wiggles uncomfortably in anticipation of change.

This book also inspired a journal writing assignment that I gave to my performers. They were given the task to write as their character describing good days and bad days in their everyday life. The journal entries written by the younger versions of the sisters were then given to the older versions of the sisters and vice versa. This helped the dancers begin to add texture and perspective to their characters. Here is an example of a journal entry from Chelsea written in the voice of the younger version of June:

Today I feel stuck between a grown-up and a kid. I can't really relate to either. I'm like a ping-pong ball bouncing back and forth. I don't have much

fun playing kid games anymore but I don't wanna tell Maggie that. I asked mom to take me bra shopping since Kate already wears them...

Basic writing exercises like this allowed for the performers to flesh out their characters in hand-crafted ways. Instead of me determining all the details of the back-story the dancers were given to permission to use their own imagination and creative license, personalizing their role in the work.

Chapter 6: Learning to hear the heartbeat



Photo by Zachary Z. Handler

I alternate between fear and courage in this journey. Teetering on an edge at one moment I am excited and believe that I am on the brink of something fresh and real and at the next moment I am certain that I have no skill, that I do not know what I am doing and that everyone must think I am a fool for trying to make work. I am puzzled by this quick back and forth of emotions.

- (From Process journal 1/15/14)

Fear and the creative process

Fear of failure was a constant hound in my process. There are two main contributors to these flashes of fear. One is that I care a lot about how I perceive others opinion's of my work. The second is that I do not actually know how to do

what I want to do. It is not that I don't know WHAT I want to do, although this too can be illusive, it is that I do not know the HOW of what I am doing. I am left with an on-the-tip-of-my-tongue feeling. I get close to expressing the idea but it does not hit the right tone. I do not know HOW to create the tone. But I have an internal sense that knows when I am getting closer to hitting the right note. Not knowing the HOW of my expression leaves me feeling doubtful of my skill and confused as to how I can acquire the skills that I lack.

In my bed at night I was often haunted by these demons. I felt my job was to acknowledge this monster and let it into the piece instead of pretending that I felt nothing. In doing this I began to recognize that fear of being seen as worse than my peers was directly related to my feelings of intimidation and envy from sisterhood. The feelings are not rational but they are deep-rooted have the power to choke out my creative voice. Bringing up bitter resentments from my sibling relationships enabled me to have a different perspective on why I was so afraid of being compared to fellow choreographers. Once again I found support in Susan Rethorst's words:

The road to that confidence is a true and deep engagement in your work, and thus the ability to turn off that fear of opinion and find the excitement of unknowing, rather than its discomfort, and a leap of faith that allows for that turn. Your work needs to become yours, your den, your lair. You need to locate and keep yourself there. You never will if you believe that others know what is best for your dance. (126)

Learning through the doing

Saying "yes" to an idea and then following it through was what taught me the most in the creation process. By this I mean that I could not learn about WHAT the piece was until I put something into the space and fully committed to it. This was most clear to me in all of the showings along the way. Every time my dancers and I sequenced sections together and performed the choreography, even if the ideas were not fully fleshed out, I gained a deeper insight into whom the piece was and what it was trying to say.

Between December and February we held seven informal showings that presented *Pleated* as fully realized as possible. This included lights and costume sketches. These work-in-progress performances helped the dancers, the collaborators, and me hone in on the essence of the work and trim away loose threads. The more we ran the piece in its full form the more we began to recognize the gestalt of it.

This was a revolutionary for me. This process of making, showing, reflecting, and refining taught me to embrace the fullness of what the dancers and movement front of me were revealing, letting go of what I thought the piece should be or how I imagined it in my head. Jean-Luc Godard, the director of *Breathless*, admits his process of accepting his own film for what it was:

The only thing is, one never does exactly what one intended. Sometimes one even does the opposite. At least this is true of me. But at the same time, I am responsible for everything I do. After a certain time, for instance, I realized that *Breathless* was not at all what I thought. I thought I had made a realistic

film, like Richard Quine's *Pushover*, but it wasn't that at all. In the first place, I didn't have enough technical skill, so I made mistakes; then I discovered that I wasn't made for this kind of film. There were also a lot of things I wanted to do but that I can't bring off. For instance, those shots of cars looming through the night in [Franju's] *Head Against the Wall*. I would also like to compose shots that are magnificent in themselves, like Fritz Lang, but I can't. So I do other things. Although I felt ashamed of it at one time, I do like *Breathless* very much, but now I see where it belongs - along with *Alice in Wonderland*. I thought it was *Scarface*. (44)

In a moment of frustration I stormed in to my advisor Karen Bradley's office and proclaimed that I was fearful that I did not know how to make dazzling choreography and that I would not be successful in creating a highly crafted, fresh, virtuosic movement vocabulary for the piece. Her reply to me was reverberating, "You will dazzle people if your work is meaningful". In other words, the power of the work did not lay in what genre of dance I was working in, or even how innovative my concepts or dance moves were. The piece would be powerful if it moved people.

On Making Fork

Woven into the process was another important figure but outsider to the University of Maryland, Kate Folsom, a dancer and trusted friend whom I had worked with on two of my previous choreographies (*Figure Eights Part 1* and *Blind Back/Seen Seeing*). As a performer Folsom performs movement with precision and

clarity while infusing it with psychological depth and nuance. She had also worked with Emma Jaster, my puppet collaborator and theater consultant, on Emma's work *To Know a Veil* and served as a bridge between the two of us. Much like the friend character in the piece "Kate" (not based off of Kate Folsom but my childhood friend Kate Silvey) the Folsom was brought into to add perspective and texture to the rehearsal process. Knowing that I like to create in dialogue with others, I desired an additional outside eye to help me discuss, react and muse off of. Kate learned material and participated in most of the development exercises. She also helped to balance the doubled characters: each sister had an older and younger version while the character "Kate" was singular in the work. The real Kate served as the character "Kate's" double.



Another interest in involving Kate Folsom in the project was to create a duet work that pulled from the themes and movement vocabulary in the piece but stood apart as a separate work. The creation of *Fork* was fast and furious. With little time for development Kate and I quickly created a complicated number map to serve as the movement score for the piece, a process that I mirrored in the creation of the sound score, a syncopated remix of the first six seconds of Simon and Garfunkle's iconic song "Cecilia". After two rehearsals we showed *Fork* as a work-in-progress program called "Dance and Desserts" in McLean, VA. With an enthusiastic response from the viewers, we went back to refine and edit the work just in time to audition for the Maryland Choreographers' Showcase. Adjudicator Zvi Gottinger, a well established contemporary ballet choreographer in New York, wrote of the piece saying:

These two amazing performers "regress" to pre-adolescent behavior and silly child-game like rituals, and emerge with a profound and sophisticated choreographic work, that is touching a nerve. The work is beautifully structured with repeated and morphed motifs and is smartly organized as a series of games, defined by a repeated ritual of holding hands. Their partnering is inventive, like they come-up with it on the spot. They do not perform for us, but are totally self-absorbed, unconscious of space and time. That quality makes the experience of watching them voyeuristic, like you witness an intimate act. They seem to be trying to repair something that is unrepairable, but they keep trying.

The creation of this duet enabled me to climb inside of the spirit of *Pleated*. Through this experience I could clothe myself with the energy and nature of the work without literally being in the cast of the concert. The duet *Fork* could stand on its own while also working as a "sister" or companion piece to my thesis.

Just prior to *Pleated's* opening, I worked with videographer Nguyen K. Nguyen to shoot a film version of the piece so that it could have a visual presence next to *Pleated* without Kate and me performing it live. I took the beautiful footage that Nguyen shot and edited it to to a five-minute video. Rather than being a documentation of the performance the film version used tight shots, costume changes, and quick jump-cuts to create a eyecatching, two-dimensional depiction of the dance.

Chapter 7: Collaboration, Participation and Entanglement

Speaking in tongues

In the 1980 documentary *Poto and Cabengo* filmmaker Jean-Pierre Gorin follows the story of six-year-old twin sisters who have lived most of their lives in isolation from society and have invented a highly elaborate, idiosyncratic language that only the two of them can understand. In *Pleated* the cast and I were successful in creating a self-functioning piece with our own distinctive language. Whether this was in part because of the complex prop, costume and light elements as well as the delicate negotiations with the space or if it had to do with our intimate, "sisterly" relationship I found that it was difficult to bring the designers into our world. Even though they were familiar with the ideas in the work they had not spend the hours in the studio learning the language of the piece.

Collaboration to me is defined by conversation and a back and forth of listening/responding. In order for a conversation to occur we needed to discover how to communicate in the right dialect.

Color and fabric: Working with costumes

Costumes are one of the first elements I consider when embarking on a new choreographic work. I am drawn to bright, saturated colors that reference 1960s pop fashion, vintage fabrics of thick heavy knits and well-worn cotton prints. Aside from costuming my own work I have also designed costumes for Nicole Wolcott, the Dance Exchange and Erica Rebollar.

Although I knew immediately what type of look I was aiming for in *Pleated*, I was hopeful that a collaborative relationship with a MFA designer would lead me in directions I had not considered. The collaboration with costume designer Tyler Gunther was marked by a long progression of trial and error experiments with potential costumes. Tyler immediately entered a dialogue with me about the look and feeling of the piece. He brought a genuine curiosity into the subject matter and the time period that I was interested in. He attended many rehearsals and conducted surveys with the dancers on their personal childhood memories and their favorite outfits growing up. His early research referred to a '60s color palate (which I loved) and fashion trends from tweens in the '90s. The actual renderings that came from this initial research was not at all in the direction that I envisioned for the final piece, but it was a start. Tyler continued to attend rehearsals and by December he brought in articles of clothing from costume stock for us to try out. This jump from hypothetical renderings to actual garments was immensely useful. It took his ideas off of the paper and onto the body, which gave me the opportunity to respond to what was working and what wasn't. It took approximately four or five more rounds of trying variations of costumes on the ensemble before we decided on the final design for the cast. This process included a shopping trip at the thrift store, a result of a meeting with costume professor Helen Huang, my thesis chair Sara, Tyler and myself. On this shopping trip I became better acquainted with how Tyler was looking for colors and shapes versus how I was looking for colors and shapes. This trip helped to clarify where miscommunications were occurring.



Photo by Zachary Z. Handler

Throughout the collaboration, Tyler was responsive and respectful of my role as director. When I was unsatisfied with a costume piece he offered more options. Despite his positive attitude and willingness, I never felt he fully grasped the specificity of my artistic vision. By the end of the process I felt that the costumes were cohesive, vibrant and helped to establish mood and tone for the piece while clarifying the character relationships. After seeing the performance student Amber Frazier wrote, "As the dancers entered the costumes spoke before their actions,..as the dance continued the costumes began to tell a story." The colors of the costumes were highly successful in communicating who was who to the audience but the fabrics and shapes of the garments did not possess the uniqueness and rich personality that I had desired with *Pleated's* visual design.

While I may not always see the need to utilize a costume designer in future works I felt that our collaboration helped me to consider how to approach conversations with a costume designer and how to more clearly articulate my vision to a fellow artist.



Photo by Zachary Z. Handler

Shadow and illumination: Working with Light

My relationship with lighting designer Max Doolittle clicked very early on. He seemed to immediately understand that I was interested in a duality between hyper-reality/mundane and whimsy. After the first thesis showing in September he wrote to me saying:

Your movement and sound is so evocative of a location and an idea-that I thought why not just do the piece in plain light. Not worklight-but something distinctly not theatrical and not representational. Then-should we find a moment-we can tear that world apart and snap into something either colorful or hard edged-something that feels like a performance. The play between those two might be interesting??

From this we focused on how to create a look that simulated the ordinary light of the dance theater and then a minimal use of special, theatrical lights to pop the heightened imagination in other scenes. We both clearly understood that I would be greatly limited in the lighting equipment we could use for the work because I was requesting to flip the space. Rather than using a fully functional theater I was placing the audience on stage and requesting that the audience side of the space be given magic. In addition to this we were sharing a program with my fellow MFA candidate Ana Patricia Farfan and her thesis concert *My Tempest*. This meant that space would need to be transitioned and adapted to suit her needs within the same evening.

By late Fall 2013 I began to work with contractor lights in the space. The reasoning for this was two-fold: I wanted to get a sense of how the lights were going to affect and change the feeling of the dance early on so that I would have more time to fine-tune the choreography in relation to the light; and I wanted the lights to give a low-budget, home-made, living room dance sort of feel to the work.

The addition of flashlights came when I wanted to add a scene with whispers and ghost stories. I was working on character development with Patty and Phyllis (the

youngest) and we were interviewing each other with the flashlights. In the process we developed an improvised score using flashlights. The discovery of this dance felt fresh and alive. It quickly became the most prized section of the dance. My dramaturge even said to me after an informal showing, "if you could just make all of the sections of the dance as good as that one I think you will have a really great piece". Interestingly as I look back on the finished work I think that the flashlight duet ended up being a less successful component in the context of the larger narrative structure. These simple minimally lit scenes (Dance Party, Slow motion, Swimming Dream, Marco Polo and Flashlight Duet) helped to define the "living room dance" aesthetic and directed use of light in the other scenes. These low-lit scenes also helped us to focus on playing with other lighting possibilities for the remaining scenes. Because our tech time in the theater was extremely limited, only a single six-hour day, I was happy for my choice of simple lighting for nearly half of the show.

What Max and I discovered in this process was that the entire piece demanded more magic. Our original ideas of everyday lighting were not strong enough to really draw the audience into the proscenium-esque performance. One large issue was that Ana's piece had requested to pull up the black marley on the stage side/my audience side. The blonde wood underneath the flooring was much brighter and the light bounced off the surface more. This created a bleed of space from the performer's world to the viewer's world. Although I was interested in blurring the line between audience and dancer I wanted to be very specific about which moments I did this. If there were no line between the performer and the observer's eye the "movie theater" feeling would be completely obsolete.

In between dress rehearsals, I joined Max during his "dark" time in the theater to problem solve and tweak the lights. We worked for a total of seven hours prior to the premiere. Our time to reflect on the notes from the past run and to work to solve problems creatively and collaborative was educational to me, a satisfying and unexpected merging of artistic languages. In these hours together we found solutions for how to light the Chelsea/Robin "Shaking all over" bedroom duet which became one of the more visually striking scenes because of the revised lighting ideas. In addition to this duet, the most successfully lit scenes included the bunkbeds, the falling/time travel moments, and the climbing dress up party.

Though our collaboration felt successful in the sense of exchange and dialogue the execution was slightly disappointing. In retrospect I think Max and I could have used more lighting instruments to heighten the relationships and emotions on stage. I think we also could have separated the audience from the stage more clearly. These were all issues we discovered from watching the piece with the addition of his lights. We could have responded with greater refinement but we simply did not have the time.

Environment: Working with Scenic Design

After seeing your movement I really think that the physical space and the movement contrasting each other is important and interesting! I thought that what you have so far was nothing that I had seen before. I loved the way that you used levels... I think making it a truly 'sight' specific piece is what is going to make the show successful. I really don't think you need any

additional scenery from what is already given in the seating. (e-mail correspondence after first showing from Lydia Francis)

My relationship to the set designer, MFA candidate Lydia Francis, was least clearly defined. Because I was focused on utilizing the existing structures in the Dance Theatre I was not in need of a traditional set designer. What was essential to my work was creating an environment for my audience to comfortably watch the piece with full sightlines considered. This process of collaboration was slow to begin but highly successful in the end. Through various meetings and conversations we determined that a backyard movie environment would be appropriate for the piece. Using athletic mats and an assortment of garage sale pillows and blankets, we created a make-shift theater with the clouds from *My Tempest* overhead. From the first production meetings I had spoken again and again about not wanting to hide anything in the theater but fully embrace everything in the visual field. This meant that anything that would exist in Ana's piece would also need to exist within my world. Luckily both Ana and I shared an interest in the dichotomy between the real world and the fantasy theatrical world. Ana's fanciful, bumbley clouds did not in any way contradict the world I was creating.

I worked with Max to light the clouds in such a way that as the audience entered the space the scenic design was put at the forefront. With a gorgeous blue and pink sunset splashed onto the back cyc and the clouds lit like a dreamscape we effectively diverted attention from the empty performance space and focused the energy onto the audience seating, creating a cozy and intimate picnic environment.

Upon entering, I was struck with surprise at the theatre which had been transformed...The area where the guests normally sit had been converted into the stage space, the risers had been pushed back, and the area that is usually the dance stage housed chairs, mats, and pillows for visitors to sit and watch the show. The atmosphere was very cozy, personal, and warm, for colorful blankets and pillows adorned the sitting area, [and] clouds filled the sky... I knew I that I was in for a unique, transformative experience unlike other dance performances I had ever seen before. (Nikki Lust, student paper)



Photo by Zachary Z. Handler

Puppetry: Working with Emma Jaster

The most fruitful season of development was in January while working with Emma Jaster. I had brought Emma into the process specifically because of her work with puppetry. I knew I wanted to work with a puppeteer although I wasn't quite sure of its connection to my choreographic interests. Perhaps it is related to my desire for grace as dancer. In von Kleist famous article "On the Marionette Theatre" from 1801 he writes,

Like elves, the puppets need only to touch upon the ground, and the soaring of their limbs is newly animated through this momentary hesitation; we dancers need the ground to rest upon and recover from the exertion of the dance; a moment that is certainly no kind of dance in itself and with which nothing further can be done except to at least make it seem to not exist. (24)

Although I am not entirely sure that I agree with von Kleist's assumption that the moment of recovery is not indeed dance I do believe that puppets move like humans could only dream of - soaring through the air, crumpling to the ground, seamlessly shape-shifting. The viewer personifies the inanimate object, imbuing it with life and character. In this moment, the onlooker transfers a part of him or herself into the puppet. This kind of kinesthetic empathy to a non-human body is quite beautiful to me and contains the childlike wonder I knew was essential to *Pleated*.

With funds from the Henson Foundation and through TDPS, Emma was brought in for two weeklong creative residencies. The first week with her in July led to one scene that would remain a hallmark of *Pleated*.

A most beautiful discovery came when we began playing with the dresses on the ropes. The drift and swing of the dressing coming down from such a great height was truly delightful. It brought a new sense of height and depth into a space that is largely seen as flat because of the wall of seats. And what a character! I was charmed and utterly enchanted when the magic dress came swooping into the space. All eyes were glued to "her" (the dress') every movement. (Process Journal from 7/2/13)

With Emma back for a January intensive we knew we would be come back to a further investigation into the dress puppet. During that week our days were long and full. Without the distractions of other school events we spent everyday - six hours day, in the Dance Theatre for a week. This generous amount of time, though it always seems there is never enough time, gave us the opportunity to create a cycle of making and then observing. The period of time was extremely productive and I found Emma's skills as a versatile theatre artist to be refreshing to us all. She brought freshness to the production and an energy that inspired and transformed many of the performers, particularly developing their sense of timing. She gave us tools to understand the rhythm of the text in the piece and how leave the right amount of time for a line to land with the audience.

The character building work with Emma centered on establishing back story and finding ways to all agree upon the context of the situation. Without spelling everything out for the dancers, we discovered the usefulness of determining factors like age, environment, and situation. Emma gave an assignment to the dancers for them to write out their age, goals, and tactics for each scene of the piece. This helped for us to clarify what discrepancies existed. It also helped to reveal where there were still gaps in understanding the nature of each scene.

Chapter 8: Working with an Institution

Undoubtedly the most challenging part of the thesis process was learning to understand the Center and the TDPS systems of theatrical procedure. In fact I still do not feel that I completely understand how things work. Last year, when I was fully produced as a solo artist at Dance Place, I was clearly presented with a full contract with all of the expectations and protocol for production. When I attended production meetings with the staff and crew of Dance Place all questions were clearly answered and professionally followed through. I opted to hire the resident stage manager for my show and was profoundly impressed by her expertise in calling the show and the skills in working with the performers. I found the team to be supportive artistically and technically and thoroughly receptive to my vision for the entire show.

The Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center is a much larger creature than Dance Place. In the building we have multiple performance venues, which produce large and smallscale student productions alongside internationally renowned, award-winning shows by well-established dance icons such as Eiko & Koma, Meredith Monk and Bill T. Jones. From my perspective the Center is a well functioning machine, which includes executive, programming, marketing, departmental, as well as costume shops, scenic shops, electrical shops, props shops, box office, and house management teams. The Center is apart of the much larger educational institution, the University of Maryland, involving thousands of students and outside communities.

Pleated was presneted by the School of Theatre, Dance, and Performance Studies with support from the Center. Unlike Dance Place, whoes mission focuses on

producing and presenting almostly exclusively dance artists, the School is a laerger entitiy that serves many differnt populations, largest of which is undergraudent students - with an emphasis on learning and faciliating in addition to helping artist manifest their vision. In this environment students have the unqiue opportunity to work on a variety of top-not productions and with high calibre professionals. Students take on roles as stage manager, crew, designers, house managers, and board operators. This creates an inteteresting justaposition of experience within a production and with it comes many oppotunities for miscommunication and problem solving.

It does not surprise me that the School was challenged by my unusual request of performance space. Many issues were involved in being granted permission to produce an evening of dance in this way. One issue was that of safety. Climbing up and down the sides of the risers, dancing inside of the steps and on the top level of the space near to its edge were all potentially dangerous for the performer. In the process of acquiring permission to use the space in such a way I was asked to let go of several ideas including: performing or placing lights behind the risers and being on the risers when they were opening or closing mechanically. When The Center Council granted the project permission to proceed, it was done so with a certain number of conditions including bringing in local aerial artist Andrea Burkholder as a climbing coach, who was an extraordinary help in the process.

In one way I saw the school, staff, and faculty as being unswervingly dedicated to my artistic interests and choreographic goals. In another way I felt that I was being misled or ill-prepared for the system that I would have to face. I

simultaneously felt empowered and disempowered by the process. On the one hand I was being given a generous amount of resources and manpower to support the manifestation of my project but on the other hand the existing systems within the Center and TDPS designed to accommodate a more traditional style theater production, were not accustomed to a project like this.

Pleated, in many respects, was a low-budget, DIY style production with thrift-store found costumes, simple props, and easy to use lighting equipment. I designed the show this way, not only because this aesthetic relates thematically in that it refers to my childhood days of directing living room dances, but this simple production elements gave me greater control over the tone of the piece. I could conduct the work, complete with lights, costumes, props and sound very early on, long before the concert went into the final production. This type of hands-on working, while it does not follow the standard theatre where the stage manager takes on this role, is not uncommon in the dance world. In fact world-renowned choreographer William Forsythe is known to call the lights and sound live during performances (Ransom, n.p.).

The complexity of the show lay in its fine-tuned calling of cues, the off-kilter audience placement, and the unconventional use of space. Though its production value was rather modest, the work demanded a highly sensitive stage manager. Working with a student stage manager was a challenge that I was not prepared for. While I did learn many significant lessons in the differences of theatre vs. dance and how to better communicate my needs as a director and choreographer. A mode of working that I look for in my process demands that people be curious, empathic and

aware both the details as well as the big picture. The work itself must be recognized, validated and empowered with sensitivity to the space and the environment by everyone involved in the live performance.

Chapter 9: Seeing is Believing



Photo by Zachary Z. Handler

Considering the Audience

In all of my work I want to give people more tools to see and feel the world around them. My dances seek to illuminate ways in which we can observe and reflect on our family, memory, and our sense of place. The theatrical experience can be full of visions and wonder and can it also expose us to what we try to ignore or hide from ourselves. The exaggeration of life can raise questions about how we operate in day-to-day life. My dances are intended to be gifts to those who encounter them. I intend to find great pleasure and growth through the creative process of making a work. As my choreography often comes from an autobiographical place, I hope that the work I make will serve to bring more clarity in the relationships that I have to family and friends and the greater community.

While making *Pleated* I spent a great deal of time considering what I wanted to invite my audience into. How could I welcome the viewer into my topsy-turvy, sisterhood world with unexpected shifts in space, girlish cliques, and a heavy coat of pop sensibility while still leave room for the universal? How could I create an environment that evoked the viewer's own unique memories? In *A Choreographer's Handbook* by Jonathon Burrows, the author muses on how to create a bond between the audience, the performer and the content of the piece:

The first things the audience sees when a performance begins form a contract. This contract teaches the audience how to read the performance, at the same time as the performance is unfolding. The contract is the key to understanding the continuity that holds and gives sense to the piece. This is as true of an abstract piece, as of a narrative piece. When a piece makes sense to us it appears to reach a point where we would accept anything that happens. The continuity of unfolding objects has set up a series of clues, which teach us how to read, anticipate, recognize and be surprised by what follows. (34)

Opening night and the days that followed

Offering up *Pleated* was a terrible and beautiful experience. At this point I lost control of the work. It was in the hands of the performers, the crew, and the audiences who came to watch. Opening night was particularly meaningful because my two younger sisters, both of whom live thousands of miles away, sat in the audience next to me. With clasping hands and tearful eyes they witnessed the piece that I had made

inspired by our real life memories. Though I had worked so diligently to make the piece universal and accessible to diverse audiences, *Pleated* was undoubtedly dedicated to my sisters Erin and Mary, with an intention to ignite healing in old, covered up wounds and to knit us closer together.

Beyond the impact this work had on my family, I was overwhelmed by the written responses I received from students and audience members who were very moved by the work.

[The] scene where the girls admit to their jealousies of each other and take responsibility for their actions is extremely heartwarming and touched a deep part of my soul...This part brought me to tears and struck a cord deep inside of my soul because it truly captured what life is like as you transition from being young and carefree to the older world where you face challenges of jealousy, betrayal, culpability, and bigger responsibilities as you develop and grow character. - (Alexis Baione, student paper)

Watching this show was very personal for me as it reminded me of my childhood and my relationship with my sister. I really value the way the choreographer cherished each moment—whether it was happy or sad—and made the audience truly experience it. This was done particularly through the use of breath, duration and gestures. In one of the intense scenes when the two sisters find Maggie, tension builds up. This can be seen through the heavy breathing and for a moment June doesn't say anything before lashing out at

Violet. The impact is stronger because of the brief pause. Even a quick rolling of the eyes and arms crossing succinctly expresses how the characters feel. Moreover, gestures like these remind us of how we felt as children. Not just how we felt while executing these particular physical cues, but how it felt to have these done to us. - (Grace Lee, student paper)

Pleated portrays sisterhood in its real, raw reality encompassing both the highs and the lows inherent in such a close, intimate relationship...despite the specificity, the themes and affective impact of her choreography are universally-felt and realtable to people of all backgrounds regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, or sibling status. Overall, the piece just oozes with life and inspires joy, laughter, vitality and reflection in both the euphoric and the harrowing moments. - (Nikki Lust, student paper).

I felt transported into a world of memory, play, make-believe, choice, and relationship. ...the things that continue to stand out in my memory are the use of timing elements to denote memory and chronology, the subtle and spot-on embodiment of "youth" by the three "young" sisters, the whimsical set design all around me, and the seamless blending of visual, sound, music and movement elements. This is such a well-crafted and heart-felt project. - (Marin Leggat, audience response)

Your playful, narrative style makes dance accessible to those of us who don't know the genre well.

- (unknown audience response)

Pleated was loads of fun and I felt every scene was necessary to help progress the story. The dancing felt a part of the story rather than a separate identity.

- (Joshua Clute, student paper)

Every aspect of this performance came together to create a story narrative that displayed sisters reminiscing on all aspects of their life: the good, the bad, the ugly, and the beautiful. From the colorful costumes, to the dream-like scenery, to the free-spirited jumps, glides, and tumbles, the young and older dancers conveyed the bond of sisterhood.

- (Hannah Zinnert, student paper)

Chapter 10: A lifetime of artmaking



Photo by Kate Folsom

Reflections and Future Directions

This year and a half long creation process illuminated my understanding of time. Time (kronos) is an interesting element in my process. Everything takes more time than I think it will. Each aspect of the process had a sort of kitchen timer. Sometimes I burned things, other times they were undercooked and the fullness in flavor was left unrealized. Other times I acknowledged the element of time but stood impatiently, tapping my foot while waiting for something to complete its transformation. The time it takes to work through, refine and grow into the choreography is longer than my ambition suggests. Extra time is required when

working with other people. Performers need time to receive feedback, make sense of the feedback and integrate suggestions or counter what was offered.

Time (kairos) as a choreographic element is still being discovered in my work. Timing of movements: flow, stillness, suspension, and pulse. Through this process I became more interested in timing and the unfolding of narrative, its arc over the course of a 45-minute work and how to use each section of the dance as an essential building block in order to construct a meaningful, integrated work of dance-theater.

Although I was very close to concretizing the final shape of the piece by the end of February *Pleated* did not come into a full manifestation until the two days of tech in the theater. Unfortunately this was barely enough time to see its potential and by the time I had witnessed the piece fully it was already over. No long life. It was born and then disappeared.

Choreographically, I can see where I cut myself short, or didn't plunge deep enough into an idea. Some of the movement I gave up on changing because the performers could not imbue it with the dynamic quality I was looking for. Several sections in the dance continued to stump me, even in the final performance. The Dance Party to the early Beatles cover was never as wild and radical as I dreamed it could be. The Bunk Beds material felt underdeveloped, dripping with promise and yet-to-be-discovered magic. The Mirror Duet never found the right emotional "note" and movement vocabulary. And the Flashlight Duet, though at one time it was surprising and fresh in the end felt like its meaning became muddy. Other movements through the work had a kind of on-the-right-track-but-not-quite-there sense about them.

The long Swimming Dream scene remains an unsolved mystery in my mind. One audience member described it as "an elegant number... It felt like floating, swimming, and flying all in one movement." In feedback sessions I was repeatedly told that it was too long and people would fade during this section. I intentionally kept it in the piece because I wanted to give the audience time to check out and reflect on their memories of childhood. I am not convinced that this choice worked choreographically in the end. The section may have been too long.

As a dance maker I am not sure how to tackle these unfulfilled desires. In my years at graduate school I have been looking inward so much I wonder if my movement phrasing and choreography might be rejuvenated by gazing outward more. What has been missing in my movement practice is a regular schedule of taking classes with a variety of people in a variety of styles. My movement vocabulary is sometimes stuck on repeat, the same rhythmic tendencies and spatial habits cycling.

As I move forward into whatever my next choreographic venture might be I must remember my joint interest in directing the work from both the outside and the inside. I do not need to create and then teach every movement to my dancers, nor do I need to prescribe every scene from the outside. What I desire is a merging of the two worlds where I am able to live and breathe the atmosphere of the work and to feel the gestalt of the piece in my bones while focusing my eyes on the structure and architecture of the choreographic compositions. The collaborative relationship between the co-directors of PEARSONWIDRIG DANCE THEATRE displays the balance of inside/outside guidance. Although the roles are not exclusive and often blur they are pronominally broken into Sara Pearson directing from the outside and

Patrik Widrig tuning and leading the dancers from the inside. For both choreographers the route is subtle and carved out by intuition. Without a choreographic partner I am stuck attempting to fill both of these roles simultaneously. In *Pleated* I feel that my role of directing the movement and physicality was left lacking compared to the compositional tuning. For the future this is an aspect I wish to investigate further, especially in terms of exploring timing and movement qualities.

In Conclusion

Out of my heart and my history I create choreography that is rooted in the personal while reaching for the universal. Like homemade birthday presents, wrapped in old paper and tied up with a turquoise ribbon my dances are intended to be gifts discovered by the audience. I often question whether my dances are too playful or not intellectual enough. I admire sophisticated artists who discuss the metaphysical, political or issues of justice. I respect pure craftsman, masters of form and design. At the moment I do not see my work fitting into either of these categories. In a conversation after the show with friend and colleague Cassie Meador, artistic director of the Dance Exchange, I mentioned this content conundrum and her response was, "I think making personal work that is full of joy and delightful things is incredibly bold. A lot of artists don't do this".

My choreography is born through an intimate process of exploration with the dancers. I begin with a feeling or a visual image. The feeling is deep and often indescribable. I am drawn to working with memory in my because it is about the felt/sensed experience... because there are things I never want to forget and I wish to

recreate particular moments over and over again...because I want to erase choices I regret...because I love the way my body becomes alive when I try to remember something far away...because I want to collect moments from life and memories feel like treasures...because my attempts at recollection are often clumsy and I get impatient with myself so I feel I need more practice...because, because, because I cannot quite put my finger it.

As I cultivate a familiarity with memory and my body in relationship with the memory, I collect my dancers to journey together, like a team of explorers searching the heart of the piece. Sometimes we are on the same path at the same time. Other times we venture in different directions and get distracted. My job is to keep everyone coming back to the same pulse so that we remain in harmony together. Not on my own but surrounded by cast members, collaborators, assistants, mentors, and even audience members. In this crowd of witnesses and co-conspirators, I want to be challenged to direct projects with a clear vision and lucid language while also admitting that I do not know exactly where we are headed.

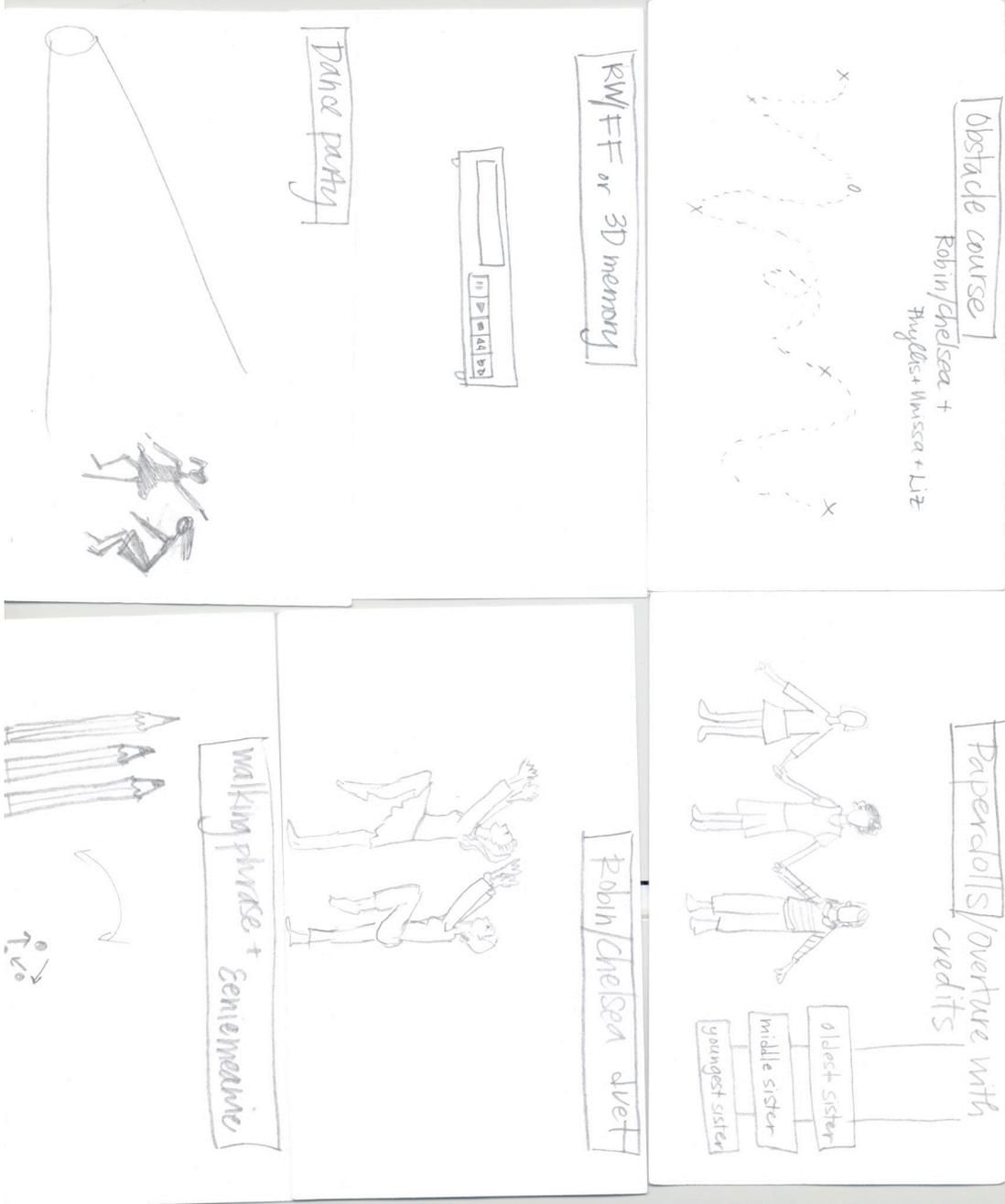
With *Pleated* my greatest triumph was that I stayed attuned to the piece throughout its uncharted course and shifted with curves along the way. My vision for the work was simultaneously clear and distinct yet undefined and emerging - requiring that I be adaptable. By attaching myself to the process and listening for the heartbeat of the work I successfully followed my ideas into a fully formed, colorful, evening length dance-theatre performance that displayed choreographic rigor and honest performances delivered by the dancers.

Though I am deeply moved by the impact this work had on my family and many audience members, including strangers, who were profoundly touched by the content of the work, I see this work as simply another part of my journey in artmaking. The creation process of *Pleated*, alongside the writing of this document has illuminated my inner yearnings as an artist and I feel that it is my duty to pay keen attention to these revelations.

I am interested in complicated subjects like family, in domestic objects like pillows and tables, in everyday movements like walking and skipping, and in simple yet profound language like, "I am sorry". Looking back, the process of *Pleated* was treacherous, terrifying, and delectably wonderful - like a rollercoaster that shakes your bones but as soon as the ride is over you go running back for another round.

Appendix

Storyboard of *Pleated*

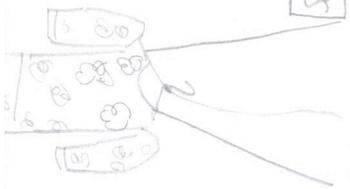


Singing chairs/
hurry-dwæt

3/4 H



Flying dress



Marco — Fald

o fald

Fald

o fald

Marco
O (Puyals)

o fald

Fald

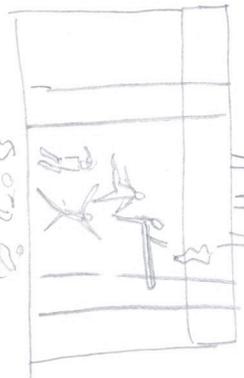
SLOW motion TRIO

no one asked
you

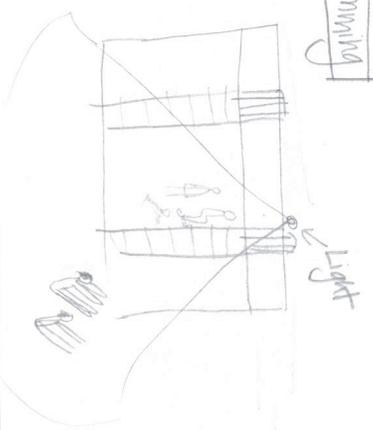
RRRR



Climbing/Dress-up



Swimming



Blame game



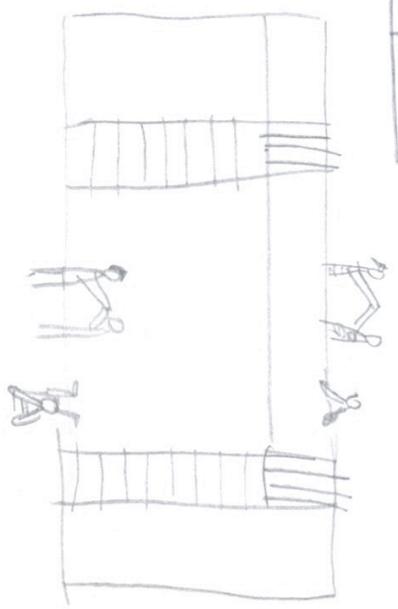
Fatty/Finglas flashlight quest



Bunkbeds / obstacle course repense



Double prefael



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