The Role of the Artist - Exploring the Psychological Realm Through Movement

As a novice choreographer, I began the artistic process with never-ending opportunities in the horizon. Rather than becoming intimidated by the abundance of opportunities, I sustained a sense of ease and authenticity that served the process extremely well. Even when I was faced with difficulties and challenges, I used them as a learning experience in how to navigate issues and create something beautiful from chaos. Furthermore, I found the explorative nature of choreographing to be extremely fulfilling and compelling. When considering dance in the research paradigm, there was always more to extract from the movement and the dancers. The research process demanded openness to experimentation, alteration and modification that in hindsight better served the overall work. The research paradigm required me to call upon the gifts of my dancers and encourage personal artistic contributions. This collaborative approach allowed the dancers to not serve as mere puppets that mimic choreography, but rather gave them the autonomy to insert their valuable thoughts and ideas in the work. The preliminary stages of the choreographic investigation provided room for discovery and self-expression, but over time the piece developed into a concrete and in depth work.

Throughout my life, I have encountered a plethora of obstacles and challenges residing in the mental, physical and spiritual realms. During these difficulties, I felt a deep sense of sadness and hopelessness as these issues were clouding my vision of the future. It was not until weeks or months later that I was able to look in retrospect on those events and realize both their significance and purpose in my life. In these moments of
difficulty, I was facing an incredible amount of dissonance – a tension and disagreeableness in need of a resolution. Yet, it was in these moments of dissonance that I had the most growth; these moments propelled me in a forward direction that I never would have imagined or thought I was capable of. This phenomenon served as a launching point for my choreographic studies and was expanded upon to include the personal experiences of my dancers. As a cohort, we explored the natural tendency of humans to retreat and become bitter in times of tension and their inability to see its role in the larger scheme of life. Then, its beautiful and mesmerizing resolution that seems inconceivable or unexpected.

Wrapped within the dichotomy of dissonance and resolution is the crucial contribution of emotions. A highly prevalent social phenomenon teaches society to numb, or suppress emotions, especially ones that are considered negative. Unfortunately, this cultural construct has classically conditioned people to believe that any personal expression is “too personal”, “over-emotional” or “unnecessary”. The choreographic work explicitly challenged this cultural notion and presented the argument that ignoring such emotions is actually more destructive than allowing them to resonate within your life. I utilized the analogy of running from your emotions or challenges and the physical and mental fatigue that can occur over an extended period of time. Once this point of exhaustion is reached, an individual has no choice but to acknowledge the chaos occurring in their lives. It is in this moment of stillness that one is finally able to reach a resolution. Thus, in order to “see”, you must stop running in avoidance and acknowledge the dissonance.
One of the most interesting parts of this process was exploring and identifying the function of choreographic devices and elements. Initially, I was unfamiliar with the varying devices and only considered focus, directionality, cannon and unison work. While I did incorporate these devices in the piece, I also gained knowledge of other devices and modes of creating choreography. I relied heavily on creating movement for the sake of movement and then uncovering meaning by abstracting from the solid foundation of movement. I also incorporated meaningful gestures that were carried throughout the piece Exploring unfamiliar territory, I also inserted movement styles or qualities that were unnatural to me (i.e. slow movements), but served the greater purpose of the piece. Layering was also included to create a chaotic dynamic, which contributed to the overall narrative.

In the process of inserting meaning into the kinesthetic movement, I encouraged my dancers to marry their focus, energy and physicality. As a choreographer, I wanted the dancers to understand their role as an artist and how their inner thoughts can physically manifest through movement. I encouraged the dancers to harness the power and knowledge that is housed within their body in order to authentically tell their story. Then, the movement becomes of much more substance aside from its shapes and lines – there is intentionality and purpose behind it. It was through the coaching of the mind-body connection that I realized the multiplicity of interpretations that the overall piece has. While I did have an explicit idea for the overall piece, other themes began to emerge such as the necessity to see one another despite differences, the concept of togetherness in distress and most abstractly, the role of darkness and light in our lives.