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Co-Authorship in Action: Curation & Collaboration in American post-Judson Dance

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CO-AUTHORSHIP IN ACTION:
CURATION & COLLABORATION IN AMERICAN POST-JUDSON DANCE

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Honors Thesis in Theater and Dance
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# Table of Contents

List of Illustrations.............................................................................................................3  

Acknowledgments..................................................................................................................4  

Introduction ...............................................................................................................................5  

Chapter 1.................................................................................................................................12  

*An Introduction to the Instability of Authorship*  

Chapter 2.................................................................................................................................21  

*Early Modern Dance, Judson Dance Theater, and the Evolution of Collaboration*  

Chapter 3.................................................................................................................................33  

*Post-Judson Artists: Creation is Collaboration*  

Chapter 4.................................................................................................................................43  

*Authorship in Action*  

Chapter 5.................................................................................................................................55  

*The Choreographer-Curator*  

Conclusion.................................................................................................................................67  

Bibliography.............................................................................................................................75
Illustrations

Figures

1. Martha Graham  
2. How to Pass, Kick, Fall, and Run  
3. Yvonne Rainer: Terrain  
4. Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Dance Ravel: Landscape or Portrait?  
5. Heidi Henderson  
6. Xan Burley and Alex Springer  
7. Way In  
8. Into the Frame of Us A  
9. Into the Frame of Us B  
10. Into the Frame: Charlie, Kathryn, Chandler  
11. Into the Frame of Us: Emilie
Acknowledgments

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Introduction

Dance and America maintain a complicated relationship. Contemporary dance audiences could be described as esoteric and minimal, yet as Jan Van Dyke reminds us “Dance classes for little girls are considered part of growing up in many American families.”¹ As a form, it intrigues people, as evidenced by the popularity of television shows such as *So You Think You Can Dance* and *Dance Moms*, but concert dance is by no means widely followed, accepted, or understood. Historically, according to Jo Butterworth and Liesbeth Wildschut, dance has been neglected for countless reasons: its ephemerality and transience, low social status, nominal documentation, and lack of cannon and literature, to name a few.² Postmodern dance maintains an even more inferior position. This essay aims to illuminate and champion concert dance through an investigation into a sliver of American postmodern dance, which I term post-Judson dance, in an attempt to better understand, define, and assert dance in academe, art, and culture. In this essay, I examine the use and benefits of collaboration in today’s dance devising processes and the influences that constructed collaboration as a choreographic working method. Ultimately, I argue that today’s choreographers are curators.

Contemporary choreographers arrange and highlight the artistry of their collaborators by supporting and crafting individuality. They maintain rehearsal environments in which dancer identities can reveal themselves through collective action—environments where diversity and multiplicity flourish. Dancers are expected to be individuals, make bold choices, and offer an artistic point of view and choreographic curators step in to sift through and sculpt that material in ways that align with the larger trajectory of the work. These two groups come together to explore

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the range of aesthetic perspectives, skills, and abilities available to them. Through historical, theoretical, contemporary, and practice-based evidence, this essay argues that through choreographer and performer participation, leading to the transformation of content, style, structure, and discovery, choreographers harvest an expansive collection of information that they use to make the most fully explored, articulate, and compelling creative work.

**Historical Influences**

Scholars Ramsay Burt, Sally Banes, and many others regard The Judson Dance Theater as the birthplace of postmodern dance. Judson artists rejected drama, spectacle, and artifice, engaging with chance and the unremarkable, focusing on “the clarity and directness of movement as unembellished activity, and the dancer’s actual weight and physicality.”³ In the 1960s, Judsonites redefined what was allowed in dance performance. Most important for this argument, the Judson Dance Theater laid the foundation for today’s collaborative working model, emphasizing unified action and fostering the beginnings of a dance community in which individuality became a core value.

Judson work was a reaction to the egocentric choreographic value systems of early modern artists such as Martha Graham. Modern choreographers worked against the limitations of ballet and developed new techniques to create a unique voice, emphasizing more humanistic qualities.⁴ Artists including Graham, and earlier Isadora Duncan, Loie Fuller, and Josephine Baker, among innovative others, created individual techniques yet were united by the desire to investigate human expression, liberation, and “…a recognition of femininity.”⁵ Working against societal events such as the Great Depression and later the perceived threat of Communism and

³ Jan Van Dyke, “Gender and Success in the American Dance World,” 3.
Socialism, modern choreographers sought to create work by asserting their artistic voices by means of lone-authorial creation.

At the core of both modern and postmodern dance traditions is the choreographer – some might call them the author. This essay aims to uncover the uncertain, undefined edges of authorship in postmodern dance. Contemporary questions of authorship are usually framed through poststructuralist claims about the death of the author. Writers like Roland Barthes, Michel Foucault, and Alexander Nehamas complicated traditional notions of the author, recasting it as a function of discourse that serves as a "means of classification" that is "regulated by the culture in which it circulates." Throughout this essay, I will investigate notions of authorship and how they relate and become complicated in reference to collaborative, co-authored dance making processes and finished works.

Classifications

Before moving forward, I want to clarify and define some terms I will be using throughout this essay. The first is the concept of choreography. As you will see, choreography is a concept with multiple understandings that have changed radically throughout history. However, in its most basic form, choreography is making dances. In their anthology, Contemporary Choreography: A Critical Reader, editors Butterworth and Wildshut make the argument that choreography is context dependent – that choreographic constructs are explored in relation to the unique environments in which they are employed.

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9 Ibid.
and Wildshut’s assertion and refer to choreography (or the act of choreographing) as a process of experientially and critically examining, researching, and assembling movement and ideas, which are dictated by and dependent on societal climates in which the choreography is made.

I also adopt the term “devising” when referring to dance making or choreographic processes. Dance devising comes from the theatrical understanding of devising or devised theater. Devised theater, like choreography, has multiple definitions that are constantly in flux. However, devising is widely understood as interactivity in the process of making, usually original, performance.\textsuperscript{10} Like postmodern artists, devised work questions the hierarchies of theater, rejecting the traditional playwright-director relationship and instead concerning itself with collective creation and visual and physical pursuits.

While I situate this essay within scholarship on postmodern dance, we have moved past the postmodern movement both in art and culture. However, our current societal and artistic era remains undefined. Cultural scholar Alan Kirby agrees, explaining that there are multiple, conflicting theories about what post, postmodern society entails. Some argue that post, postmodernity is about hypermodernity, characterized by a “headlong rush forward, of unbridled modernization.”\textsuperscript{11} Or conversely, scholars assert that post, postmodernity is characterized by performatism and exploring “a set of values and practices that postmodernism treated with notorious suspicion, such as identity, transcendence, love, belief and sacrifice…bring[ing] back beauty, good, wholeness…”\textsuperscript{12} In the face of this cultural uncertainty, perhaps what scholars could agree upon is that the characteristic of post, postmodern culture are still largely unknown.

\textsuperscript{11} Ibid. 
\textsuperscript{12} Ibid.
For post, postmodern dance clarification, I look to scholars Melanie Bales and Rebecca Nettl-Fiol. They do not solve the cultural definition dilemma, but they do offer a concrete term for the current dance state, which I mentioned earlier as post-Judson. In the introduction to their book, *The Body Eclectic*, Bales names the period following the Judson Dance Theater as post-Judson, which I appropriate as a stylistic and temporal marker. I also want to note here that there are many aesthetic and stylistic approaches that fall under the umbrella of contemporary dance, so I have simply chosen a portion to investigate more fully – a type that engages directly in the Judson lineage. When I refer to post-Judson artists and choreographers in this essay, I am referring to the portion of the field that has maintained a pointed commitment to egalitarian working environments and creative processes.

**Research Structure**

This essay is organized in five chapters. Chapter one, *An Introduction to the Instability of Authorship*, documents the understanding of the author at specific historical moments. Highlighting the works of Roland Barthes, Michel Foucault, and Alexander Nehamas, this chapter introduces theoretical and literary classifications of the author, which I compare to post-Judson choreographer and choreography. It first details the theoretical offerings of Roland Barthes, and his post-structuralist assertion that the author is dead. Next, it describes Foucault’s author-function and thirdly, it examines Nehamas’ understanding of authorship, which includes a distinction of the author and writer and the inevitability of co-authorship. Lastly, it illuminates the ways in which post-Judson dance parallels and disagrees with these theorists’ understandings of authorship and creation.

Chapter two, *Early Modern Dance, Judson Dance Theater, and the Evolution of Collaboration*, traces the emergence of collaboration in modern and postmodern dance. It
highlights three important moments in dance history, beginning with the early modern period and the sole-genius practiced by Martha Graham, moving to chance choreography devised by collaborative duo Merce Cunningham and John Cage, and lastly examining postmodern dance in relation to the Judson Dance Theater – notably their democratic compositional techniques and belief systems and their impact on post-Judson artists and work.

*Post Judson Artists: Creation is Collaboration*, chapter three, examines how and why a selection of post-Judson dance artists incorporate collaboration into their processes. Using the findings of interviews with choreographers and artists including Kellie Lynch, David Dorfman, Heidi Henderson, Silas Riener, Jenna Riegel, Xan Burely, Alex Springer, and Kate Enright, it first argues post-Judson choreographers use collaboration to define, deepen, and transform movement and ideas. It then lists the tools these choreographers use, such as improvisational scores and task-based assignments. Thirdly it makes the case for performer reliance, citing the necessity and utility of using performer identities and idiosyncrasies as a way to generate diverse creative perspectives. Finally, it describes the distinct responsibilities of the post-Judson choreographer, highlighting the need for a singular outside eye for reasons of cohesion, authenticity, and practicality.

The fourth chapter, *Authorship in Action*, documents the process of making the creative portion of this written research – an eighteen-minute dance theater piece entitled *Into the Frame of Us*. The chapter describes our creative methodology, which was inspired by Jo Butterworth’s Didactic-Democratic choreographic framework. It begins by explaining Butterworth’s model, describing the role of choreographer and dancer in each stage of the framework. It then looks at our methods in creating the piece, then cites performer observations of the success and
challenges of each stage, and finally reveals important themes and tactics that emerged. It concludes by suggesting a need for a new model outside of Butterworth’s framework.

The last chapter, *The Choreographer-Curator*, makes the argument that collaborative choreography becomes a curatorial facilitation process that deepens, enhances, and transforms choreographic thought. This chapter begins by exploring the roles and responsibilities of the curator, and then compares that to post-Judson choreographic processes using the works of Jonathan Haas and Micheal Shott. Next, it looks at the act of curation in relation to authorship and the notion that curation is an artistic act in its own right, supported by the work of Rossen Ventzislavov. Finally it makes the argument that considering choreographers as curators can be an effective working model because it facilitates participant engagement and enjoyment but not at the cost of cohesive, thoughtful, co-authored work.

In the conclusion, I revisit why I conducted this research and the historical groundwork, laid by postmodern artists, which gave way to collaborative dance devising. I briefly describe the components of post-Judson compositional techniques and reemphasize why post-Judson choreographers have continued the collaborative tradition. I then make the case for the effectiveness of the curatorial model in certain contemporary contexts, explaining why level of satisfaction and quality are increased in post-Judson processes. Specifically, I trace how improvisatory avenues facilitate a heightened connection to and authenticity of movement and ideas that results in a more engaging experience for the dancers, choreographers, and importantly, the audience. I conclude by arguing that the best way to display individual identities and ensure performer and audience engagement is through the critically reflexive participation of the choreographer-curator, and for the societal necessity of working collaboratively.
Chapter 1
An Introduction to the Instability of Authorship

In 1967, Roland Barthes pronounced the author dead. Until this point, scholars and the general public alike considered the author-figure entirely responsible for the work; the text and author were inseparable. This solitary authorship facilitated the emergence of the author genius, which for the reader, led to predetermined static meaning and singular understanding. However, the twentieth century sparked the beginning of theorists questioning this omnipotent authorial role, with one of the most notable critiques written by Barthes in his polemical work “The Death of the Author.” Michel Foucault and later Alexander Nehamas offered their own theoretical propositions to further dismantle the author. These theorists attempt to resituate textual criticism within models of discourse, while simultaneously undoing the historical belief in and of the author-god. Barthes, Foucault, and Nehamas confront sole authorial responsibility with more radical notions of authorship that exist outside or beyond the initial author. This chapter examines the social and historical construction of the author, how the author affects the process of interpretation and the formation of meaning, and finally, the relationship of authorship to post-Judson choreography.

Death of the Author, Birth of the Reader

In Barthes’ radical 1967 essay, he claims that the historical understanding of the author, the individual who originates, creates, and owns the work, transmits meaning to the reader. Barthes does agree that the author is the originator of the text. However, he argues that using the author to determine meaning, while convenient, is inherently limiting and stems from Western traditions. He writes, “The author is a modern figure, a product of our society insofar as, emerging from the Middle Ages with English empiricism, French rationalism, and the personal faith of the Reformation, it discovered the prestige of the individual, of, as it is more nobly put,
Western traditions raise the author up to artificial esteem and purpose. In societies predating the official emergence of the author, particular figures were responsible for performance of a narrative; however, the performer served exclusively as a transmitter of information, not as creator or producer of the material. Such performers were admired for their “mastery of the narrative code” but never their genius. This relatively contemporary, Western concept of the author has since dictated our interactions with and understandings of written work, in which the text, author, and meaning are intertwined.

Barthes rejects this combining of author and meaning, proposing that it should be the language, not the author that is doing the speaking. He writes, “Once the author is removed, the claim to decipher a text becomes quite futile. To give a text an Author is to impose on that text, to furnish it with a final signified, to close the writing.” Barthes views text as a “multiplicity of writing;” as a structure of many layers and components that can be disentangled but not deciphered. Instead meaning emerges based on the subjective interpretations of the reader. For Barthes, authorship is a function of spectatorship.

Although the author possesses responsibility, both practically and legally for the production of the text, Barthes says it is the words and language of the text that produce meaning. He suggests “Linguistically, the author is never more than the instance writing, just as/is nothing other than the instance saying: language knows a ‘subject’, not a ‘person’, and this subject, empty outside of the very enunciation which denies it, suffices to make language ‘hold together’,

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14 Ibid.
15 Ibid., 147.
suffices, this is to say, to exhaust it.” The author, for Barthes, becomes the past of the text, and it is the text, not the author, which speaks.

The reader becomes fully engaged with the text when the text is freed from the owner, the author, or from what Barthes calls “interpretive tyranny.” Barthes declares that text is unable to capture the “passions, humors, feelings, impressions” of the author and therefore they are “lost, infinitely deferred.” The reader is able to provide “unity” to the text, which is not limiting or owned, because the reader offers the proper witness for the multiplicity and plurality of the work.

On the issue of multiplicity, Barthes believes that because of the “innumerable centres of culture” from which we draw from, the text itself is essentially derivative – or sourced—from multiple other works, and is a reflection of those multiple traditions and contexts. Radically, what this also implies is that work is never original. Furthermore, the direct meaning intended by the author may not and cannot be translated because of the vast subjectivity that exists among readers. The origin or impetus of the work is the responsibility of the author, however the destination—where the text ends – is with the reader.

This point ultimately leads Barthes to his central argument: that the reader holds more responsibility to the text and the process of interpretation than the author. Barthes proclaims that, “…The birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author.” From this perspective, the author, as we traditionally understand, is removed from the text, therefore dissolving the singular authorial voice and instead allowing the text to be transformed and

16 Barthes, “Death of the Author,” 144.
17 Ibid.
18 Ibid.
19 Ibid.
20 Ibid.
21 Ibid., 146.
interpreted by the reader. In contemporary notions of choreography, this is also the case; spectators are tasked with constructing meaning based on their own experiences and perspectives.

**Authorship, Text, and Author-Function**

In response to Barthes, Michel Foucault agrees that the author disappears through the act of writing, however, he claims that “[I]t is not enough to declare that we should do without the writer (the author) and study the work itself.” Foucault shifts Barthes emphasis from language to discourse, claiming that the author is understood as a function of discourse rather than an entity unto itself. Foucault argues for the need for the author as a concept but that concept has no relationship or ties to an actual person. In his essay, “What is An Author?,” Foucault claims that this author function is tied to institutional systems, therefore locating the author within specific historical and cultural contexts. He is also concerned with how the work can uphold the same legitimacy in the absence of the traditional author-figure.

Foucault declares:

> It is obviously insufficient to repeat empty slogans: the author has disappeared; God and man die a common death. Rather, we should reexamine the empty space left by the author's disappearance; we should attentively observe, along its gaps and fault lines, its

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new demarcations, and the reapportionment of this void; we should await the fluid functions released by this disappearance.\(^{25}\)

English Scholar Prayer Elmo Raj claims that Foucault is looking to “determine and enunciate the space that is left void by the author’s departure in the structuralist and post structuralist theory”\(^{26}\)

The primary role left empty by the departure of the author is filled by what Foucault calls the “author-function.”\(^{27}\) He suggests that the function of the author does not refer to a single person but can refer to multiple “selves,” and proposes four-characteristics or features that set apart his model. Those categories are: legal function, field & discipline, originality, and literacy signs. For the first of these features, Foucault says that the author emerges in the need to hold individuals accountable for “subversive or transgressive communications,” which demands the individual to be labeled as the author.

The second characteristic of the paradigm is that the author-function is dependent on the discipline and historical moment. For example, the anonymity of an author is more acceptable in scientific texts due to the desire for objectivity. Foucault writes, “there was a time when those texts which we now call “literary” (stories, folk tales, epics, and tragedies) were accepted, circulated, and valorized without any question about the identity of their originator,”\(^{28}\) which means that the anonymity of authorship was ignored because their historicity provided authenticity. However, once the author figure emerged, especially in literary discourse, “the meaning and value ascribed to the text predicated upon the ‘author’s name; for the reason that

\(^{25}\) Foucault, “What Is an Author?,” 127.
\(^{26}\) Elmo Raj, “Author and Text,” 1.
\(^{27}\) Foucault, “What Is an Author?,” 128.
\(^{28}\) Ibid., 125.
the genuineness of the text was determined by the ‘sovereignty of the author.’” \(^{29}\) Depending on field and social context, the author is looked upon for validating and legitimizing text.

Thirdly, the author-function is a composite process, carried out through “complex operations” which involves the “profundity” and creativity of an author to be original.\(^{30}\) Foucault observes that in modern literary criticism, manifold ways are employed in its desire to “recover” the author in an attempt and emphasis on novelty. The final component of Foucault’s model states that we must be aware of the literary signs that seem to denote credit to a single individual when referring to the author, such as “personal pronouns, adverbs of time and place, and the conjugation of verbs.”\(^{31}\) As Foucault mentions in his third author-function, the other is not a singular voice but rather anything from several narrators to multiple selves and subjects. Again, Foucault speaks to paradigms present in post-Judson processes and choreography – in both cases, multiple voices are always present in creation.

Instead of seeing the author as an individual, the author figure assumes this more fluid, author-function identity. This author-function provides a sort of anchoring for the reader to construct interpretations and meaning. So unlike Barthes, Foucault is not arguing for the complete discarding of the author, but, instead, suggesting that the author concept is needed for purposes of interpretation. Where Barthes and Foucault do agree is that readers should not rely on a single authorial voice or figure when interpreting written work. They advise the readers to interpret the text in terms of its content, language, and for the Foucault, its multiple authorial voices and discourses.

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\(^{29}\) Elmo Raj, “Author and Text,” 3.

\(^{30}\) Ibid.

\(^{31}\) Ibid., 129.
Writer v. Author, Work v. Interpretation

Continuing Foucault’s argument, Alexander Nehamas expands on the idea of the author function, claiming the author is a “heuristic device” – a vessel for the expression of text. The author provides the reader with the opportunity to interpret and understand the text for him or herself. One of Nehamas’ primary additions is the difference between the author and the writer. Nehamas remarked, “Writers are actual individuals, firmly located in history, efficient causes of their texts. They often misunderstand their own work and are confused about it as we frequently are about the sense of significance, indeed the very nature, of our actions.” According to him, the writer is the “individual responsible for writing the text and to whom the it may be legally said to belong,” while the author is a “mythical subjectivity created by the text and by those who interpret it.” This author is also something that does not precede the text, but instead is created though the process of interpretation.

Nehamas goes on to stress that the author figure is not directly associated with individual works, but that it emerges from the entire collection of works. In dance, this is to suggest the importance of canon – or more specifically, that over time choreographic work accumulates an aesthetic character that defines the work. Choreographers build their aesthetics progressively and those become what we can read and identify as markers of their perspectives. The author figure “constitutes the very principle that allows us to group certain individual works together and to

34 Moxey, _The Practice of Theory_, 57.
35 Ibid., 58.
consider them as parts of such an internally related connection.” Nehamas continues, "Since the author, as we have seen, is never depicted, but only exemplified, in a text, this figure is transcendental in relation to its whole *oeuvre* as well as to the individual texts of which that *oeuvre* consists.” What Nehamas implies is that the author figure plays a sort of regulative role in interpretation – serving as a guide or facilitator during the process of interpretation, which I will later argue is also evident with some post-Judson choreographers who curate interpretive experiences.

What is also important here is Nehamas’ specific characterization of interpretation. Interpretation does not need to lead to a larger or singular meaning but instead is the process of “…construing movements and actions and their products…” Interpretation becomes the process of expansion – of the text’s significance – and in turn places the text within the possibility of a fluid context and is the primary means through which we construct authorship.

Nehamas also introduces the idea of co-authorship through his notions of interpretation. He argues that the writer produces a text so that we, the reader, can interpret it and those interpretations are what create the author. Like Foucault, Nehamas argues that the author-figure plays a role in guiding reader interpretation, while Barthes claims this author-figure has disappeared entirely. Where these three theorists agree is that the burden of interpretation is no longer placed upon the author, but instead of the individual and collective reader.

**Authorship and Choreography**

Although Barthes, Foucault, and Nehamas primarily refer to written works in their critiques, many of their ideas can be applied to the authorial voice in postmodern and post-

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38 Ibid.
39 Ibid, 687.
Judson dance. Going forward, I will treat choreography in the same way that the aforementioned theorists treat text – as information created, interpreted, and authored by and within the societal moment. In fact, you will see how these different modes of authorship played out in my own creative process in chapter four. As Barthes, Foucault, and Nehamas suggest about written work, post-Judson dance relies on the viewer for the formation of meaning making. However, the author – or choreographer – can serve as a guide or facilitator through which the reader, or spectator, can interpret and understand the text. The singular authorial figure in dance has dissolved and the content of the dance work itself – or text – is what speaks. Although agency in interpretation may not be common understanding or practice among audiences, spectators have the authority to interrogate the dance text in order to arrive at their own conclusions.
Chapter 2
Early Modern Dance, Judson Dance Theater, and the Evolution of Collaboration

In the early twentieth century, modern dance emerged as a new form. In America, artists like Isadora Duncan, Doris Humphrey, Ted Shawn, and Martha Graham spearheaded the form, as well as Josephine Baker and Katherine Dunham whose Africanist influence also shaped the aesthetic." However, mid twentieth-century dance artists, frustrated by the constraints of the existing modern style and working methods, began experimenting with democratic choreographic practices and beliefs, which informed the develop of what we now call postmodern dance. This chapter traces the evolution of collaboration from modern to postmodern dance. It highlights three particular artists as exemplars of approaches to choreographic authorship at particular historical moments: Martha Graham, Merce Cunningham & John Cage, and the Judson Dance Theater. This chapter presents a sliver of a much more complex and rich history. The chapter begins with Graham as an example of sole-genius authorship, then moves to Cunningham and Cage, pioneers of chance choreography, and concludes by examining the egalitarian views, work, and compositional techniques used by the Judson Dance Theater.

American Modern Dance

Early twentieth century America was ripe for an artistic shift. Feeling the lasting effects of WWI, as well as the unstable economy and societal changes prompted by the machine age, modern artists emerged and defined a new role for the arts. Oliver Saylor remarks that this new role of dance was one of revolt, marked by confusion, chaos, and unrest. He describes the

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“overwhelming readjustment of values, involving not only the arts as such but our whole understanding and conception of life.”43 In a society threatened by the appeal of Communism and Socialism, dance was at the center—exalting individual expression and emphasizing the worth of different types of bodies.44 Isadora Duncan, for example, created a style that emphasized flowing movement and expression based on what felt more natural throughout her body.45

Sally Banes contends that modern choreographers “systematized, streamlined and criticized both the themes and movement vocabularies of their [classical] predecessors.”46 While early modern artists rejected romantic balletic technique and the artifice that accompanied it, they adhered to other fundamental tenets of Romanticism that privileged individual authorship. The individual artists thought of their work as expressing and embodying universal truths. The modern dancer and choreographer sought to externalize genuine, personal experience and truth through movement, and they did so through individual artistic motivations.

**Martha Graham and the Sole-Genius**

Modern dance experiences a tension between individual identity and communal harmony, but ultimately the individual wins. Theorists Steven Best and Douglas Kellner claim that the authentic, expressionistic emphasis that emerged was only a portion of the much larger goal shared by modern artists – to create “the great work, the masterpiece.”47 The desire to produce masterpiece quality work translated into choreographic practices that excluded the voice of the

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44 Ibid., 2-3.
dancer. To modern choreographers, dancers were viewed as instruments to be used and manipulated to represent a choreographer-driven vision.\textsuperscript{48} Best and Kellner agree:

Elitism became the corresponding attitude of high modernism and the modernist artists, whose genius and purity of vision was incomprehensible to the layperson. Leading modernists sought to form their own private language, their own unique vision that expressed their singular self.\textsuperscript{49}

Modern dance artists shared a desire to be groundbreaking, which they believed they could achieve more effectively through a singular, aesthetic voice and process.

Martha Graham exemplifies this sole-genius model of authorship. While her predecessors and contemporaries laid the groundwork for the form, Graham is considered the mother of modern dance. Henry Seldis conceives Graham “one of the truly great image makers of our time…of a magnitude comparable to Picasso’s “Guernica” and Stravinsky’s “Sacre du Printemps.””\textsuperscript{50} By the end of the 1930s, Graham had stepped into the role of performative and choreographic protagonist in her work – she not only was the star of her dance pieces but she acted the same way in her process. Former Graham dancer Pearl Lang recalls little dancer involvement in the content or composition of Graham’s pieces. According to Lang, Graham “…usually had already formulated the way she wanted the piece to work” when she entered the studio to work with the dancers.\textsuperscript{51} In rehearsals, Graham simply transferred content to her dancers and dictated its execution.

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{49} Best and Kellner, \textit{The Postmodern Turn}, 124.
\end{itemize}
Graham did collaborate with other types of individuals involved in her processes – specifically, musicians and visual artists. However in order to retain ultimate artistic and directing power, she hired them on a commission basis. Typically, Graham would construct a “script” of her dance to give to the composer, which included elements such as plot development and movement sequencing. Once the composer created the score, Graham would “change or develop her choreography if necessary, working it around the music or stage set,” which

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53 Ibid.
54 Ibid.
usually came in the form of altering counts of movement phrases.\textsuperscript{55} Graham’s flexibility demonstrates that she did value the collaborative spirit enough to alter her artistic vision, but only on her terms and only with artists of other disciplines.

Graham’s collaborative tendencies may have been the exception for modern artists, with notable exceptions like the New Dance Group, a 1930s American artist collective who worked together towards social justice through dance. But perhaps Graham’s model also had social aims. Sally Banes alleges that, unlike male dominated leadership of the ballet world, modern dance was “ripe…for female creative artists (choreographers, that is, as opposed to dancers).”\textsuperscript{56}

Mirroring the mid-century feminist movements, the authoritarian choreographic role was an essential step in establishing a prominent and distinct female choreographic voice that would later be dismantled and democratized in the 1960s. Although the forerunners of modern dance were not necessarily actively making feminist performance, their work was “contributing to the growing discourse about women and to the pressure women were applying to society’s structures, whether in the political or cultural sphere.”\textsuperscript{57} Therefore, their roles as author geniuses were not only artistically desired, but helped women rise to positions of authority equal – and above – their male counterparts.

**Sources of the Postmodern**

America in the 1960s is also marked as a period of revolution – this time from modern ideals. Best and Kellner state that, “…during the 1960s…theoretical revolution reputed concurrently with the political upheaval and helped foster the postmodern turn.”\textsuperscript{58} Creating the


\textsuperscript{56} Banes, *Dancing Women*, 123.

\textsuperscript{57} Banes, *Dancing Women*, 123.

\textsuperscript{58} Best and Kellner, *The Post Modern Turn*, 6.
postmodern, theorists such as Judith Butler and bell hooks constructed theories that were radically democratic in an attempt to redefine and reconstruct agency, rationality, and democracy.\textsuperscript{59} American postmodern dance reflected these shifts, departing from the codified, expressionistic techniques that governed modern dance. Postmodernism also marked a radical moving away from hierarchical, sole-genius authorship and modes of creation toward egalitarian, co-authored modalities.\textsuperscript{60} Two important predecessors to the postmodern dance era include the legendary collaboration of Merce Cunningham and John Cage, and soon after composer Robert Dunn and his composition class. These artists served as important influences for the individuals who formed the Judson Dance Theater.

**Cunningham and Cage**

Early postmodern choreographers created dances that “…were not cool analyses of the form but urgent reconsidereations of the medium.”\textsuperscript{61} The partnership between Cunningham and Cage was no exception. Together, they introduced revolutionary concepts of chance choreography and collective authorship. Cunningham, former dancer with the Martha Graham Company, pioneered the field of chance procedures – a choreographic technique aimed to “decentralize space, create unexpected and often witty combinations of body parts in movement, and decentraliz(e) time in the dance in the sense that there were no logical climaxes or developments.”\textsuperscript{62} Chance techniques used random or spontaneous choice making and/or sequencing. Cunningham’s work eliminated expression and narrative by randomizing sequences of steps and focusing on the action of the body. Arguably Cunningham’s most important

\textsuperscript{61} Banes, *Terpsichore in Sneakers*, xvii.
\textsuperscript{62} Banes, *Democracy’s Body*, xvi.
contributions include the notion that all movement “begins from walking.” Therefore any material, procedure, and method of dance making were valid and acceptable. However innovative these claims, Cunningham still straddled modern aesthetics with his preference for a singular authorial voice and a virtuosic movement quality.

Figure 2. Merce Cunningham and John Cage perform How to Pass, Kick, Fall, and Run, April 13, 1971. Photo by University Musical Society.

Cunningham’s partner, composer John Cage, explored parallel themes such as spontaneity and in-the-moment choice making. Cage drew teaching inspiration from a broad array of fields including the writings of Antonin Artaud, Zen Buddhism, and observations of the everyday. In his own compositions, he fostered live choice making by leaving out

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63 Banes, Terpsichore in Sneakers, xvii.
64 Ibid.
65 Banes, Dancing Women, xvi.
compositional components, such as pitch variation, to allow for musicians to make (different) decisions every performance.\textsuperscript{66}

Most importantly, Cunningham and Cage were, “rebelling against what was sometimes felt as a hierarchy of authority in modern dance”\textsuperscript{67} Interested in working with spontaneous methodologies, the duo employed ideals and methods that became hallmarks of the postmodern dance ideology. They viewed collaborative efforts as proportional – no medium was ancillary. Cunningham and Cage rejected Graham-like commission based collaborations and instead sought to present work in which all parts were equally important, which set a notable precedent for postmodern dancers and choreographers to come.

**Robert Dunn’s Workshop**

Robert Dunn, a composer and student of John Cage, was the another influential voice pre-Judson. Dunn led a composition class, which included many individuals who later became the Judson Dance Theater. Influenced by Cage’s experimental music class, Dunn put into action a belief system that advocated for compositional acceptability.\textsuperscript{68} Like Cunningham and Cage, Dunn’s preferred choreographic techniques centered on chance procedures.\textsuperscript{69} Marni Mahaffay, a Dunn class member, describes using chance as a way to unlock “limitless possibilities.”\textsuperscript{70} These procedures provided a way to generate material through exploring unexpected areas of movement and thought.

The group also used task procedures. Task movement is generated on necessity – movement that is free of virtuosic elements and codified vocabulary – an important and notable

\textsuperscript{66} Best and Kellner, *The Postmodern Turn*, 39-40.
\textsuperscript{67} Banes, *Dancing Women*, xvi.
\textsuperscript{69} Ibid., 216.
\textsuperscript{70} Quoted in Banes, *Writing Dance*, 214.
departure from Cunningham. During Dunn’s workshop, the group constructed assignments such as making a dance about “nothing special” or connecting imaginary dots on the floor.\textsuperscript{71} Early class member and famed West Coast dancer Simone Forti, saw the aleatory methods used in class “not as a relinquishing of control but as a means of evoking in performance the original events and structures at the moment of composition.” These assignments acted as the structure for the dancers’ performative experimentation.

Generating dances without particular inspiration was in complete opposition to the grandness that was modern dance. It allowed the dancers to disrupt the dominating pattern of authority through collective engagement and inquiry.\textsuperscript{72} In July of 1962, Dunn’s class culminated in a final performance at Judson Memorial Church– where the group would later draw its name.\textsuperscript{73} Although Dunn’s workshop ceased after this event, members continued to meet and create work, accepting and maintaining the ideologies and methods used in Dunn’s class. In 1963, individuals from the class officially organized under the Judson name.

\textbf{The Judson Dance Theater}

The Judson years amplified and expanded the political, social, and artistic revolutionary spirit ignited by mid-century artists. Political and civic unrest bred individuals who questioned and redefined the notion of dance and how to make it.\textsuperscript{74} Judsonites worked radically against standing conventions of concert dance, rejecting virtuosic vocabulary, drama, and glamor and instead choosing to put the pedestrian, everyday, and even mundane on display.\textsuperscript{75} Judson years not only established new, radical aesthetics but also birthed more elastic processes that

\textsuperscript{71} Banes, \textit{Writing Dance}, 214.
\textsuperscript{72} Ibid., 216.
\textsuperscript{73} Ibid., 215.
\textsuperscript{74} Banes, \textit{Dancing Women}, 18.
emphasized democratic, non-hierarchical creation and decision-making.

Figure 3. Members of the Judson Dance Theater perform Yvonne Rainer’s *Terrain*, 1963. Photo by Al Giese.

Pervasive societal and artistic upheaval only supported Judsonite creative exploration. In *Postmodernism and its Critics*, John McGowan explains that postmodern society opened up to the recognition of plurality, relativism of knowledge, and subjectivism of perception—the mainstream centered on experimentalism and radicalism. 76 Sally Banes agrees, declaring that the postmodern social environment supported and was reflected in postmodern art. She writes:

The country’s post-war mood of pragmatism was reflected in the various arts, from the Happenings that made disposable use of environments and materials at hand, to the New Realist (or Pop Art) depiction of figures and objects, making reference to industrial

subjects and commercial styles. The economy was expanding, and the Kennedy administration stressed youth, art, and culture. There were not yet many grants for individual dancers, but there was a spirit of willing participation.\textsuperscript{77}

The Judson Dance Theater challenged historical truths and ideological principles about dance. An artistic utopia emerged in which the general public acknowledged and accepted the distinct social ethos of subversion and freedom in which art could and did participate in. “Emblematic of the Kennedy era,” there was a shift in authority from wisdom to the energy, radicalism, and creativity of the youth population.\textsuperscript{78}

**Judson Values: Redefining Who’s In Charge**

The Judson artists abandoned singular authorship in exchange for collective creation. All members of the group had an equal say in decision-making and artistic questioning, disrupting authoritative choreographic techniques of modern dance companies. Banes even calls Judson efforts a “…conscious assault on the hierarchical nature not only of academic ballet but also, more directly, of the American modern dance community as it has evolved in the late 1950s.”\textsuperscript{79}

Judson members used the methods they learned in Dunn’s composition class, especially task procedures, chance methods, and other structures rooted in improvisation, to dismantle solitary authorship in choreographic processes.

These methods had an important physiological effect on the group. Chance procedures, especially, forced those in charge to give up control. The Judson artists were not only artistically interested in the effects of relinquishing control, but that ideal became a communal commitment and organizing structure. These devices also carried political meaning. Banes notes that “…the

\textsuperscript{77} Banes, *Democracy’s Body*, xv.

\textsuperscript{78} Banes, *Writing Dance*, 211.

\textsuperscript{79} Ibid.
complex collective process led to choreographic methods that seemed to stand metaphorically for freedom.” Judsonites were consciously refusing the ranked organization that governed the modern dance scene, as well as the authoritarian elements of American society up until this point.  

Judsonites created revolutionary work supported by a collaborative spirit, commitment, and structure.

**The Judson Legacy**

The Judson era was certainly one of rejection, reversals, and reevaluation of the tenets of dance. Exploding conceptions of what counts as movement and performance and adopting working methods of collective action, Judson artists made an enormous impact on some post-Judson artists and practices. Primarily through improvisation and task assignments, Judsonites redefined a new role for agency, personal perspective, and freedom that became paramount in their collaborative dance devising. Many post-Judson choreographers, including the group of artists I discuss in the next chapter, maintain a pointed commitment to fully democratic working environments and creative processes in order to advance their work.

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Chapter 3
Post Judson Artists: Creation is Collaboration

Dancer and choreographer Kellie Lynch argues that in the work that she makes and participates in, “collaboration is a given.” Dance artists Heidi Henderson, Silas Riener, David Dorfman, Jenna Riegel, Xan Burley, Alex Springer, and Kate Enright agree. This chapter examines the uses and benefits of collaborative processes and argues that post-Judson choreographers and performers value collaboration for three main reasons: definition, deepening, and transformation of the work and artistic voice. Drawing from artist interviews, this chapter unpacks a sampling of post-Judson dance devising methods, choreographer and performer reasoning for using collaborative methods, and the responsibility of the choreographer within the collaborative model. I choose these samplings of artists deliberately, because I know that they work collaboratively, and I used discussions with them to better understand the value systems that privilege collaboration from multiple perspectives.

Post-Judson Collaboration

Post-Judson choreographers act as facilitators and dancers become creators and, eventually, co-authors. Butterworth defines collaborative processes as those that “…concentrate on open, even democratic methods using exploration, discovery and problem solving to find movement content relating to body action, dynamic or spatial considerations.” The most important aspects of Butterworth’s definition are the democratic methodologies in which movement is “found.” This democratic approach allow for material to emerge and develop throughout the process. The flexibility and choreographer and performer desire for transformation cultivates a more nuanced area of investigation, which results in multiple points

81 Kellie Lynch (choreographer and dancer) in discussion with the author, September 28, 2014.
82 Butterworth and Wildshut, Contemporary Choreography: A Critical Reader, 184.
of view and ideas that contribute to the range and quality of creative inquiry – often beyond what a single author might imagine.

**Strategies for Discovery**

Artists and choreographers construct collaborative environments using improvised scores and task-based activities. Choreographers provide movement or conceptual prompts that performers respond to by building their own material. In processes with Bill T. Jones, Jenna Riegel is responsible for creating phrase material based on movement assignments. She describes prompts focusing on “weight transfers, and shifts and lines of the lower body.” Once she generates the material, she explains how it is kept, manipulated, or thrown away based on the “very clear ideas of what he [Jones] is looking for.” Jones permits dancer participation but they do not have equal compositional decision-making power.

![Figure 4. Ravel: Landscape or Portrait? l-r: Erick Montes Chavero, I-Ling Liu, Talli Jackson, Jennifer Nugent and Jenna Riegel. Photo by Paul B. Goode.](image)

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83 Jenna Riegel (Dancer) in discussion with the author, October 9, 2015.
84 Riegel, discussion.
Typically, however, dancers maintain higher levels of agency in post-Judson processes. David Dorfman, Riegel recalls, uses open improvisational scores, giving the dancers almost free rein to start composing something at any point during the rehearsal. Riegel, and Dorfman himself, note that dancers are able and expected to drive compositional choices. In rehearsal, Dorfman describes “…order[ing] things, for the purposes of getting a flow and seeing what evolves and what arose. I put whatever we make that day into an arbitrary order or mapped out order and watch the dancers problem solve the transitions” He intentionally gives vague prompts because he likes to see how the dancers negotiate uncertainty – or fill in the gaps themselves. Additionally, he chooses dancers whose choice-making ability he trusts; he is looking for something in dancers that is beyond technical capacity.

However, when he does provide prompts, Dorfman says they are often physical, visual, and qualitative, such as moving with extreme momentum or moving like your body is collapsing. Similarly, Lynch explains that choreographer Adele Myers uses improvisational scores to generate material, which Meyers then sculpts. Myers comes into rehearsal with a specific movement “to-do” list and then provides the dancers with improvisational prompts such as word associations, body part initiation, or first impulses, among others.

Collaborative duo Xan Burley and Alex Springer explain that, before bringing in other dancers, they often begin a process improvising together in a studio to see what emerges. From those ideas, they are able to “…give material to dancers, and/or have them create material based on something conceptual, and then either the concepts will inform the manipulation of that material and the crafting of that material in space, or, very excitingly, things will emerge out of

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85 Riegel, discussion.
those conceptual prompts that is perfectly specific.”86 All of these exploratory techniques, although different in intention, work toward the same goal of shared research and collective negotiation of concepts, intention, and style. This is epitome of collaborative research.

![Image](image.jpg)

**Figure 5.** Heidi Henderson. Photo by Nikki Carrara

**Define, Deepen, and Transform**

Heidi Henderson says that collaboration provides the opportunity for the extension of an idea. She notes that, in rehearsals, she often offers abstract or incomplete ideas that the performers tease out, clarify, and build on. This “allows them [the dancers] to relax in a place that becomes morphing material that…takes us to the next place”87 For Henderson, collaborative participation helps her clarify and expand on ideas she’s interested in. Similarly, Lynch explains that she utilizes collaboration to work through abstract ideas that may not be easily explored through movement. Like Henderson, Lynch alludes to the ability to, when working with multiple

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86 Xan Burley & Alex Springer (Choreographers and dancers) in discussion with the author, November 1, 2014.

87 Heidi Henderson (Choreographer) in discussion with the author, September 25, 2014
thinking bodies, deconstruct and physicalize conceptual ideas to solidify them through collaborative movement investigation.

Collaboration also has a strong divergent power. Through cultivating a shared pool of knowledge, histories, and experiences, collaborative offerings can push a choreographer not outside of what they were doing or what they were interested in, but into a domain that they have not yet explored or considered. Burley and Springer, for example, augment and craft movement and ideas that intentionally amplify their collaborators’ contributions. Springer notes that collaboration allows him to “…see who you are, share some information and figure out how we all belong in this thing…making something that I wouldn’t have been able to make without those specific people in the room.”

Similarly, Lynch notes “…what the dancers say is really important because sometimes you need to see things differently.” Through the allowance and encouragement of collaborator contributions, breadth of thought and concept is expanded in exciting, unexpected, even novel ways.

**Performer Reliance & Agency**

This brings up the issue of performer necessity; it could be argued that choreographers become reliant on their collaborators to produce movement and ideas with which they experiment. Riegel recalls that in Dorfman’s rehearsals, “…each artist and dancer in the room was equally responsible for putting ideas into the space and thus into the piece.” Each dancer not only had an enormous amount of influence within the process, but Dorfman quite literally depended on their ideas, or areas interest and expertise, to construct the piece.

Burley and Springer explain that they work collaboratively “because then people are doing what suits them, guided by our improvisatory concepts… that’s just what is most

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88 Burley & Springer, discussion.
89 Lynch, discussion.
interesting to us as choreographers—the individuality within collective vision.” 

In “Improvisation in Process: Post Control Choreography” Annie Kloppenberg cites artists and choreographers Karl Rodgers, Jen Nugent, and Bebe Miller as evidence in her claim that “Improvisation cultivates an embodied presence that is fresh, prepared, attentive, lively, receptive, responsive, and responsible.” As Kloppenberg argues, Burley and Springer attest that emphasis on individualism and agency – both intentionally and inherently within improvisational exploration – leads to a deeper investment in the work from dancers, and subsequent deeper investment in an unpacking of choreographer proposed conceptual ideas that ground the process. In chapter four, I will illuminate this phenomenon, by reflecting of the use of improvisation in our creative process for Into the Frame of Us.

![Image of dancers](image-link)

**Figure 6.** Xan Burley and Alex Springer. Photo by Ian Douglas.

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90 Burley & Springer, discussion.
Shared Authorship

Dorfman suggests, “The most successful collaborations to me are when people forget who made up what thing and it’s group ownership and it’s about the work…I really, really enjoy that and in magical moments that’s what happens.”

Similarly, Bebe Miller explains that when making work with her dancers, she wonders, “Is [it] mine, is it theirs?” However then proposes, “I think it's the piece's. It [belongs to] the situation.” These magical moments that Dorfman discusses – when individual contributions are blurred and collective thinking takes over – and Miller’s similar sentiments, refer to processes and work that become equally shared experiences. Through facilitated collaborative efforts, performers and choreographers share in research in order to reach a place of co-authorship. For Dorfman and Miller, collaboration is not just useful and effective, but crucial in creating collaborative work that is specific and thoroughly developed from multiple, often differing, perspectives.

Choreographer Responsibility

Kate Enright observes, “I think we [dancers] forget what a choreographer has to actually do.” Enright introduces the important notion of choreographer and dancer distinction. In collaborative structures, post-Judson artists argue for the necessity of an often-singular, facilitative voice, for cohesive development, artistic authenticity, and practicality. Author and director Clive Baker uses the terminology “…steering rather than ordering” when naming directorial responsibilities in his theatrical processes. Similarly, many choreographers facilitate investigations, or “steer,” dancers in directions that move the process forward. Dorfman equates

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92 Dorfman, discussion.
94 Kate Enright (dancer) in discussion with author, September 17, 2014.
95 Quoted in Emma Govan et. al, Making a Performance: Devising Histories and Contemporary Practices (New York: Taylor and Francis, 2007), 49.
his role as choreographer to that of a ship captain – it is his responsibility to navigate and guide the trajectory and emerging aesthetic of the work. He explains:

> there is almost never an idea that doesn’t have merit or won’t be considered and I love that and pride myself on that everyone has this voice and should be heard and seen. So even if it’s an idea that’s not where I want to go, there is something in there that will stick in my mind, or my brain – or my heart—and it will come out later whether sub textually or more overtly. But because of that, my role is to keep…whatever the developing aesthetic of a particular piece or evening in mind.\(^96\)

One of the distinct roles of the choreographer is the development of a cohesive and clear aesthetic point of view. Dorfman agrees, suggesting that the choreographer is responsible for developing interconnection among the diversity and quantity of voices and ideas.

In her choreographic work, Lynch considers herself a protector – of quality, content, and the subjective experiences of the dancers. She finds that on especially emotionally demanding rehearsal days, she “will try to protect whatever happened that day and keep it in the piece in order to…protect its authenticity in some way”\(^97\) She speaks of the choreographer’s responsibility to preserve performer and content authenticity, which she is able to achieve through maintaining a somewhat removed, outsider relationship to the process and content.

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\(^96\) Dorfman, discussion.

\(^97\) Lynch, discussion.
Finally, there is simply the issue of practicality. Silas Riener notes, “Its just really useful to have a point person that manifests in certain ways related to authorship…there needs to be a person that can just say no to things”\textsuperscript{98}. This creative power, along with administrative and organizational tasks that choreographers are often independently responsible for, sets them apart from their dancers in a necessary and realistic way. Performers and choreographers attest to the need for a person to make quick decisions in order to keep the process moving forward.

\begin{figure}[h]
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\caption{Rashaun Mitchell and Silas Riener in \textit{Way In}. Photo by Lilly Echeverria.}
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Although aware of challenges collaboration presents, Riener explains:

I love it. It is extremely frustrating and difficult because we don’t often share opinions, particularly about process or methodology so there is an enormous amount of tension in the work that I find…generative but also sort of…debilitating. So it’s a lot of work and a lot of figuring out how to…. coexist with someone who doesn’t agree with you and how

\textsuperscript{98} Silas Riener (choreographer) in discussion with author, October 3, 2014.
to move the work forward, or move the work somewhere when there isn’t consensus. But I think that…it forces you to be really flexible and be really articulate and…really painfully aware of your own preferences, opinions, and desires when it comes to the work…. its delicate and its difficult. But if you’re up for that, it can be really rewarding.\(^99\) Riener echoes much of what other choreographers stated – collaboration comes with high effort but also with often even greater reward. Riegel equates the most successful collaborative processes to that of a band. She says, “…the base player holds down the steady beat so that the lead singer can create a melody or the drummer holds the rhythm. There is a respect in music for those roles and that is what allows great music to occur – you need the steady and you need the variation.”\(^100\) Collaborative dance devising allows for all these voices to be heard and listened to. Working collaboratively encourages in depth investigation that clarifies, deepens, and transforms material. As we attempted to achieve in some of the stages of the creative process in making *Into the Frame of Us*, post-Judson processes activate a sense of collective thought, facilitated and crafted by the choreographer, which results in work that is diverse but cohesive, thoughtfully investigated, and nuanced.

\(^99\) Riener, discussion.

\(^100\) Riegel, discussion.
Chapter 4
Authorship in Action

*Into the Frame of Us,* deliberately and experientially investigated notions of authorship, ownership, and the value of collaboration. The rigorous rehearsal process provided the opportunity to explore physical manifestations and embodied practices inspired by Jo Butterworth’s Didactic-Democratic choreographic continuum. We worked in a five-stage process, each stage exploring different modes of authorship ranging from choreographer as “expert” to choreographer as “co-author.” This chapter introduces Butterworth’s framework and documents our creative process including our methodology and the important themes and tactics that emerged through our process. Finally, it explains why, in this context, curatorial collaborative processes were both personally rewarding and artistically transformative because they augmented, deepened, and enhanced choreographic thought.

A Dance Devising Model

Jo Butterworth proposes a Didactic-Democratic model for teaching and engaging with choreography. She articulates multiple choreographic traditions, offering five distinct approaches to devising dance, which include choreographer as expert, choreographer as author, choreographer as pilot, choreographer as facilitator, and choreographer as co-owner. These approaches differ in levels of dancer and choreographer interaction, skills, and methods used. They range from a “teaching by showing” approach, in which the choreographer is considered expert and the dancer as instrument, to more cooperative, shared, collaborative modes of working and creating, resulting in the notion of co-ownership and collective decision making.\(^{102}\)


\(^{102}\) Ibid, 179.
In Butterworth’s framework, didactic is understood using Jerome Bruner’s concept of apprenticeship or the “the development of skill competency through repetitive practice.”103 Didactic practices are intended to teach, but the teacher or choreographer functions as an authoritative figure. Butterworth’s democratic definition stems from the egalitarian emphasis of the postmodern dance lineage; specifically the working methods practiced by improvisational performance group Grand Union in 1960s New York, which grew out of the Judson Dance Theater.104 Using these and other historical markers of the past, Butterworth articulates five distinct processes.

Little to no dancer contribution, as modeled by the sole authorship of Martha Graham and others in the 1920s and 30s, exemplifies Butterworth’s first model – choreographer as expert model. Instead, choreographers manipulate and direct dancers to align with an artistic vision.105 Dancers must imitate and replicate. Stage two, choreographer as author, involves choreographic control of artistic voice. However, this model permits dancer interpretation, which minimally influences movement content and artistic vision.106 In this framework, dancers actively participate in imitating, replicating, but also interpreting the material that the choreographer provides. In choreographer as pilot, stage three, the role of choreographer becomes more fluid with the addition of improvisation – and therefore dancer agency. Improvisational strategies begin to dissolve the hierarchical choreographer/dancer divide and encourage dancers to access their own compositional skills. Choreographers initiate and control dancer-driven content creation.

103 Butterworth, “Too Many Cooks?,” 179.
104 Ibid, 180.
105 Ibid., 181.
106 Ibid.
Butterworth’s fourth and fifth models are inspired by 1960s, postmodern democratic concepts of facilitation and co-authorship. Both of these final two processes hinge on collaborative creation and development through improvisation and task response. What sets these two models apart is the role of the choreographer. In the choreographer as facilitator structure, choreographers provide the leadership necessary to “negotiate, process, intention and concept”\(^{108}\). Choreographers accentuate dancer contributions but remain the ultimate deciding factor on anything from content generation to macro-structure.\(^{109}\) Conversely in Butterworth’s fifth process, any sort of choreographer hierarchy disappears, replaced by complete co-ownership of material and ideas.\(^{110}\)

**Into the Frame of Us**

**Who**

I began the creative process by selecting a nine-person cast – seven women and two men – with representatives from every class year. They range in areas of expertise, from highly trained, technical dancers and actors to people who have very little experience with dance but engage in other physical practices, such as running, soccer, and hockey. I selected people with whom I had a previous relationship with, or who had expressed pointed interest in working with me. Additionally, I chose these individuals because all of them, either with me or with other choreographers, had been exposed to collaborative processes in some context and had expressed interest in working collaboratively. Although this group did not come from similar movement histories, they all shared similar choreographic experiences, which united them under similar value systems – notably, understanding collaboration as a primary tool for discovery. I felt that

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\(^{107}\) Butterworth, “Too Many Cooks?,” 183.
\(^{108}\) Ibid., 187.
\(^{109}\) Ibid.
\(^{110}\) Ibid.
these three qualifications allowed for individuals to enter the process with the level of trust, courage, and desire to participate in the structure that I believed was imperative for success.

Figure 8. Into the Frame of Us A. l-r: Lizzie Woodbury, Emilie Jensen, Maggie Bower, Lucy Soueck, Chandler Smith, Sujie Zhu, Nellie LaValle, Kathryn Bower. Courtesy of Jenn Mazza, photographer.

Methodology

We began rehearsing during the fall semester, with one two-hour rehearsal per week. Inspired by questions of collaboration and a desire for genuine co-authorship, I entered this process with no pre-determined content but with a plan for the process and a strategy of how we were going to engage in that exploration. We allowed ourselves an extensive research process – its purpose to discover and test out movement and conceptual ideas that interested us. This process involved both physical explorations and discussion-based rehearsals. We spent one
rehearsal discussing contemporary notions of feminism and another doing relay races in the studio, for example.

We quickly realized the importance of establishing familiarity and trust within the group; although I knew all the members of my cast personally, they did not all know each other. We attempted to expedite the getting-to-know-you process by spending time together outside of rehearsal. We all believed it was essential to feel comfortable with each other on a more general, interpersonal level so we shared meals together, did homework together, and spent time with each other in other, more casual contexts. This early familiarizing tactic was an important step in creating the most open, playful process that lead to a level of trust necessary to cultivate bold experimentation in rehearsals.

In the studio, initial rehearsals became opportunities for discovery. Although I, as choreographer, structured and facilitated each rehearsal, the performers generated content and explorations based on ideas relevant to them. For example, in the preliminary rehearsal periods, I offered scores based on my cast’s interest in musicals, the idea of unattainable dreams, and family member quirks, among other things. During this period we set little material, but did record all improvisations, on video, for later reference.

In January, we transitioned to deliberately and methodically testing each of Butterworth’s five categories. We rehearsed for two hours, Monday through Thursday, and each day we would essentially “try on” one of these modes of authorship. For example, when working in the first stage, choreographer as expert, I taught a movement phrase to the dancers using an authoritarian teaching style, and the dancers responded as “instruments” responsible for imitation and replication.111 That section would later become the unison movement phrase that occurs in the

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middle of the piece, involving the entire case expect two performers who at that moment, are sitting on the floor arguing. After each rehearsal, the dancers completed a survey, which asked them to reflect on the success and issues they experienced working within the specific model investigated that day. The survey questions included: 1. What was satisfying for you as a dancer during this stage? What was frustrating? 2. What were some important questions that you raised or were raised by others during this rehearsal? and 3. How do you think your input during this stage affected the (1) depth of investigation and (2) transformation of material during rehearsal? Over the course of our rehearsal process, we held four works-in-progress showings, in which we received feedback from those in attendance.

Figure. 9 Into the Frame of Us B l-r: Emilie Jensen, Maggie Bower, Charlie Dupee, Lizzie Woodbury (jumping), Sujie Zhu, Lucy Soueck. Courtesy of Jenn Mazza, photographer.
Results and Observations

As prescribed by Butterworth, in stages one and two I alone created content that the dancers either meticulously replicated or physically interpreted. As Graham practiced, in stage one the material remained entirely the same to its original form, while in stage two, small physical transformations or alterations to material occurred due to the allowance of dancer interpretation. For example, I created the aforementioned unison section through teaching my collaborators a sequence of movements that they replicated and stage two resulted in the moment just before the unison moment, in which the dancers join the phrase through a process of accumulation. I instructed them on how and when they would join the phrase, but they were allowed to physically interpret the material they used to do so.

When reflecting on notions of satisfaction and dissatisfaction, I want to note again that I recognize that my performers’ past experiences craft personal perspectives that determine what feels satisfying. In this case, their previous experience and training with collaboration affected how they viewed working in a non-collaborative structure. To that end, the first two stages did not prove to be satisfying to my collaborators or to me. Singular artistic control of concept, style, structure, and content allowed no departure from the original material. The dancers expressed similar feelings about these stages, asserting that although it was “…satisfying and somewhat relaxing to not be responsible for creating anything… there was no investigation, play, or transformation of material which limited what we were doing and what could be done.”112 The dancers and I found that sole choreographic authorship severely and detrimentally narrowed the scope of our investigation, leaving the work and process feeling constrained in intention and investigation.

112 Maggie Bower, completed survey conducted by author, January 13, 2015. (I refer to my collaborators by their first names by their own agreement).
Stage three, *Choreographer as Pilot*, involved the introduction of highly structured improvisation; however, I still retained primary artistic and aesthetic control. As Riegel describes of Bill T. Jones’ processes, stage three permits dancer contributions, however those contributions are limited to physical content creation. Likely due to my own preference for more collaborative structures, I found it difficult to negotiate my authority over decision-making while simultaneously providing the dancers with enough agency. For the dancers, stage three was equally confusing. Although they found it satisfying because the material felt “infused by their desires and choreographic qualities…” they noticed that this stage lacked personal conceptual investigation, and the physical exploration felt “frustratingly too structured.”

Nellie found that she “…liked how it was our own material but with guidance…but still felt like [she] could only respond to the specific, physical task and couldn’t add anything else.” Similarly, Lizzie felt limited in the types of things she could add to the process. She wished that she could “…veto certain ideas or voice dissent/dissatisfaction” As Nellie and Lizzie express, this stage still did not permit the level of participation that contribute to the complexity of material revealed during a creative process.

In Butterworth’s fourth stage, I provided leadership to the group but they were responsible for content-construction and content generation. The dancers enjoyed this process the most of all. They frequently experienced moments when “… [their] input collectively helped to transform the piece due to the encouraging and willingness to add ideas and try new concepts.” Dancers noted personal agency as “crucial” and “highly important” during this stage. Emilie stressed

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114 Nellie LaValle, completed survey conducted by the author, January 12, 2015.
115 Lizzie Woodbury, completed survey conducted by the author, January 12, 2015.
116 Kathryn Butler, completed survey conducted by author, January 21, 2015.
117 Charlie Dupee, completed survey conducted by author, January 21, 2015.
that during this stage she was “…able to think critically about the questions we were addressing and the problems that came up. It was great to have my suggestions used!” Similarly, Kathryn felt “…excited about being active in trying to achieve spatial and timing relationships with the other dancers in my own, unique way. I found it enjoyable to solve problems given by Sara on my own, and with other dancers.” Kathryn and Emilie experienced a heightened engagement and enjoyment through increased freedom and responsibility, which prompted them to introduce not only new movement ideas, but also conceptual, structural, and aesthetic interests.

Figure 10. Into the Frame l-r: Charlie Dupee, Kathryn Butler, Chandler Smith. Courtesy of Jenn Mazza, photographer.

The moments where the dancers were given full responsibility and control and I removed myself from the process, Butterworth’s fifth stage, felt enjoyable but posed many problems.

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118 Emilie Jensen, completed survey conducted by author, January 21, 2015.
Particularly, dancers expressed concern with lack of focus and direction. Lizzie articulated that in stage five “…it felt like no progress was being made because there were so many voices and opinions in the room”¹²⁰ and similarly Lucy noted, “It was hard to get the whole group to focus and organize. While having freedom to choose whatever we wanted to do was exciting, the lack of leadership role that came with stage five was less enjoyable. I missed the structure and effectiveness of the other stages.”¹²¹ Lizzie and Lucy illuminated the issue of organization – or rather lack thereof – within this stage. Although we did privilege play and exploration for much of the creative process, we needed direction in order to transform, deepen, and organize thought. The only moment that we decided to keep from this stage was a brief section in which Lizzie sings a portion of the chorus from a song from *Cats* the musical. Nothing else that the dancers created during this stage felt important or beneficial to the identity of the larger piece.

**Emergent Themes & Tactics**

Two important tactics emerged as integral to our process – improvisation and transformation. The nature and level of improvisational fluctuated depending on what stage of Butterworth’s framework we were working in. For example, we did not use improvisation in stages one and two; however, in stages three and four, I would come in with improvisational scores that became less structured as my sole authorship decreased and dancer agency increased. Improvisation proved important because, by its ephemeral nature, it altered and transformed material. Improvisation necessitates a deep, personal connection with material, which I argue in this type of process, encourages performers to be more willing to alter material. Emilie agrees, stating, “…because the work is ours, I felt a strong desire, almost responsibility, to transform the

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¹²⁰ Woodbury, survey, January 12, 2015.
¹²¹ Lucy Soucek, completed survey conducted by author, January 12, 2015.
material – to make it better because it was mine…” Emilie speaks of a more thoughtful
investment that occurs when working from an improvisational place. This type of investment
urged participants to delve deeply – with full commitment – into the material and process, which
allowed for more expansive, complex questioning and results.

Figure 11. Into the Frame of Us. Emilie (foreground). Courtesy of Jenn Mazza,
Photographer.

Transformation also became an important theme in itself. For example, the first section of
the piece began with the cast, in the downstage left corner of the space, running on and off the
stage in a diagonal column. I had initially imagined that this section would only involve two
performers and it would be brief. However, during one rehearsal Charlie asked if we could stop

to discuss the intention behind this section. The cast questioned me about larger themes that this section represented. Together, we decided that this moment provided a really great opportunity to investigate one of our larger questions – how idiosyncrasies fit and persist within a single, unified action or idea. With that information, the performers suggested that it might be more impactful and informative to have the entire group involved in this running section. This decision, made primarily by the cast, became really important in solidifying a primary theme that guided the work. This is just one of many, isolated examples of how, through collaborative efforts material gets more critically examined, interrogated, and transformed toward a more nuanced, cohesive piece.

**Reflections on Process**

After working through all of Butterworth’s stages, my cast and I, realized that none of the models really worked for us in their entirety. Influenced by their histories, which crafted their perspectives towards creative processes, the dancers desired high levels of personal agency and responsibility within the process while also noting the need for order and cohesion, which I provided as director. These environments involved a facilitated process that allowed for individual expression and personal inquiry guided by choreographic direction. I began to consider myself as more of a curator.
Chapter 5
The Choreographer-Curator

A curator is an overseer – of objects, people, and ideas. Beginning in Ancient Rome, curators, or curatores, were civil servants responsible for various departments of public works, such as bathhouses and aqueducts. The end of the twentieth century produced yet another variation. We encounter the curator, as we typically know it today, as an exhibition maker who approaches art in more abstract ways. Now in the twenty-first century, the term has only expanded further, used to describe anyone from music festival organizer to fashion stylist. I propose adding post-Judson choreographer to that list. Like curation, choreography is both an intellectual and aesthetic pursuit. Curators and choreographers – via different mediums – research, select, assemble, and sequence according to a larger point of view. They both experience and facilitate aesthetic experiences. Essentially, the curator choreographs an audience’s path through an exhibition. This chapter explores the roles and responsibilities of the contemporary curator, and compares and relates that to post-Judson choreographic processes. It then looks at the act of curation as an artistic act in its own right, curation and the issue of authorship, and finally makes the case for the choreographer as curator model.

Curatorial Rules and Responsibilities

Jonathan Haas argues that the curator has two primary roles: research and writing and curation of collections. These curatorial duties evolved in tandem with the evolving role of the museum. Michael Shott states that, “A new definition involving utility extracted follows from

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the view that curation is a continuous, not nominal, variable.”¹²⁵ No longer seeking to simply display artifacts, museums now want to more effectively engage museum goers with the knowledge, contexts, and histories attached to objects, as they are finding their “storehouses of objects cannot serve as the sole medium of communication.”¹²⁶ Contemporary acts of curation involve more extensive, intersectional research, nuanced selection, and an increased desire for communication with audiences. Similarly, some post-Judson choreographers begin with a process of physical and theoretical research, within which they assemble, select, and sequence material with the end goal of performing or putting the work on display. In our creative process, we also began with a process of investigation and research from which we determined our primary themes.

This evolving role of the curator has a lot to do with the emergence of cooperative ways of working. Hass explains that while curators have the ultimate translation power of content message, dynamic interactions occur between curators, educators, designers, and other specialists to develop the exhibit.¹²⁷ Mirroring the postmodern dance movement, collaborative curatorial efforts have taken the place of the “independent, master-hand role” that curators held in the past.¹²⁸ Contemporary curators now work closely and rely heavily on the opinions of their peers and the producers of the artwork, not only to support their curatorial visions, but also to provide new, unexpected perspectives and directions for exploration, as is the case with collaborative dance processes.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 241.
¹²⁸ Ibid.
Research and Writing

Curators, and other members of an exhibition design team, begin their research by identifying an initial area or topic of interest. From there, curators engage in both detailed investigations of the pieces of art themselves, as well as the social and cultural environments within which the objects originated. For exhibitions, curators also research ways in which the pieces relate to each other, providing the framework so that objects can be “read” and appreciated. As Nehamas claims of the writer, the role of the curator is to facilitate the interpretive experience.

Similar to post-Judson choreographers, the exact focus of the curator’s research is largely an independent decision. However, that focus is supported, expanded, and enhanced by colleague suggestions, as was the case when creating Into the Frame of Us. The cast, almost exclusively, proposed our areas of interest and inquiry, but ultimately I was responsible for determining our core research questions. Keeping in mind audience and contextualization of the work, the curator develops a thesis that guides the exhibit. Hass notes that curators are not responsible for presenting information that can be “appreciated and understood” by a general audience, but instead for providing them with enough information to have an interpretive experience on their own, which is much like how I viewed my role as a choreographer-curato.129

Creating Value Through Selection

The curator translates the research into an exhibit through various acts of sequencing, arranging, selecting, and displaying to align with the artistic point of view.130

With the input of co-workers, and now often the artists themselves, curators determine and dictate how the work will be installed, displayed, and presented in the space. Post-Judson

130 Ibid., 238.
choreographers engage in a similar selection process. Choreographers and dancers offer prompts, often improvisation or task-based, to which the collaborative team responds, creating material or posing further questions. Once the choreographers and dancers create the material, the choreographer selects, alters, and transforms that freshly generated physical information into something that would better portray the interests of the larger work.

Curators have to be deliberate with how they present their research; according to Hass, their audience exists as only a “passing acquaintance.” Hass suggests that audiences only interact with the exhibition or artwork on a temporary, infrequent basis. In dance performance especially, a form characterized by its ephemerality, audiences not only view work, at most, a few times, but the content and nature of the work changes each time it is performed. Therefore, for both curators and post-Judson choreographers, information needs to be efficiently and succinctly translated in order to be immediately useful to the audience. I argue an effective way to achieve this conciseness is through curated, collaborative efforts.

However, communication with the audience needs to be as expansive as it is specific to allow for plurality of interpretations. As Foucault, Barthes, and Nehamas stress, in the post-Judson era, the burden of interpretation is placed on the individual viewer. Contemporary curators, like post-Judson choreographers, deal with the issue of meaning making and interpretation in the conceptual art work. Post-Judson dance and art are governed by the notion that there is no single, correct reading of a work. For curators, in contemporary exhibitions, the actual role or prominence of the artist lessens as a result of contextualization from other sources.

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Reconsidering Curation

Although there is no debate that the curator is involved in the artistic world, public opinion typically separates the curator from creative pursuits. However, art historian Rossen Ventzislavov contends that not only is the act of curation artistic, but it should be considered a fine art in itself. Ventzislavov argues for the acknowledgement of creativity and value making in curation – even going as far to say that we should combine our conception of curator and artist into one. While I do not agree that these two professions are entirely comparable, I concur that we can lessen the distinction between the two positions – for two main reasons. The first is that the curator creates artistic value through selection and the introduction of new “custodial narratives,” and the second is that our understanding of the role of the artist has evolved over time to include practices and approaches attributable to the contemporary curator.

According to Ventzislavov, artists distinguish themselves from critics, curators, and collectors due to the creative component of their actions. However, he suggests that the notion of the curator should be considered equally creative due to the curator’s role in selection. Often artwork itself does not contain directions about how it should come into contact with the public, so the curator is both responsible for selecting the work itself and the placement, display, and performance of the object. Where this becomes a creative act is in the understanding that the curator adds artistic value to the objects, artwork, and context. Ventzislavov notes:

If an artist can pick out any object and pronounce it an artwork, what she is doing, among many things, is adding value, through a certain mode of selection and a respective idea-

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133 Ibid.
134 Ibid.
135 Ibid.
driven narrative, to the object and the larger world. In this sense, the “artwork” itself is
not the object the artist picked out, but precisely the act of selection and the narrative
which informs it.136

Ventzislavov suggests that the art itself does not come to fruition until it is selected and
displayed according to a curatorial narrative. Curatorial efforts transform artwork and therefore
the curator, or the act of curation, arguably plays the most significant role in the translation,
embodiment, and enjoyment of the work.

The same can be said for post-Judson choreographers. Choreographers and dancers create
physical material and structures through the research process, but it is only when that material is
sifted through, selected, and assembled that it becomes a cohesive dance piece. Artist, curator,
and critic Robert Storr, provides the useful proposal that artists and curators are like writers and
editors, respectively.137 Storr explains that the curator:

may justly take pride in spotting ability and fostering accomplishment but who is
otherwise content to function as the probing but respectful ‘first reader’ of the
work/manuscript—thus acting on behalf of all future readers—and is disinclined to
interfere in a writer’s process except to the extent necessary to extract the best that is in
them so that the subsequent dialogue between their work and the public be of the highest
and most open-ended order.138

Although in choreographic processes, I would disagree with Storr’s belief that the curator or
editor is disinterested in being involved in the artist’s process, the idea of extracting the best
information created by the authors is important in understanding the responsibilities of the

136 Ibid.
http://www.frieze.com/issue/article/the_exhibitionists/.
138 Ibid.
contemporary curator and post-Judson choreographer. Marcel Duchamp, artist and scholar famous for his “Readymades” which spawned the Found Objects movement from 1913 to 1921, claims that the act of creation simply involves placing an object in a new scenario.\textsuperscript{139} Although somewhat extreme in its claim, this statement speaks accurately of the contemporary understanding of the curator and post-Judson choreographer, who work artistically by facilitating new scenarios and narratives in which the objects and art exist.\textsuperscript{140}

Additionally, the changing conception of the curator occurs because the binary between artist and curator has begun to dissolve. Due to shifting societal, political, and economic climates, the artist is no longer viewed as divorced from practicality or responsibilities more traditionally associated with the curator. Instead, creation, criticism, and administration have converged. Historically, people perceived artists as entirely consumed by their creative endeavors, and their poverty and suffering were glorified as a marker of authenticity.\textsuperscript{141} However changes, especially in the past 50 years, in the amount of resources and financial support afforded to creative endeavors have forced artists, including choreographers, to be responsible for matters more typically associated with curators, such as caring for the art, management, and sponsorship.\textsuperscript{142}

I argue that while the act of curation should be considered an artistic act in itself, artists and curators are not entirely comparable. After all, the curator is not responsible for creating the art. In “The Name of the Game,” Tim Morton explains, “… framing the figure of the curator [as

\textsuperscript{139} Nicolas Bourriaud, Postproduction: Culture as Screenplay: How Art Reprograms the World (New York: Lukas & Sternberg, 2002), 12.  
\textsuperscript{140} Ventsilavov, “Idle Arts,” 90.  
\textsuperscript{141} Ibid.  
artist] points to a certain lack of self-confidence in the field, as though curating is an activity that can only be understood, or even validated, with reference to activities that exert a greater gravitational pull.” ¹⁴³ Morton hints at the risk of devaluing the independent field of curation. I do not believe this is the case. Instead, we can increase the value and understanding of curators, artists, and choreographers by looking more in depth at curatorial responsibilities.

Also, the authorial clout curators maintained in the past is no longer desirable. Artist-curators, such as Gavin Wade, express “…I would suggest that clear authorial distinction is a red herring set up by the art world institutions of the past of which artists were of course implicit. I think those distinctions can be dismantled now.”¹⁴⁴ As Wade supports, most contemporary artists and curators no longer uphold strong divisions between themselves, instead working collaboratively towards a guiding point of view.

The Curator and Authorship

With this notion of curatorial creative influence, the issue of authorship arises. Yes, curators are often not the creators of the work, but they do add their own value to the artwork through selection and contextualization. So the question arises, who is responsible for the authorship of the artwork? I refer back to Nehamas and Ventzislavov for clarification. Nehamas explains that the author emerges through the process of audience interpretation.¹⁴⁵ He notes the difference between the writer (the artist) and the author (the spectator/interpreter), while Ventzislavov argues that a piece of art does not fully come into being until it has been viewed and interpreted by someone other than the creator. With this understanding, authorship becomes

a dialogue between the artist, curator, and audience. Mikhail Bakhtin introduced the idea of
dialogism, which applies to this triangular authorial relationship. Dialogism is the continual
dialogue with other authors and literary works – it informs and is informed by previous work.
E.J. White claims that “dialogue, as a antidote to monologism, generates differences, and as a
consequence, has the capacity to cross cultural and individual borders…” In contemporary
cases, curators, artists, and especially spectators, share authorship of creative work through
dialogic communication.

Dorothee Richter emphasizes this crucial triangle of authorship between the artist,
curator, and audience, even going so far to argue that the public is the most important part of this
equation, as the work is primarily intended for them. She suggests that these three groups work
collaboratively to produce a product – for her, authorship is “many-voiced.” Nehamas also
touches on this idea, citing the inevitability of co-authorship due to the multiple viewers that
come in contact with the interpreted work. What Wade, Richter, and Nehamas point to is the
dismantling of traditional understandings of authorship in place of collective creation and shared
production of art.

**Choreographer as Curator**

The post-Judson choreographer is a curator – of personalities, histories and ideas.
Choreographers and curators engage in rigorous, collaborative research and selection processes,
the later the choreographer ultimately guides. Through the powers of selection and development
of ideas and concepts, post-Judson choreographers and contemporary curators create value that

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enhances, and even transforms, physical and conceptual thought. Post-Judson choreographers working in this collaborative environment share authorship of the produced work with the dancers and the audience.

The process I am referring to is one that I believe exists outside of Butterworth’s framework. Based on scholarly and creative research, I argue that, context dependent, a sixth category is most relevant and effective in post-Judson practices and that this process could be named “choreographer as curator.” The *choreographer as curator* process draws from Butterworth’s fourth and fifth models, creating a hybrid category that sees the choreographer as something between facilitator and co-owner. Like Butterworth’s fourth stage, within my sixth category the choreographer provides leadership, guidance, and facilitation, or curation, of intention, concepts, and artistic stimulus. Additionally, this sixth framework puts great emphasis, even dependency, on improvisation, in which all collaborators both create and respond to tasks and scores. Where Butterworth’s fifth process comes in is through an emphasis on shared research, decision–making, and negotiation of ideas. The *choreographer as curator* stage involves a process of selecting, arranging, and displaying of information, utilizing improvisation and dancer-generated content. It necessitates participant suggestions, about conceptual and structural content, which aids in reaching a place of co-authorship among all individuals.

After our third showing of *Into the Frame of Us*, we received both good and less than favorable feedback on certain sections of the piece. We found that the sections that garnered the most positive reactions were those created using stage four processes, while the least favorable were the sections made from a stage five format. We felt, and the viewers confirmed, that the sections made using a stage five structure lacked the clarity, texture, and poignancy of the sections made in stage four. Although stages four and five utilize improvisation and support high
levels of dancer agency, it was only after the dancer-generated material had been through the refining process, of selecting, arranging, and displaying, led by me as choreographer, that our primary themes and nuanced details became clear to the performers and especially the spectators. These reactions speak to the strength of the choreographer as curator method, which provides the clarity and cohesion of stage four with the collaborative authorial power of stage five.

My dancers agree. When asked to reflect on which process they both found personally and structurally effective, Kathryn remarks that the most enjoyable methods were those in which we were “…able to work as collaboratively as stage five but with enough leadership to keep everyone focused and productive.”\(^{148}\) Chandler notes that he:

responded best to stage six, because he enjoyed the structure of stage four while also enjoying the chaos and excitement of stage five. I appreciated these stages as the choreographic process felt like our own, allowing room for exploration and self-contribution towards the larger goal of putting the piece together. It was really rewarding to see the piece unfolding as a result of the work we had done together… The dance became an embodiment of the performers, providing a more meaningful and compelling piece for everyone who contributed.\(^{149}\)

Emilie agrees with Chandler, claiming that stage six was most effective and enjoyable as “with guidance and focus from Sara, everyone was allowed to have a clear voice, which allowed us to find new ways of approaching work that we wouldn’t have necessarily found otherwise.”\(^{150}\)

\(^{148}\) Butler, completed a survey conducted by the author, February 17, 2015.
\(^{149}\) Chandler Smith, completed a survey conducted by the author, March 15, 2015.
Similarly Maggie notes that she felt like the most effective processes were those when:

My input enabled me, and my fellow dancers, to investigate parts of the work that felt significant to me or caught my attention. I think all of us working on the same material, noticing different things, and having the ability to speak up and say what we like and what we could change and enable a “final” product that was something that all us of involved could relate to on a personal level. Through working this way…we reached a place where the authorship of individual sections blended together – we forgot who made the work and it became more about collective ownership.”

These sentiments are exactly what stage six is all about – co-authorship in action. Albeit affected by our past experiences and compositional histories, working in a curated, collaborative creative process was not only the most rewarding, as we were able to explore personal curiosities, express opinions, and embody a sense of authorship and responsibility for the work, but this type of process also deepens, enhances, and transforms choreographic thought, in turn producing the highest quality process and work.

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Conclusion

This research project emerged from my own desire to unpack and ultimately better understand my own choreographic process and its historical antecedents. I was interested in how collaborative creative processes manifest themselves in contemporary contexts, how authorship functions within those collaborative processes, and my role within these processes as a performer and choreographer entering the field. I examined historical, theoretical, contemporary, and practice-based investigations of the authorial voice in dance. I came to the conclusion that the collaborative structure, utilized in many post-Judson dance processes, leverages the creation of shared ideas and power, thereby enhancing the experience of the collaborators and deepening their physical and theoretical exploration and output.

Merce Cunningham, John Cage, and The Judson Dance Theater laid the foundation for that collaborative model. These artists’ respect for collaboration fostered the beginnings of a dance community in which plurality became a core tenet. Through the interest and allowance of everyone and the everyday, dance collaborators revealed and used their own lived experiences, perspectives, and surroundings as material for their investigations and performance work. Inspired by a societal model of individual exploration through collective engagement, the journey of rediscovery implemented by the Judson Dance Theater brought collaborative exploration and research to the forefront of choreographic thought. Through these rigorous research efforts, Judsonites, and those before them, flipped any understanding of dance on its head, which they were able to do because of their collaborative support systems.

Some post-Judson choreographers have unsurprisingly chosen to continue the collaborative tradition spearheaded by their predecessors. However, collaborative models have since shifted beyond Judson techniques, mainly due to availability of resources and societal support. In the
height of the Judson era, a societal environment of experimentation, exploration, and collectivism supported creative efforts – artistically and financially. In contrast, contemporary practices are influenced – even dictated – by the lack of resources and desire for expediency and conciseness of information, prompted in part by technological advances. Unlike Judsonites, today’s choreographers and performers no longer have the privilege or resources to devote extensive amounts of time to working with a single group of people. Additionally, the individuals they work with are typically not united by similar histories and trainings, as was the case with Judsonites and Dunn’s composition class. With the dissolving of the traditional company structure towards a more project based framework, post-Judson choreographers, as often the most consistent members of a group, have to step in more prominently than before.

These choreographers “step in” through a curatorial dance devising process that deepens, enhances, and transforms choreographic thought. Post-Judson choreographers as curators select, assemble, and sequence movement material, structures, and conceptual ideas. The dancers and choreographers generate material together, inspired by ideas proposed by both parties. The choreographic responsibility really ignites during the editing process, to ensure that the subjective, wide scope of content continues to align with the evolving guiding principles and questions.

At the heart of collaboration is the individual. This may seem counter-intuitive, but in dance devising, the collaborative structure relies on the committed efforts and contributions of individual performers. Post-Judson choreographers realize the richness of information that lies within the embodied histories of their collaborators. They take advantage of the lives, perspectives, and memories of their collaborators and use those diverse experiences to construct the work.
Devising dance through collaborative, improvisational modalities requires the performers to access honest effort and content while attempting to eliminate artifice. This process hinges on commitment to one’s own subjectivities and the allowance of the exploration of those subjectivities in rehearsals. Accessing these personal memories and remaining open to the precarious unknown is a skill that requires the collaborators’ genuine curiosity in the task, and non-judgmental attention to the result. Once accessed, performers are able to deeply and thoroughly investigate ideas and concepts of personal importance to them, which brings various layers of information into the process. The curatorial choreographic process requires improvisatory and task-based modes of discovery. Improvisation and task provide the structure that grants the necessary agency and explorative spirit that can lead to the most engaged and nuanced questioning from the dancers.

I suggest that the quality and complexity of the work depends on the level of investment and complexity of dancer proposed and generated content. Influenced by improvisatory training and previous working processes, professional dancers, such as Jenna Riegel, Kellie Lynch, and Alex Springer, as well as members of my collaborative cast, attest to feeling more engaged and fulfilled when responsible for generating movement and ideas within a process, especially when those suggestions are based on their own compositional, social, and/or political ideals. Therefore, I put forward the proposal that when given this freedom within the curatorial structure, dancers create more complex, nuanced, and thoroughly examined material because they are able to draw from their own experiences. In essence, the quality of the work depends on the quality of dancer input, and the quality of dancer input depends on the facilitation of collaborative environments within which the dancers can thrive.
Albeit slowly, dance audiences are catching on to the fact that post-Judson performers are human bodies performing real tasks and real experiments onstage. In *Kinesthesia, Empathy, and Related Pleasures: An Inquiry into Audience Experiences of Watching Dance*, Matthew Reason and Dee Reynolds explain that the dance audiences experience a range of “kinesthetic pleasures”– pleasures being “interpretative "strategies" to designate the instinctive and largely automatic and engrained processes that motivate spectators in their engagement with dance.”\(^\text{152}\)

The authors are not arguing for universality in responses to watching dance, however they identify strong trends in which audiences experienced high kinesthetic pleasure from viewing performer’s emotional or intellectual virtuosity, rather than physical prowess.\(^\text{153}\)

I argue that this kinesthetic pleasure might be experienced more frequently in post-Judson dance due to an allowance and emphasis of the personal. Post-Judson dancers are working and experimenting, in real time, drawing from their complex, embodied histories and knowledge. The presentation of this real, often messy, often flawed content connects the audience with the generosity, authenticity, and emotionality of the form. This is not to say that all dance made collaboratively should be or will be relatable or understood. I simply suggest that curatorial choreographic processes enable a quality of material generation that audiences could comprehend strongly on a physical, emotional, and visceral level.

Working collaboratively also produces and expedites the creation of new performative structures. Philippe Noisette explains:

> It was in the United States that dance hitched up with performance art in a clear—and acknowledged—desire for osmosis. By experimenting with new forms of representation and


\(^{153}\) Ibid.
by working with ultimately ordinary materials, the bodily marriage of dance and performance art produced some of the finest chapters in the twentieth-century creative art.\textsuperscript{154}

Judson exploration, due to its constant collaborative emphasis, produced more expansive, more imaginative ideas, which post-Judson artists have continued to explore and create. With availability and allowance of technological performance components, post-Judson artists have and continue to make many advances and original contributions to the field of technologically and performance, among other forms. Post-Judson processes encourage participants to remain engaged in a collaborative, generative compositional mindset, which greatly expands structural and performative possibilities.

However authenticity, individuality, and originality cannot come at the cost of cohesion. The work still needs to be thoughtfully prepared and constructed, and I argue that an efficient model to achieve that is through a curatorial collaborative process. In rehearsal environments of exploratory and investigatory autonomy, where performers are sometimes but not often united by compositional and/or creative histories, dance devising can become chaotic and unproductive, as many of the interviewed artists and my own dancers verify. Being genuine is paramount in performer experiences and performance, but often, the choreographer can bring out this authenticity most effectively, complexly, and clearly through the curation of a distinct point of view.

So in some contexts, the \textit{choreographer as curator} is essential in collaborative processes. And they are most successful when the choreographer is both situated deeply within the process, as part of the collaborative team, while also being a somewhat objective, outside eye that directs and focuses. In research aimed towards social justice, researchers attempt to be something they

\footnote{Philippe Noisette, \textit{talk about contemporary dance}, 168.}
call “critically reflexive.” They understand that theoretical frameworks shaped by personal perspectives, histories, and assumptions are essential components to research and to understanding the unique and vast complexities of the human experience – however, they also note the importance of self-criticality and reflexivity in order to recognize the often unintentional privileging of certain types of knowledge, ideas, and conclusions. Educator and scholar Bill Ayers terms this research approach humanistic, which involves an inclusive, participatory model in which research takes into account a multitude of experiences while continually questioning. Ayers argues that this is the most successful form of research because, due to our expansive and interconnected nature as humans, excluding or separating the personal experience and perspective ignores necessary evidence we need in viewing and understanding the full picture.

Choreographer curatorial processes are similarly effective when the curator is embodying a critical reflexivity that allows them both to embrace the subjectivities of their collaborators, while also removing themselves in order to create a united experience for the performer and viewer. I approached my research from different points of view and rehearsed within multiple, often-unfamiliar styles of process. Although I came into this research with pre-conceived ideas about my preferred way of working, accepting those inherent biases while attempting to understand, embody, and practice different choreographic working modalities is working critically reflexively. I do recognize the limitations of this research in using a perhaps intentionally biased group of collaborators. However, my goal was not to argue that curatorial

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collaboration is the only or best way of working, but instead to dissect why curatorial processes work for certain artists in certain contexts.

Perhaps the choreographer-curateur is somewhat like an auteur – at least that’s what Steven Lubar, who cites museum curator Richard Rabinowitz, suggests. In cinematic auteur theory, the film’s director, or auteur, provides the creative vision that brings the work together. In all curatorial efforts, Rabinowitz argues that the narrative, or the physical and emotional journey for the visitor, is the most important part of the artistic experience. And the way to concoct and bring forward that narrative is to “bring the actor forward, in all his or her individuality and particularity.” Ultimately, the curator is responsible for:

arranging these objects...so that they move visitors to invent stories for themselves. The art of the gallery is to furnish the imagination with the makings of good stories—human characters, human actions, human places, human rules, and human tools—so that visitors can feel themselves dramatizing the past. I do my art so that you can do yours. This is the task of interpretation.

Post-Judson choreographers craft lived experiences through a selection process that reveals the individualities and idiosyncrasies of each performer. Echoing Nehamas’ sentiments, the post-Judson choreographer provides the information, enhancing the performer and viewer imagination through a curatorial process that deepens, enhances, and transforms creative thought, awakening the interpretive experience for the spectator. Ultimately what audience, choreographers, and performers engage with most deeply and pleasingly is thoughtful work, and an effective way to achieve that is through a curatorial research, editing, and selection process.

158 Ibid.
159 Lubar, “Curator as Auteur,” 73.
Andrew Simonet, co-founder and former co-artistic director of the hybrid performance company, Headlong, states, “…we do know that diverse ecosystems are more resilient, more able to respond to disturbance. The same is true for culture. Diversity of thought and imagination makes us more culturally resilient, more able to thrive in times of change.”

So perhaps there is something even more important, something even bigger than satisfaction within and effectiveness of the work. To work influenced by only a singularly, individual point of view is to work naively. But to work without direction is similarly problematic. Performance forms socially construct norms and boundaries of the individual, so audiences look to art to set the standard. We, as artists, have a cultural responsibility to work collaboratively, to work within a practice that develops and hones individuality, practices compromise and determined decision-making, and cultivates strong points of view, as models for the rest of society. To believe in human diversity and democracy is courageous and necessary. It is through collaboration that the most effective, thoughtful, radical, and important change occurs.

160 Andrew Simonet, *Your Life as an Artist* (Artist U), 29.
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