Composition/Improvisation
Instructor: Aaron Wood

Description:
This 5 day series is designed to address theory and practice in the principles of dance composition with concentration on the exploration of time, space, energy, music, phrasing, text, and partnering. The participants will explore the connections between choreographic intention, movement invention, content, and form. The overarching goal for this series is the development of personal movement invention into cohesive choreographic form.

Objectives:

- To continue developing creativity through movement learning and experimentation.
- Continue developing a sense of where choreographic and improvisational motivation comes from; from within the body, motivated by the mind, or a mixture of the two.
- To embrace an open-floor-forum where we can freely discuss the compositional elements of each others’ works - including movement and design, choreographic structures, conceptual approaches, and ones’ personal movement signature and style.

References:


Day One: Connectivity through movement

Exercise 1: Mind/body meditation and centering
This exercise will begin each class, but with that specific days' theme. A teacher led meditation to find complete body/mind independence.

Exercise 2: Name Game
Create a gesture that describes who you are and how you currently feel. Create 4 counts of movement based on this feeling. In two groups of 10 each, combine in any order the 4 count phrases of each dancer to end up with a long group movement phrase worth 40 counts. Show each group’s dance.

Exercise 3: Twittering
Inspired by twitter, dancers will walk around the room to eventually meet up with another person. When they meet, one person will ‘tweet’ with movement what they are feeling, seeing, or hearing. The other person will then reply with their own ‘tweet’. Repeat this exercise with different partners for a few minutes.

Exercise 4: Multiple Followers
To develop exercise 3 further, add the element of multiple followers. The dancers will continue walking through the space, but when they find a person they want to follow, they will do just that. They repeat one or two movement(s) as much or as little as they’d like then leave and find another person to follow or perhaps begin developing their own tweet for someone else to follow. Keep this exercise going, but instead of just walking, add the element of moving through the space perhaps exploring different levels, energy qualities, speed, etc.

Exercise 5: Connectivity
Everyone write down, on a piece of paper, a phrase they think they would see tweeted or would twitter themselves. The phrase needs to have an action word, qualitative word, and directional word. Mix-up the phrases and pass them out to the dancers. Each dancer will have one tweet to use as movement motivation and will set 24 counts worth of movement. After movement is set, each dancer will show their phrase and the audience will guess if to see if it was their ‘tweet’.
Day Two: **Directionality choices**

**Exercise 1: Mind/body meditation and centering**
This exercise will begin each class, but with that specific days’ theme. A teacher led meditation to find complete body/mind independence.

**Exercise 2: Ball of yarn web/unravel**
Each dancer will stand at random spots throughout the room. Using a ball of yarn, one dancer will randomly toss the yarn ball to anyone in the room. This will continue until everyone in the room has a strand of the yarn. The last person to be tossed the yarn will toss it back to the first person so that the string becomes connected. Now, the dancers will move through the yarn puzzle trying to untangle the giant knot(s). As the teacher, help direct the exercise by calling out different energy qualities.

**Exercise 3: Remy Charlip exploration- forming dance via transitions**
With illustrated dance shapes depicted on a piece of paper, the dancer chooses the order in which to tie all of them together. How does one transition from one shape to another? Are abrupt transitions acceptable? Why or why not?

Note: the paper may be flipped around in any way the dancer chooses which will change how the illustration is seen and depicted. For example, an image might look like upright, but when the paper is turned sideways the image looks to be sidelong.

**Exercise 4: Defined Movement/Random Direction**

In **any** order you would like, dance the below movement directions (this will be phrase one):

- Swipe right arm in 4 directions
- Collapse body
- Tell us about your breakfast
- Grab right foot behind you
- Jump up
- Cover mouth
- Kick left foot
- Turn around
- Grab shins
- Soften into floor

Write each movement direction on a piece of paper. Mix these pieces of paper in a pile and randomly draw them out. This will be your order you will dance them and this phrase will serve as phrase two. Combine both phrases, now retrograde the entire combined dance. Show final composition study.
Exercise 5: *Number Box game*

Each dancer writes down numbers 1-8 on 8 different pieces of paper. Numbers 1,3,5,7 serve as the corners. Numbers 2,4,6,8 serve as the mid points. Mix-up these numbers, and draw them randomly. Write down the numbers. For example: 5,7,2,6,3,8,4,1. This will be movement phrase one. Jump from number to number, and repeat this twice through. Mix-up the numbers again and write the new order down. This is phrase two. Using only your upper body dance this phrase. Repeat this phrase twice through. Final phrase, combine the jumping and upper body phrases in any fashion. Do this twice through. This will be phrase three. Try changing the dynamic quality of the final phrase by dancing as big, little, slow, fast as you would like.
Day Three:    Group work

Exercise 1: *Mind/body meditation and centering*
This exercise will begin each class, but with that specific days' theme. A teacher led meditation to find complete body/mind independence.

Exercise 2: *Finger lead/push through space trust game*
In partnerships, one dancer will be the guider and the other is the follower. With one hand, the two will gently touch each other’s pointer fingers. The follower will close his/her eyes. The guider will lead the follower throughout the space. Being mindful of other dancers around to insure not running into anyone else, the guider will arch, weave, and direct the follower through the space. Switch roles so that both parties can experience the others job.

Exercise 3: *City Limits and Fill in the blanks (negative space has never looked so good)*
   a) With 4 boxes mapped out by the instructor, on the dancing space, the dancers begin to move throughout the largest one first. There will be a lot of room for the dancers to explore and improve. After a little while, the dancers will continue moving but into the next smaller shape. Now, their movement becomes not as big. This will exercise continue until the dancers are moving in the smallest of the established boxes. Now, after moving in four shrinking spaces, the dancers’ movement has become minimal. How can they continue moving and exploring all of the limited space, yet be mindful of one another as to avoid collisions. Can the dancers retreat to and from the floor? Can they assist one another through lifts or stillness to escape running into another dancer?
   b) In duets, trios, or quartets have the dancers set a movement phrase that incorporates assisting each other via lifts, weight share, etc. to find the negative spaces of the dance. Create a study to show the rest of the class.

Exercise 4: *Round Robin*
Two groups need to be established. One group will serve as the dancers and the other group as the choreographers. There will be 6 rounds with the sixth being a final showing. The choreographers will walk clock-wise to work with the following groups.
   First Round 5 minutes- begins with 5 sub-groups of three in each group. Two of the three are dancers and the lone person is the choreographer. He/she gives them 24 counts of movement material. This must be a duet with partnering, intertwining, support, etc.
   Second Round 10 minutes- vary the speed of 3 spots within the dance
   Third Round 10 minutes- add repetition to 2 spots within the dance (they can repeat as much or little as the choreographer chooses.)
   Fourth Round 10 minutes- change facings of 1 spot within the dance (this could mean front to back, up to down, etc.)
   Fifth Round 2 minutes- going back to original group, the original choreographer may choose to change one element or leave it as is.
Day Four: An image is worth a thousand words and degrees of abstraction. The dancers will use image cutouts of current environmental events as movement motivation and compositional theme(s).

Exercise 1: *Mind/body meditation and centering*
This exercise will begin each class, but with that specific days’ theme. A teacher led meditation to find complete body/mind independence.

Exercise 2: *Mother/child*
The dancer is a mother/father with a child. Find ways to hold, rock, feed, play with, support, and love your child. Now, using an image of a mother/father with a child manipulate it so that you have five very short movement versions, each more abstract, each further away from the conventional, but all keeping the essence of the image. You will have five degrees of abstraction. The first will be very representational. The last is highly abstract and removed from the original and may not be easily recognizable; but the spirit is there, and at some level a connection can be made to the original image. Make a phrase using all five degrees, beginning with the first degree and progressing through the second, third, fourth, and final.

Exercise 3: *The Whole Picture*
Working in groups of three or more, use an image from a magazine to inspire movement. Start with a small cutout of the image. Perhaps this image is round with a black dot. What does this stir up in the dancer? Eventually work until the entire picture is whole. Do not show the entire picture until the very end. For example: begin with the small round black dot and it will continue to grow into a final image of the BP oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico. Create movement phrases of 20 counts worth of material.

Exercise 3: *Outdoor Site Specific*
Take the movement phrases from above and set them in an outside space. Towards the end of class, show works and dialogue about what we saw.
Day Five: Final composition

Exercise 1: Mind/body meditation and centering
This exercise will begin each class, but with that specific day’s theme. A teacher led meditation to find complete body/mind independence.

Exercise 2: Final Composition
The dancers may choose to work individually or within a group. Create a compositional study based on any of the ideas we explored this week. Allow for 20 minutes of exploration and 55 minutes of show and dialogue.

Questions:

1. What is form? What does form do for choreography?
2. How can form relate to abstraction?
3. What does it mean to abstract?
4. When you abstract, it is said that you gain the purest quality/form of the movement. Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Why?
5. Why is dance considered one of the least abstract of the arts?
6. Reflecting on the week’s improvisational and compositional studies, do you feel you initiate movement from the mind, body, or a mixture of both?