The Cult Phenomenon: An Overview

An Honors Thesis (Honors 499)

by

Shannon McNeil

Thesis Advisor:
Sarah Mangelsdorf

Ball State University

Muncie, Indiana

December 1997

Graduation Date: December 21, 1997
Abstract

Purpose of Thesis
This project combines written material with visual art to form an integrated piece of learning material. First will be a written discussion of the cult phenomenon: a definition of cults throughout history, a brief discussion of a few infamous cults, a reflection on membership of cults, and a discussion of the conversion process of cult members are all included. Next will follow a discussion of how this research relates to the visual representation of a hypothetical cult life in dance form. The reader will be able to follow the creative process, the symbolism involved, and the final aspect of the performance of this piece. The overall purpose of this thesis is to gain a better understanding for cults throughout history, and to appreciate how this new found knowledge can be represented in a visually artistic way.
Table of Contents

Written Presentation of The Cult Phenomenon: An Overview 1

Works Consulted 11

The Creative Project - Idea Conception 12

The Creative Project - The Process 14

The Creative Project - The Dance and its Symbolism 19

Rehearsal Photographs 22

The Creative Project - The Performance 31

Performance Photographs 32

Final Thoughts... 41
Written Presentation

of

The Cult Phenomenon: An Overview
Throughout time, humans have searched for the answers to the most important questions one can ask -- why are we here? What is our purpose in life? What happens to us when we die? Search as we may, the answers to these questions are always evasively out of our reach. People have often in many cases tried to form their own "reasonable" answers, which is how the concept of religion was formed. Religion, in whichever form, attempts to answer these aged questions. Which brings us to the subject of this discussion: cults. The Webster's New World Dictionary definition of a cult is "a system of religious worship or ritual, a devoted attachment to a person, principle, etc., or a sect."

Given this definition, one would have to wonder why the need for cults arose when simple established religions throughout the world can apply to this definition. In John J. Collins' book The Cult Experience, anthropologist Willa Appel says that there are four major characteristics that define a cult (6-7). First, there is an authoritarian structure. Second, there is a regimentation among the cult followers. Third, there is a renunciation of the world and the society in which the cult exists, and fourth, there is a diminished regard for the individual. It can be seen how these characteristics will set the cult apart from other organized religion, or in some cases, can it? This paper will attempt to explain some attributes of cults in general, pointing out commonalities amongst them. The discussion will include what kind of people join cults and why. It will include the conversion process of a cult member and what that involves. But first, a brief look at a few major cults
throughout history should be included in order to gain a grasp on what exactly we are dealing with when we say we will attempt to explain a cult.

There have been a great many number of supposed cults throughout time: the Jonestown group, The International Church of Christ, Scientology, the Mormons, Jehovah's Witness, Order of the Solar Temple, Satanic, Seventh-day Adventists, and the Unification Church are to name just a few groups with which people are familiar. It would be very time-consuming to describe each of these in detail, so we will limit our discussion to a few famous ones: the International Society for Krishna Consciousness, or the Hare Krishnas, the Divine Light Mission, the Heaven's Gate cult, and the Branch Davidians.

First we will briefly look at the International Society for Krishna Consciousness, or the Hare Krishnas. This cult was founded by A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada. This cult differed from the Hindu religion in that it worshipped the god Krsna as a separate being from the god Visnu. A. C. came to the United States in 1965. He was worshipped as Krsna's representative on earth. Iskon, as this cult is called for short, believed that we are eternally related to Krsna, and that our ignorance to this is why we are continually reincarnated into human bodies. They believe that we must give our life to Krsna and devote every thought to him so that we may gain spiritual awareness. A cult member joins a temple and performs chants, and is forbidden against any intoxicant, certain foods, and sex. Men shave their heads, and all devotees carry a string of beads to
keep track of his/her chants. Rituals include song and dance ceremonies where food is offered to Krsna so he can eat. The cult members participate in communal living, where the typical day begins at 3:30am and includes classes, worship, rituals and chants. This cult at its high point had over a million members.

In 1960, another group known for cult activity began when Param sant Satguru Dev Shri Hans Ji Maharaj formed what is known as the Divine Light Mission. He had four sons, and upon his death in 1966, he named his youngest son, Maharajji, as his successor. The boy was 8 years old at the time. In the 1960s Americans seeking eastern mysticism found their way to India and converted to the Divine Light's teachings. At age thirteen Maharajji went to America to set up headquarters in Denver, Colorado. This cult believes that there is a single reality that includes everyone. This reality is God. This group taught that one can know God directly. To do this, there are four steps one must go through, with the help of an experienced cult member. First, one needs to find the light within oneself and meditate on it. Next, one finds the "sound of the spheres" within oneself and learns to find it during meditation. Third, one finds the "honey-like nectar" that flows through the body and learns to taste it during meditation. Lastly, one finds the vibration that runs through the body and learns to meditate on it at all times.

Members have claimed that they actually do experience God through this process, and get hooked on this feeling. Members attend discussion groups, and can either join a communal living household, where 30% of each person's income goes to the cult, or
join cooperative households that hold strict rules -- sex, some
types of foods, and other worldly pleasures are prohibited -- and
follow the direction of a leader appointed by headquarters.

One of the most famous cults to Americans in the 1990s is
the Heaven's Gate cult. The founders of this cult, Marshall
Applwhite and Bonnie Nettles, nicknamed Bo and Peep, were a
former music teacher and nurse who in 1972 met each other and
agreed that they had a higher purpose in life. They said that
they were members of the kingdom of Heaven who had been placed in
human bodies to help the rest of us overcome our human existence.
Their beliefs were that we are constantly reincarnated into
higher life forms. If we can overcome our human existence, we
can move to the next level of androgenous beings with perfect,
indestructible bodies. We will then be taken to Heaven by a
spaceship. Life in this cult consists of detaching oneself from
family and friends, camping out, living with the barest
essentials, and living in close quarters with someone of the
opposite sex so one can learn to overcome human sexual urges.
Many men were actually castrated. The cult went into hiding in
started rearing its head again. They sold a video called "Beyond
Human," and ran an ad for recruitment in the USA Today
newspaper.

Then, on March 22, 1997, the comet Hale-Bopp made its closest
approach to earth. It was at this time that the group committed
mass suicide, in shifts that lasted three days. They believed
that there was a spaceship traveling behind the comet that was
going to take them to their higher existence.
The Branch Davidians, another famous cult of the 1990s, actually had its roots back in 1831 when William Miller, an atheist turned Baptist preacher, started studying the end-of-time prophecies in the bible and preaching about the end of the world. This was the beginning of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

From 1929-1930, a man named Victor Houteff started a spinoff group called the Davidians. He preached that Jesus would return and rule in Israel with Houteff by his side. Houteff died in 1955, at which point his widow took over. A man named Benjamin Roden began to say that God has told him to take over. He called his group the Branch Davidians. In 1978, Ben Roden died and his wife, Lois took over. In 1983, Vernon Howell came on the scene and used Bible scripture to convince Lois that they should have children together. Lois's son, George, at this time was claiming himself to have divine inspiration, and began to rival Vernon. George forced Vernon and those that followed him off of the Waco, Texas headquarters at gunpoint. It is in this same year that Vernon married his first wife, 14 year old Rachel. From here it was a downward spiral. Vernon overtook the Waco headquarters by an armed invasion, and changed his name to David Koresh, David coming from the Bible's king of Israel, and Koresh meaning death. He told of a ten year prophecy after which Christ would appear again. But as time grew on, David also stated that he was Christ incarnate. He convinced his followers that all of the women were for him to begot, in order for him to divinely reproduce. He led his following in a communal living, where followers slept in abandoned school buses, and had a full day that began early in
the morning and consisted of sometimes 8-9 hour long Bible studies and military training. In these studies he twisted Bible verses to "prove" that he was Christ reincarnated. This cult ended in a most tragic way when on February 28, 1993, the ATF raided the compound on suspicion of firearms. This led to 4 ATF men killed, 16 wounded, and 6 cult members believed to be shot. This led to a standoff that lasted 51 days, and eventually the whole compound was engulfed in tear gas to try to get the women and children out. A fire broke out, and Koresh along with as many as ninety followers, almost thirty of whom were children, died either in the flames or by self-inflicted wounds.

Now that we have followed the process of some infamous cults in recent decades, now let's look at the different types of people that join cults such as these and their reasons for doing so. Some scholars seem to agree that cult members generally tend to fall into one of three categories. First, there are "normal" people who have turned to a cult during a period of need in their lives. These needs that they are looking to fulfill will be discussed later. The second category are people that have had problems in their lives for considerably long periods of time. They are sometimes labeled as "searchers". Lastly, there are people who are in the category of the "disturbed". These people may be searching for perverse and different ways of life, and turn to cults for those desires.

There are many reasons why people turn to cults for fulfillment, and there are many needs that these people are looking to satisfy. One need that people wish to fulfill is a
desire for community. In today's face-paced, do-for-yourself lifestyle, many find that community is something that is lacking in their lives, and can usually be achieved with the cult communal living that was described earlier. Another need that people want to have satisfied by these cults is the need to feel able to deal with social problems. There are many large-scale problems in the world today, such as homelessness and starvation. These problems can make a person feel insignificant and incapable of being in control. Cults offer a way to control one's present, future, and possibly afterlife, which helps one feel more competent. Another need is the desire for dependence. Today's world stresses independence and self-reliance, which can make a person feel alone in the world and desire a confidant or companion. Cults offer these people someone to look up to, someone who is knowledgeable of the future and the way to live one's life. Another reason some people join cults is that in the technologically advanced state that the world is in today, cults offer more of an organic environment, where one can get to natural roots. Some people join cults simply because they wish to rebel against their family or society in general. It has also been mentioned in many studies that some cult members have had a past with drugs, and wish to find a high that will last indefinitely. They wish for something that will make them lastingly feel special and different, something that the drugs can only give them for a short period of time. With all of these reasons for why one would join a cult, why should one NOT join? In this writer's opinion, just the simple reason of being an
individual and not following someone else's beliefs seems a valid enough reason. All of the above mentioned reasons are things that can be satisfied through other, more reasonable, venues.

Now that we have seen why people join groups such as those described at the beginning of this paper, we will now look at the general process of converting a person into one of these groups. John Lofland and Rodney Stark have a model for which seems a general process for conversion into a cult (Collins 33-35). But there are certain factors about the specific person that are usually in place first: background factors, such as the needs previously described, and situational factors that arise when cult members and a possible future member meet. There seems to be seven phases of the conversion process. First, there is tension within the person due to the needs of that person that yearn to be fulfilled. Second, this person attempts to solve his/her problems in some way, looking for possible answers. Third, the person realizes that he/she is looking for some religious answer and begins searching different venues for that answer. Fourth, the person reaches a turning point in his/her life. Usually something drastic happens here, such as a job loss, a move, etc. This lets the person let go of his/her past and look toward future possibilities. Fifth, the person meets cult members and develops some sort of relationship with them. Sixth, the person is prompted to let go of all previous attachments and form stronger bonds with the cult. And lastly, intensive interaction, where the cult shows the person what the cult is about in an isolated setting. It is in this phase that
people say that brainwashing occurs. It is this same process described in the last phase that Ted Patrick used in the 1970s to "deprogram" cult members -- to bring back people who had been brainwashed by a cult. Family members of cult inductees would hire Patrick, for sums of sometimes $1000, to kidnap the member, and then isolate him/her while performing "deprogramming". He would ask the member trying questions about the cult, show them the cult's downfalls and inconsistencies, "bad-mouth" the leader, etc. While doing all of this, sleep was monitored so the member would be mentally fatigued and tired of fighting. In many of these cases, Patrick's method worked, but it was still viewed by many as brainwashing in reverse.

This paper has attempted to give an overview of cults throughout recent history. We began with a definition and a description of a few major cults so the reader could gain some insight on exactly what a cult is and how it is defined. The descriptions of the cults also gave the reader an idea of the beliefs and patterns that some cults have in common, such as a specific leader and a belief that this leader is a supreme being of some sort. This paper has also described what type of people join these groups and the reasons for their joining. Finally, the paper discussed how a cult goes about bringing new members in, if it is a group that purposely recruits. All of this combined gives the reader a general idea on what a cult is and how it operates.

So, what can one learn from all of this? Number one, a point to ponder is that if all of these groups are correct, or
even just a few of them, there are an awful lot of prophets and messiahs roaming around. Another point to consider is that given the definition and description of cults, a lot of organized religion can be considered close relatives of cults. Even author Thomas Wolfe has been quoted to have said, "A cult is any organized religion without political power." Most organized religion will not go about isolating a person to "brainwash" them, but many will go about trying to show others that their way is best, and then encourage them to reject all other ways of thinking. A lot of religions are based on a single person being an all-knowing, supernatural savior, and one should consider this when looking at all forms of worship or following.

There is one important idea that the writer wishes for the reader to take with him/her after reading this paper. That is to look at all forms of beliefs that are available in the world. Look into yourself to discover what you yourself truly believe about the world, and don't compromise those beliefs for anything. You don't need others to follow you to know that those beliefs are right for you. Most importantly, keep an open mind. Closing your mind and your heart to new ideas is the most disastrous act one can commit in the search for oneself.
Works Consulted


"Cult Controversy." URL: http://www.washingtonpost...m/cult/misc/tpatrick.html. 8 December 1997.


The Creative Project—
—Idea Conception
The idea for this creative project started back in the summer of 1997 while pondering in what area I would like to concentrate my honors project. I knew that I wanted to have this project be in the area of my minor, dance performance, because I felt that this was an area that I wasn't able to work in as much as I would have liked. I learned much valuable information while completing my minor, but I felt that I would like to "end it with a bang" if you will. I also knew that I would like to have some creative aspect involved with this thesis, at which point I came up with the idea that I would like to have a dance of my creation visually portray some aspect of my research. I had never created a full length dance piece, and I thought that attempting this in itself would be a valuable learning experience.

Next came the idea of what my research would cover. I had at this point already done many research projects on aspects of my major, so I knew that I didn't want to be repetitious and do that again. Since the creative aspect of creating the dance involved my minor, I felt that I should choose a topic to research that seemed like an important subject in the world today. I spent time thinking about what was going on in the news, things that the world in general was concerned about. My original idea was to research the concept of the end of the world, but I realized it would be improbable that I would find much factual based information on the subject. I then began to remember the recent event of the mass suicide in March 1997 of the Heaven's Gate cult. It began to intrigue me that a group of people would follow one person's words and go to such extremes as
to kill themselves in hopes that a spaceship would pick them up.

I then knew that I would like to delve into the topic of the how and why of cults. I decided here that I wanted my research to look at a few infamous cults throughout time, and look at what kind of people joined these groups and why. I also wanted to find out how a group could make a person follow its beliefs, no matter how absurd they may seem.

After I had formed my topic idea, I needed to think about what I wanted my dance to portray. I wanted the idea of the dance to be general enough so that the average audience member could follow it clearly, but the voice behind the idea to be strong enough to make that audience member think about what I was trying to say about cults. I decided to show the general process of one hypothetical cult's formation and life by using movement on stage.

At this point, I had my ideas and the intended path of which I wanted this project to follow. Next came the research and the formation of the dance piece.
The Creative Project—
-The Process
The process of forming the dance began with some preliminary research on the typical stages a cult goes through. A cult usually involves an authoritative figure, who for whatever reasons, believes that he/she has ideas that should be held by the vast majority. He/she will usually start to recruit people in whatever way, and then the following begins.

I wanted my dance to show these stages, but then end with a questionable stage so the audience member is left to ponder the meaning behind the dance. I now had a basic idea of what I wanted to portray, so I needed to start creating.

I set about to find my music first. I have found that there are certain pieces of music that just makes images pop into my mind, and I was hoping that I would find music that would give me a kinesthetic reaction and make me feel it would portray my idea well. I sampled many of my friends' music after telling them what kind of feeling I was looking for and what basic feeling I wanted to receive from it. I made several trips to the library, looking under any category I could think of that could possibly produce the desired results. I asked acquaintances for ideas of music I should look for based on my giving them a brief description of my idea. Finally, in September, I found a compact disc at the library that contained one song that just did it for me. While listening to it, I could see the images in my head that I wanted to show with my project. I could see the dynamics of the music matching the dynamics of the story I wanted to portray. I felt the feeling that I wanted to convey. At this point, I had chosen my most important piece of music. This would
be the third song in my piece, which portrays the cult itself and the changes it goes through. I then found another song on the same CD that gave me the sensations I wanted for an earlier part of the story, the leader recruiting people. I talked to a friend of mine who composes music in his spare time, and told him what kind of music I would like for the first part of my piece. I wanted this part to show the soon-to-be leader of the cult's process of becoming the type of person that would want to start this type of group. My friend said he would compose this music for me, with my continuous input. I didn't choose my closing sound until November, as is described later.

Now I had my work cut out for me. For clarity's sake, I will restate what I have discussed so far. I now had the story I wanted to show with the dance. A person, for some reason, wants to impose her beliefs and ideas on a majority of people. I decided I wanted to show this person having to overcome oppression, and in her overcoming of it, overcompensates and becomes an aggressive person. I then wanted to show this person recruiting others to her thinking. I decided I would show this person seeing others' weaknesses and using them to make herself be a "savior" to them. I then wanted to show the following of the cult, but I wanted one person to start to question the following, and when she starts to follow her own ideas, she tries to get others to "see the light" as well. She tries in vain, because these people are brainwashed and do not have the strength to overcome it. The person who breaks off then realizes that if she is going to leave the cult, she is going to have to do it
alone.

The music that I chose, as mentioned above, is cited in the program that is included in this work (see "The Creative Project - The Performance"). The first song was composed by Kris Ellis, a fellow Ball State student. The second and third songs are taken from the album "The Last Temptation of Christ" by Peter Gabriel. The fourth piece of music ended up being the Lord's Prayer recited by William S. Burroughs. Reasons for this are stated in "The Creative Project - The Dance and its Symbolism" section of this work.

The next step was choosing the dancers I wanted to perform my piece. I auditioned my dancers with other senior dance majors that were creating senior choreography projects for their majors. I chose seven dancers, because I felt that this number would effectively display the group interaction. I chose dancers that I wasn't very familiar with because I wanted to have the experience of learning different girls' styles and learning to work with them. The dancers I chose were Wendee Zeisig, Lacey Heintz, Christina Lange, Karen Zimmerman-Pitchford, Katy Hackney, Heather Boyd, and Angeline Ratts, who took the place of one girl, Jessica Guthrie, who could not make it to rehearsals.

The process of forming the dance was an exciting one. My first rehearsal with the girls consisted of sitting down with them, asking them about themselves, and having them perform a few combinations so I could see how they moved both individually and as a group. I already knew of a certain lift I wanted the leader of the cult to be involved in, so I had them try this, and based
on who could do this lift, I chose who would be the leader of the
cult, which was Wendy. I would make the movements up on my own
time, and then come to rehearsal and teach them to the dancers.
Sometimes I would ask them for input on different ways they
thought would be easier to do a certain movement, or for certain
ways of moving that they felt comfortable with. I also would
sometimes see them do something and ended up adding that to the
piece.

For the first month, I would write down the movement that I
created. I later found that just teaching it to the girls was
preserving it. Trying to write everything down was slowing me
down, because I would have an idea, but while trying to write it
down, I would forget it or alter it unexpectedly. So I then
changed my method and simply remembered the movement with my body
and taught it to the girls, relying on them to remember it.

I finished choreographing a little over a week before the
performance, so I used the extra time to just watch and fix minor
things. I also fixed little things just about every week
throughout the rehearsal process. I would choreograph something,
but then decide later that I didn't like some aspect of it.
During my last rehearsal with the girls, we sat down together and
performed exercises that I felt would help them feel each other
as a group, which I thought would help bond them so they moved
like one. I think that this did work. I also asked them, seeing
the whole process themselves, what they thought of the piece and
what it meant to them. This was very important to me, and I
think it was a beneficial experience. I think it helped them all
feel comfortable with each other and with their ideas.

During this entire process, I had other people come and watch my rehearsal so I could hear their comments and criticism. Sarah Mangelsdorf, a modern dance teacher at Ball State University, Katy Teuchtler, a modern dance and ballet teacher at Ball State University, and James McVey, my boyfriend and photographer, all came to see this piece in the creation process. I listened to their comments on what they thought and how I could make the piece clearer, and incorporated many changes to the piece based on their input. This was a very beneficial part of this creation, because I started to get very biased in watching the dance, and had trouble seeing it from a third person's point of view.

My dancers gave me 100% during the rehearsal process, and I appreciate that very much. I know that it may have been difficult being that this was my first choreography project, but their attitudes and talents made me happy I had chosen them.
The Creative Project-

- The Dance and its Symbolism
The dance itself was meant to be very symbolic, and every movement had a meaning. It starts with Wendee. She moves in ways that show she has an aggressive personality, but is in pain. She pushes at her boundaries, showing that she is rejecting the outside world. There are then two girls who come in and push Wendy down. These are meant to be Wendee's memories of being oppressed. She overcomes these oppressions, but becomes very aggressive in the process. She then decides that she is meant to be a leader. This brings us to the second song.

Here, each person displays a different personality or weakness, representing everyday people, that Wendee plays on and uses to get her way. Angeline, or Angie, comes in in a chaotic way, showing her fear of the world and the unknown. Wendee slows her down and helps her stabilize. Heather and Katy come in. They are meant to be a mother and daughter. Wendee gives the child a gift which makes both of them happy. Christina then enters. She is meant to be a sexual person, and Wendee seduces her with this knowledge. Karen comes in. She is a religious person. Wendee takes Karen's praying hands and puts them to her face, to say that she is the one that she should worship. Then Lacey enters. She is a self-reliant person, who does her own movement, but Wendee shows her a new and different way of doing it. Wendee has at this point successfully recruited her followers. It is important to note here that I had both Christina and Lacey enter from the audience, symbolizing the fact that "normal" people just like you and me fall into the grips of cult leaders.
The third song begins, and the group views Wendee as Christians view Christ, which is depicted in crucifix images. Movements made by Wendee are in many cases on a higher level than and dominating of the group. It is important to note that I had the downstage left corner of the stage represent a symbolic "light", which if viewed would show a person the truth, and how they were not following their own path but someone else's. Wendee is seen trying to keep the group from looking at this light, and telling them to push it away.

Lacey sees this light, and she decided to follow her own path. This is seen when she breaks away from the group and does the same movement as Wendee, but in an opposite way, showing her resistance. Wendee then alternates between making the group push Lacey away, and trying to get Lacey back in by showing her dominance over her. Lacey ends up being strong enough to leave, and tries to show two other group members the light. But try as she may, these girls are followers of Wendee and go back to her. Lacey is left with no choice but to leave alone, while the group ostracizes her more. The third song ends with the group struggling while being faced with the light, and Wendee, making sure she still has her followers' love, walks away from the group.

This is where the Lord's Prayer comes in. This part is really up to the audience member's interpretation, but the idea behind it is as follows. The group, one by one, stands up and is blatantly looking at the light. They motion toward the area that Wendee left them during the words "Lead us not into temptation."
They cover their faces during the words "Deliver us from evil." They then walk sullenly away from the light in a methodical motion, pausing briefly to look desolately at the audience on the word "Forever." I meant it to mean that even with Wendee away from them, they still, under her power choose to walk away from the light, and probably will walk away from it "forever." I used the Lord's Prayer because at the time of choreographing this, I was studying David Koresh, and how he would manipulate Bible verses to make them seem to say what he wanted them to. Being a Christian prayer, this also alluded to the fact that the Christian religion can be viewed as a following of one person, when after these beliefs are taken on, all others are to be rejected. I though that this ended the piece on an uneasy note that should be pondered. Even though the source of oppression was removed, the group had lost themselves and what defined them as individuals. I wanted the audience member to apply that idea to his/her life in some way.
Rehearsal Photographs
taken by James McVey

A: Wendee in the first pose of the piece.
B: One of Wendee's (leader) memories of being oppressed.
C: Katy and Heather (mother and child) reaching out for Wendee.
D: The group reaching up as Wendee is in front in crucifixion pose.
E: Group (Heather and Katy).
F: Group while facing "the light".
G: Lacey trying to get Christina to see the light and break away from the group with her.
H: Our last rehearsal, performing a group exercise.
I: Christina in a jump.
J: Far away shot of D.
K: Angie reaching out for Wendee.
L: Wendee dancing in front of group.
M: Wendee bringing her followers in.
N: Lacey first breaking away from the group.
O: Lacey and Christina.
The Creative Project—

—The Performance
The performance of the dance was an exciting time for me. It was performed November 14 and 15, 1997, at 8:00pm in Ball Gym room KDS with the previously mentioned other senior choreography projects (see program and video at end of this section). There was a huge turnout for the show. Both nights, I felt that my dancers did a tremendous job of performing the piece. They knew the movement, and they knew what feelings the piece was supposed to convey. I was very happy with the performance.

I titled the piece "Dominion", because it means another person's property, which showed the idea of what the group was to the leader. The costumes I had the girls perform in were all black, simple costumes that consisted on just a leotard and dance pants. I wanted the color black to show the bleakness of the situation, and the simplicity to represent the fact that they were ordinary people. I also had glitter put around each girls' eyes for the performance, to represent the glimmer that was still visible in their eyes. The lighting effects I was able to have added to the piece. I used dim lighting for the recruitment, and a spotlight on Wendee when the piece concentrated on her.
Performance Photographs
taken by James McVey

P: Wendee showing Karen to pray to her.
Q: Heather and Christina lifting Wendee into a crucifix image.
R: Wendee dominating the movement of the group.
S: Wendee showing the group to push the "light" away.
T: Wendee dominating the movement of the group.
U: Wendee trying to pull Lacey back into the group after she breaks away.
V: Wendee trying to show Lacey that she still dominates her.
W: Wendee showing her domination over Lacey and the group.
X: Wendee commanding the group to ostracize Lacey for leaving.
Y: Wendee walking away from the group at the end of the piece.
Z: The group, while walking offstage, looks to the audience on the word "forever" in the Lord's Prayer.
Final Thoughts...
Looking back on the whole process of this creation, I find that there are a few changes I would have made. Choreographically, I see that I concentrated on certain moments a lot, and there were some very weak transitions. I learned that every moment is important, not just the crescendos. I also noticed that I didn't change forms that often. While I intended to keep the group together as a whole, I could have put them in different formations more often. As a whole, I was very pleased with my finished product, though. I felt that the message that I was trying to convey came through, and I felt that the emotion I was trying to invoke in the audience was somewhat successful. I felt my dancers performed very well for me, and was happy with that aspect.

I think that the whole process of working with the senior projects was beneficial. I enjoyed getting advice from people within the department, and I think it is a great learning experience to try to create a visual art such as a dance piece. It was exciting to see my creation performed for an audience and get their feedback. Lastly, it was a great learning experience to research something of interest to me, and put forth what knowledge I obtained both in written form and in a visual art. Overall, this was a great experience for me, and I thank all of the people who helped make it possible.