Shifting Once Again

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Researching the way changes in an individual affect one’s relationship to themself and others

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Change is constant. It is a push forward, a step back, an evaluation of one’s life. Change is involved in almost every aspect of our daily lives as humans. Recently in my life, change has been extremely present in all its forms. I have seen it in my relationships, family, lifestyle, goals, and even in myself. Change can bring about a lot of emotions when confronting it. Sometimes it can be really exciting, sometimes it is nerve racking, and oftentimes it is really scary.

When starting the process of “Shifting Once Again,” I knew I wanted to explore the idea of change. This past summer I had experienced an overwhelming amount of change in my life. My very loving nine month relationship ended. I came out as queer to my friends and parents. I figured out what I want to do with my life and who I want to be once I graduate. Many dynamics had shifted in my life, as they do when we are discovering who we are as individuals in our college years. A lot of this was at the forefront of my mind and I absolutely needed to explore what that all meant in the only way I knew how. Creating art.

My artist statement reads, “Change is constant; an action and a reaction. “Shifting Once Again” is an exploration of how changes in an individual affect one's relationship to themself and others. Figuring out who we are - that is change. Such shifts can be terrifying, exciting, and in some cases, underwhelming. I invite you to reflect on these shifts in your own life as you watch this piece, and how they might have even brought you to this very audience tonight. The knowledge that everyone around us is constantly going through changes can be comforting. Finding comfort in those changes, without resistance, is what composes individual growth and discovery.” Making sure the audience knew that this is a relatable topic was very important to me in my process. Humans are constantly discovering, even in the smallest ways, all at the same time. Adapting to life around them, and consistently finding ways to evaluate this evolution.
Everyone is going through some sort of shift with every breath they take. I wanted to confront this in a powerful, but celebratory way.

The audition process was one of the most wonderful, exciting parts of my project. While sitting in front, being blown away by all the talent in the room, I took away all the bias I had for friends and let myself be swayed into looking in a certain direction. I allowed the energy to fill my peripheral until I caught the dancer in my field of vision, saw the fire in their eyes, and knew that they were not only eager, but committed to this art. Since there were so many new faces, I knew this would be the most beneficial way to do this. I ended up writing down the names of 23 humans, hoping to get at least 6. Looking at the callboard on the final day of accepting or declining a piece, I counted not 6, not 10, not 12, but 18 powerful, strong individuals. I was gifted with these 18 beautiful dancers to work with in “Shifting Once Again.” Not only was I not expecting this, but I do not think I was ready for how each individual dancer was going to affect me so deeply, in the best way possible. As far as the choreographic process goes, I wanted to take 100% control over the choices being made and the movement being set as it allowed me to put my own experience in my research. Viewing my dancer’s doing my movement, explaining to them the feelings I am having behind it, allowed me to see how each of them felt it and performed it within their own bodies. This strategy conducted a lot of the research for this project.

Going into this project, expressing the ideas of change, I make something that would leave the audience questioning. Putting choreography on the dancers that indicated shift, evolution, curiosity, and any other form of change. This was not only portrayed through the dancers, but through the imagery and physical nature of a shirt. The dancers passed around, manipulated, showed off, and carried this shirt throughout the piece. This shirt was “the change”
and fully molded the way each dancer moved depending on their interaction with it. This relationship between dancer and shirt was very important for my piece to be as successful as it was. As the shirt choreography saturated my mind, I knew I wanted to add in the idea that everyone is going through their own challenges, resolutions, and evolution that are specific to themselves in that moment of time, all at the same time.

The piece was structured in a way that followed the path of building a communal way of experiencing change. The first part starts off very robotic and focused on the individuals of the group. One dancer would pull off, while others would stay focused on no one but themselves. This turned into the acknowledgement of more than one person, as the group sizes became smaller teams. This was where the shirt came in. The only time the dancers acknowledged the audience was after they had received the shirt for the first time. This build up was intense, it was curious, and it had experimental discoveries behind each movement. As each dancer passed the shirts along, a chain reaction of occurrences shifted the way the dancers moved. The relationship between the shirt and each dancer was incredibly important. The shirt being “the change” made it mostly clear, but change has many different layers to it. I split the dancers up into five groups that complimented each other’s strengths well, which allowed me to give each group an intention behind the shirt. I won’t go into too much detail on those intentions due to the dancers having their own experiences with each intention on stage every time.

As the piece concludes, we see a massive change in energy. It becomes more celebratory and allows for the message of humans experiencing their own changes all the time, happening to all, even if it is unnoticed. The ending section, involving every individual on stage to be in their own shirt, comfortably and fully them, celebrating this idea of communal change. As changes happen all around us, we sometimes miss the fact that others may be going through things very
similar, and being the strong humans we are, getting through it gracefully. Not only that, but going through changes while still going to school, to work, to social gatherings, and everything else that we can’t necessarily get out of all the time. This continuous discovery of the group going from individualistic robotic movement to team machines to communal experience is the entire purpose of my project.

One unexpected part of my process was absolutely the number of people who were so eager to learn, grow, and make art with me. These humans are my absolute whole world, and this process would have been so different without them. I had a lot of doubts in myself at the very beginning of trying to get my message across this stage filled with amazing humans. I wanted to make it clear what was going on, but also wanted to make shapes and try things I wouldn’t be able to do without the whole 18 people. With that though, it was very hard to choreograph ahead of time as I didn’t know how to form the shapes I wanted to make in my head without being in the space. I wanted to make sure everyone was seen and equally used on stage as well. That can be quite hard in such a large group, but everyone was split up into groups and it allowed me to pull each one of their strengths. Their eagerness to dance with new people every week was amazing and I found such an easy process of experimenting with them.

Part of making this challenge less of one, I split rehearsals up a lot. I wanted to make sure each dancer was using rehearsal time efficiently, so I would have each of those smaller groups come in for an hour rather than the full group for 2 hours. It helped with being able to give more time to each individual and it helped me to avoid dancers in the full cast to be sitting there doing nothing while I taught choreography to only 5 of the 18. This included solo and duet parts as well. I would split up times for those to 30 minute chunks which allowed me to get in about 2 minutes of choreography that would be happening while I teach the rest of the group their
choreography at another rehearsal. These days, however, make me need to prepare a lot of material before I come to rehearsal so I could teach them everything. The entire strategy behind this whole process was “learn fast, clean later” and it worked very well.

Another challenge I was experiencing was the idea of having controlled chaos within the piece. With so many bodies and a lot of movement it was sometimes hard to keep the movement appealing to the eye. It definitely took a few rehearsals before the chaos was under control and where my confidence in keeping the group together was higher. The cast was able to find a flow along with me that brought all of us to a place of comfortability within the chaotic and fast paced movement.

In this process, I was in charge of my costumes through a generously donated fund from the Dance Club. I wanted something simple and clean, with the color green. With help from Zoe Dehline and Liana Dillon, I was able to dye tank tops the green color that I wanted and had my dancers bring in their own pairs of black joggers to complete the look. I was also given an amazing lighting designer, Terry Jorgensen, who lit my piece beautifully. Seeing the green tank tops on the stage, all lit up, for the first time was breathtaking. The dancer’s intensity along with the costumes, lights, and every other aspect of the amazing production brought all of my dreams to life.

A major part of my process was feedback. In the beginning stages of my piece, a lot of my feedback came from my mentor, Heidi Eggert, and my other professor, Brooklyn Draper. Both of them know me very well, and continued to not only give me choreographic feedback on the dancing to answer my initial questions, but they often challenged me to go further, change this, find comfort in this, etc. Brown Bag feedback from both of them was also so helpful for me. Not only did I get specific cleaning feedback, but both of them helped me to figure out what sort
of ideas I want to put behind the shirt. I got ideas from both on how to implement the shirt so that it means something to not only be and the dancers, but also the audience. I later was told by Heidi, that she saw that shift in the way the dancers interacted with the shirt. As far as dancer feedback, they honestly just continued to tell me how much they were enjoying the piece and the process. They were having a lot of fun, which made it so much fun for me and that information is so good to know as their choreographer.

After the performance, I received so much love from so many people. I felt so honored that audience members would come up to me, congratulating me on my work, and telling me that I had a gift for choreography. That was the most heartwarming comment I continued to get because I truly love creating art. We had an amazing opportunity to gain feedback from Michelle Boulé. Not only did she affirm that my goals were met, but she continued to challenge my future artistic endeavors. She stated that she felt washed over after the piece ended, leaving her in a state of mind that was unexplainable. She stated that repetition in a large group amplified my choreography and that there was constant elevation. She did however challenge me to take the shirts further in my research, asking me “What is next for you?” This left me speechless, which I think is what she meant to do. My final challenge from her was to ask harder questions and that also left me in a crazy mindset. She validated my work and continued to build feedback for my future upon that. I truly feel honored to have had that conversation with her and planning on going into a deeper one in the near future.

Something I would love to do in the future is be able to explore each individual relationship to change. I believe that it would allow for me to feel fully complete in the idea of change. I want to take more time with each individual that is a part of my process to talk through their experience with change, more than we were able to this time around. If given more
rehearsal time, I would love to allow my dancers to journal a lot more. Journaling their thoughts on the roles of change in their life and how that can be put into the shirt whenever they have it in hand. Allowing that to bring more depth into their experiences may even add in more movement to the piece. It feels like this piece could go on for at least 15 minutes and still feel incomplete because the idea of change is also constantly changing. I would love to create more with this idea and maybe even relate it back to my junior project, “And Then, The Influence Shifted.”

In conclusion, “Shifting Once Again” was a fully thought out exploration on the idea of change. I am so grateful for those 18 magical humans and for Heidi and Brooklyn who have constantly had my back throughout this process and been my rocks this whole semester. Doing what I love is so rewarding when you are surrounded by constant support and being able to discover more about yourself is much more comforting that way. I don’t think this process is completely complete, or has answered any big questions for me. But I do think that this process will go on, for me, forever. I love unraveling my life and seeing what each of these little nuances, ideas, and fixations turn out to be for me as an individual. I do know one thing, however. I know that no matter what I will not, and should not, stop creating art. I find the utmost happiness whenever I am creating something for me or for the world. I have ideas constantly oozing out of my body and I know that I can’t hold them in. I have found this amazing love for choreography and I don’t think it will ever go away.
Appendix

VIDEO LOG

https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PLjXFEw8XHXKYiGDNvjPMnSgggM4dxbo9

JOURNAL
Hello AMAZING Dance Club and Dance Professors! Thank you all so much for helping us seniors out with our costumes this year. It truly means the world to us in your willingness to help fund our art. The two main purchased items below (tank tops and joggers) I would love to donate to the dance closet after the show! All other items are either used personally from mine or the dancer’s closets and/or will be kept by the dancers afterwards. Please let me know if any of this doesn’t make sense or you need more clarification. Thank you all so so much again! Any amount provided is so greatly appreciated! ME AND MY CAST LOVE YOU SO MUCH! <3

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<tr>
<th>Amount</th>
<th>Item/Notes</th>
<th>Price</th>
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| 18     | Tank Tops (all the same color)  
- If they are out of the color I want I will need to get them in white and dye them myself, but purchasing the dye with my own money is not an issue. :) | $8.00 x 18 = $144.00 | https://www.target.com/p/women-s-ribbed-tank-top-a-new-day/-/A-81521821?preselect=81245903#lnk=sametab |
| 3 (2?) | Black Joggers  
- Everyone in my cast has black joggers except for 3 people. I have a pair of black joggers that I would totally be fine with allowing one of them to borrow for this show. So I only really need $ for 2 more! :) | $30.00 x 3 = $90.00 | https://www.target.com/p/women-s-stretch-woven-cargo-pants-all-in-motion/-/A-79599718?preselect=79358977#lnk=sametab |
| 1-18?  | Large T-Shirts  
- I have not fully coordinated this conversation with my cast, but at the end of my piece everyone will be in a large t-shirt of their choosing. One that means something to them, or represents who they are in anyway. For those individuals who don’t have this sort of shirt they wish to dance in, I was planning on telling them to go to a thrift store to find a shirt and I would venmo them $3 for whatever one they find. I am unsure how many of them will want to go pick out the shirts as of right now, but am also willing to pay for these shirts out of pocket for my dancers as they may want to keep these shirts. :) | $3 x 18 = $54 | N/A |

TOTAL: $288