In the Open Air: Rediscovering Self and the Environment through Site-Specific Dance and Alternative Teaching Methods

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There is a great community of people who made my concert, performance opportunities, dissertation and attaining my MFA possible. First to my Mama, Theresa Nevada, for providing me with the support and love to follow my chosen path as a dance artist. And to my family for their unconditional love and support no matter how painful or awkward the situations, thank you.

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~ lisa nevada, (April 2015)
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ABSTRACT

In the Open Air: Rediscovering Self and the Environment through Site-Specific Dance and Alternative Teaching Methods examines the accessibility of modern and contemporary dance today. It reflects on personal research, teaching values and the human/nature interface as motives for bringing dance out of the theatre and into nontraditional environments. I examine methodologies for creating and teaching dance in nature and nontraditional settings. To support this research I have studied Anna Halprin and her approach of taking dance outdoors as a way of promoting community and self-discovery. I also review why Halprin’s work matters to me. I share my inspirations and approaches for creating Radicles: Rediscovering humankind’s primary roots, a site-specific dance. Finally, I discuss the effects of site-specific dance in nature and introduce the importance of innovative teaching methodologies to engage the individual and the community in modern and contemporary dance.
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Chapter One

Introduction

As humans we naturally move. We are also beings that inhabit place, which for most of us sustains our survival. We come together for meals, to celebrate, to mourn and to pray. Each of these situations create stories that as humans we all relate to. And as we come together to share stories and our lives there is an innate impulse to move and express ourselves through physical actions. These actions are not relegated to any particular place, it happens no matter the environment and among other humans. So why does the word dance conjure ideas that it must be in a set environment and for specific people and situations? This may not be true of some dance forms but there are styles of dance which have been categorized and assigned to very specific venues.

One example of such dance forms is that of modern and contemporary dance. In my experience these particular forms of dance have been considered by many too abstract, interpretative, or un-relatable. Conversely, modern and contemporary dance has served as an important piece of American culture. Although this culture of dance has been misunderstood, it has also been a catalyst for social activism and self-discovery. I like to think that no matter how abstract dance may be it should provide everyone involved with the opportunity to relate to the work in a way that touches their lives.

Through the history of modern and contemporary dance innumerable artists have contributed their choreographic artistry and provided many opportunities to experience dance in a traditional theatre setting. This is a perfectly fine and traditional way of presenting and seeing dance. It is one way to introduce dance to the public and it will
continue to be one of the primary structures for presenting dance. However, what are the effects of extracting modern and contemporary dance from the concert stage and presenting it in a nontraditional way and in nontraditional environments? What if this form of dance were experienced in nature? Likewise, if pedagogy for dance considers nontraditional methods and environments for teaching dance, can greater awareness and support be cultivated for modern and contemporary? Is it possible to alter how one views themselves, community and the environment through site-specific dance in nature? Additionally, can nontraditional methods and environments for teaching dance foster self-discovery, support of the arts, and promote positive change?

In this paper I will examine personal accounts from the practice and research of participating in site-specific dance. I will also share my values on teaching dance in atypical environments. To further my findings and research I will examine teacher, dancer and choreographer Anna Halprin, an individual who has made it her life’s mission to teach and present dance in nature, as a way of cultivating social, environmental and self-awareness. I will look into her history as a way of understanding why she took her dance making into the natural realm and how her practice has effected individuals and communities.

Additionally, I will introduce the places and people that inspired me to take on the radical approach of site-specific dance. I will also discuss why I think site-specific dance and nontraditional teaching methods help to bring modern and contemporary dance into public consciousness. I will present my findings on the effects of dancing in nature and creating a site-specific dance as a way of building community and an awareness of environment.
Early Research and Influences

This section is about personal kinetic research that I have experienced in my body and in my mind. It is about reflecting on the work I have done over the years to understand what influences me to dance and create dance at this moment in time. I say moment in time because as we grow and experience life, ideas change, bodies change and our surroundings change. The research I have done since entering the MFA program in 2012 has primarily been based in performance and choreography. However, ancient New Mexico landscape architecture and an environmentalist named Aldo Leopold spurred my research into site-specific dance even further. This research gave me the inspiration to remain focused on producing a site-specific dance concert.

However, my previous research that I took for granted as research began with PutAttention Dance Collective. Several more research projects came from Ecotone Physical Theatre, a site-specific production in Austria on a glacier called Hannibal and site-specific dance on film. In addition to performance and choreographic research I had the opportunity to focus my teaching style and philosophy on dance pedagogy. I will follow up with previous and current teaching research at the end of Chapter One. In this section I will cover early influences as an artist, the effect these influences have had on my dancing and choreography, and where my current research has taken me.

PutAttention Dance Collective

Having an awareness of my environment and the sanctity of the earth did not come early in my life. However, through a group of likeminded friends and artists I became interested in dance in uncommon environments, and for the purpose of raising
awareness to a social or environmental topic. PutAttention Dance Collective was founded in May 2004 by a group of women dance artists based in Albuquerque, NM. We came together because we believed there was a void in the professional modern and contemporary dance scene in Albuquerque. Each person was interested in creating choreography, improvisations and technique classes. What set us apart was that we made most of it happen through a collaborative process.

PutAttention worked together from 2004-2008. Over the course of four years our dance making process, our dances and projects evolved towards social and environmental commentary. With works like *Keeping Time, Imposters*, and *Affect* we integrated dance and film in the natural landscapes of Albuquerque and surrounding areas. *Imposters* was a dance for film project that was funded through a grant a member of the collective was awarded while attending graduate school. The film commented on the irresponsible sprawl of housing developments that was progressing at an alarming rate on Albuquerque’s Westside. We scouted locations and developed movement vocabulary on site. We also filmed at one of the housing developments while it was under construction. Other filming took place at the volcanoes just west of Albuquerque. Through our discussions we determined that our opposition to the housing developments had to be presented clearly and in a way that was visually stimulating. We also became sensitive to the chain of events that innately comes with urban sprawl. Through the *Imposters* film process and working with PutAttention I became more conscious and aware of my environments wellbeing. I was equally inspired by dancing outdoors, especially at the volcanoes. Although, PutAttention opened the door to dance in the environment, later experiences expanded my awareness further.
The Hannibal Project

Further knowledge of site-specific performance came from participating and performing in Hannibal in 2011. Through the sheer magnitude of the project every aspect of Hannibal amplified my awareness of the environment, space, time and community. It also gave me the opportunity to focus my role as a dancer. I experienced the fulfillment of concentrating all of my energy and attention into technique class, rehearsal and performance. This was my first time traveling to Europe and I had the added bonus of going there to dance and take part in this massive spectacle.

Headed by the choreographer of Hannibal, Donna Jewell took a group of dancers based in Albuquerque and traveled with them to the Alps in Sölden, Austria. The time it took to get to the site and the awesome change in environments altered my perspective on when and where a site-specific production can take place. To be more specific, living in New Mexico I never imagined to take dance to the mountains, into the snow and perform at night. Hannibal took place in the Alps, in the snow and at night. This completely expanded my thoughts on producing site-specific dance on an immense scale and it reassured me that it was possible to do.

Once in Sölden, the daily routine of commuting to the glacier began and we integrated ourselves with the community of the Hannibal project. So many people were involved in making the production happen that it seemed like a village of artists, directors, production staff, technical staff, and Red Bull snow sports crew. The commute was important for two reasons. One, we had to commute in order to get to the Rettenbach Glacier that was at an elevation of approximately 10,000 feet. Two, it set us up for the day requiring our full presence and participation in the rehearsal and technical
process. Driving up and down the mountain everyday reiterated for me the vast amount of space being used in *Hannibal*. Although the horizontal plane was utilized, it was the use of the vertical space that I found exhilarating.

*Hannibal* made use of almost every aspect of the mountain that was being employed for the production site. Jets flew overhead and a helicopter with an actress tethered to it came directly over the audience before setting her safely down in the snow. BASE jumpers filled the sky with flares attached that resembled falling stars. A manmade snow pyramid served as the focal point and stage for the actors and dancers. Snow plows, motorcycles, snow mobiles, skiers, actors, dancers and a crane with the main character attached to it peppered the mountain with colorful costumes and lights. There was even an avalanche set off to acknowledge a shift in the story. This was a huge production! Additionally, there was text and an original music score that was integral to the progression of the story.

Each of the components that made up *Hannibal* were fine examples of accuracy and timing. The directors calling cues for the show were responsible not only for a successful show but also for making certain that the wellbeing of each person and machine were never in jeopardy. Equally important was the wellbeing of the nearly 8,000 audience members in attendance. It was a massive undertaking and as I began to understand the magnitude of this production and learn the sources and funding it takes to make it happen I wondered if something similar could be done in New Mexico or Albuquerque.

The *Hannibal* project gave me an intense experience of dancing in a nontraditional setting. The extreme cold temperatures, snowy terrain and high powered
machines introduced me to an environment I never thought possible for dance. It gave me insight and inspiration to learn more about site-specific performance and how I might go about creating site-specific dance of my own. Though PutAttention and the Hannibal project sensitized me to my environments and to site-specific dance, I must credit my genuine openness to explore dance in any capacity to my work and research with Ecotone Physical Theatre.

**Ecotone Physical Theatre**

Ecotone was founded by co-directors Kevin Paul and Donna Jewell in the summer of 2006 and is still active today. The group is best described by the co-directors as,

“An Albuquerque-based performance ensemble that mines the veins of improvisation: sonic, kinesthetic, textual, visual. This diverse ensemble consists of dancers, actors and musicians. Each performance is utterly unique, a blend of angular dramedy, slapstick sound and gesture, rife with potential for hap and mishap. The Company makes extensive use of computers and electronics, random props and costumery, inscrutable ritual, semi-willing audience participation and a little backyard voodoo to transmogrify performers audience and environment to the point where, frankly, anything can happen.” (ecotonephysicaltheatre.com)

In the nine years I have worked with Ecotone I have become a different artist and person, partially because as life goes we change and hopefully grow. Likewise, Ecotone has given me an outlet to explore dance improvisation as my genuine self. I have permission to be weird, obnoxious, quiet, social, or the complete opposite. I have full access to engaging with the group around me, connecting with them in a way that creates a synergy
of awareness and flow. Sometimes there is no flow and we struggle to connect our individual selves as a group and that is okay. We make choices about how we’re going to play with time, space, music and text, which establishes an environment. We also promote the opportunity to alter and create environments within existing environments.

In order to do all of these things we have regular rehearsals and live performances. In rehearsals we give ourselves tasks and present different ideas to give ourselves a bit of structure (Although, sometimes we do quite well without a structure and fantastic work develops). Within the structured rehearsal process we are certain to remain open to any direction the improvisation takes us. This makes room for discovery of movement, sound and group dynamics. Typically, our performance process is less structured. For performance we set an ending and a beginning and usually a costume change. We give ourselves a two minute warning bell at the end so everyone in the group is clear that the end is near. Usually, tasks we worked on in previous rehearsals formulate as the show goes. Every performance is different and we almost never try to recreate a scene since it is indeed improvisation. Something that always fascinates me are the moments where I really have no clue what is going to happen next. These moments are exciting and surprising and I find myself super engaged with the group and my surroundings. Likewise, I feel inspired to take my improvisation explorations beyond my own expectations as a dance artist.

My experiences with Ecotone has afforded me the ability to see dance in a nonlinear way, presenting the value of spontaneity, self-expression, and how I relate to my surroundings by any means possible. The work has encouraged me to continue experimenting with dance and doing so in traditional and nontraditional environments.
Ecotone has not only inspired how I approach dance explorations, it has equally inspired a strong sense of community. Although, the group has seen a few changes we have built a community that is supportive, honest, playful and experimental.

**Site-Specific Dance on Film**

My research with Ecotone has remained constant for nearly a decade. Within that time I have been exposed to site-specific dance on film. My first encounter with dance on film was with PutAttention, however, further research has been conducted through my participation as a dancer and choreographer for two site-specific dance films. One of those films was a duet performed by me and dance artist Erin Crawley-Woods, and it gave me another opportunity to concentrate on my role as a dancer.

*Impromptu*, choreographed and directed by Donna Jewell, was filmed in the Willard Reading Room in Zimmerman Library at the University of New Mexico in 2011. This process was different because the choreography was originally set for the concert stage. For the filming process we took the piece and restaged it for the reading room. Although beautiful, this room was long, narrow and carpeted. It confined our dance area which required making adjustments to how we moved in space. Movements that were expansive had to remain so but in the confines of our given stage. This process engaged clarity of focus and an awareness of my three dimensionality. What I mean by focus is the act of seeing the details of my surroundings while dancing. Finding clear focus then created clear intention of movement. Having a clear focus also promoted external expression, adding to the dynamic tools I utilize in my dancing and choreography. The sensation of my three dimensionality was heightened because the space was so narrow that I had to find ways to fulfill the movement. In order to dance big and full and to
make the room seem larger I had to expand from the inside out. I used all the dimensions of my body as a way to relate to the space. This made me feel as though I was dancing to the edges of the room and beyond. This sensation translated to dancing to edges of my body, reaching my full range of motion then pushing past that limit, bursting into the space and teasing risk.

Teasing risk has become a theme for me as a dance artist. Encouraging that risk has continued through current research on site-specific dance, live and on film. A recent endeavor into site-specific dance on film came through a course in the MFA program called Creative Investigations I, headed by Visiting Guest Artist Erika Pujić and mentored by composer and Guest Artist Carl Landa. The class had two participants, me and a woman named Anna Peralta. I was interested in site-specific dance and she was interested in site-specific dance on film. With this knowledge, Pujić encouraged us to collaborate and create a site-specific dance for film. We discussed various topics and came to the conclusion that we both wanted to dance and film in natural and urban sites around Albuquerque. We were inspired by a film called ‘Koyaanisqatsi’ which examined the progressive imbalance of life and the harm done to the earth. After watching the film we decided to develop a story that followed a solo dancer as she journeyed through Albuquerque’s expansive volcanoes, abandoned railyards, and lush Bosque. The idea was to highlight each of these areas for their inherent beauty but also to raise awareness of the importance and value of each site. The railyards helped to emphasize the history of humans and the traces we leave behind once we feel a place is no longer of use or significance to us. The volcanoes and Bosque emphasized humankind’s roots to the natural world and our inevitable return to the earth.
The class went through an extensive process of scouting sites, getting permission to film in certain areas, recruiting dancers and setting a filming schedule. Once permission was granted to film at specific locations and the dancers were confirmed we began our artistic process. For each site we had the luxury of rehearsing and setting up camera angles prior to each filming. During this time movement vocabulary and choreography was developed. This was an important part of the process. Under the influence and the ways in which the space directed me I created choreography that brought out impulses for movement that were unpredictable. I also had the dancers explore their surroundings through movement which opened my awareness to the possibilities of the space. I became in tune with my surroundings and created choreography that highlighted both the environment and the artists. Filming, choreographing and dancing at each site were stimulating and beautiful challenges. I became better acquainted with taking dance into nature and massive structures and it fueled me to continue going in the direction of a live site-specific dance concert.

We titled the film “Traces” and from that point on there was no returning to traditional ways of creating my concert. I was hooked on dancing and creating dance in nature. Urban settings and massive structures are also of interest, but at this time I wish to explore the natural environment. I am intrigued by the ebb and flow nature has to offer and I want to explore how dance and the dancer are effected by such an environment. I want to experience dance in an environment that is unpredictable and risky and for me the natural environment is an ideal setting for such experiences.

Up to this point my research has been diverse and multifaceted. My experience with the collaborative process of making dance in the environment required me to listen
to those involved in the process and to the environment. Working on a large scale site-specific theatre spectacle has proven to me that a site-specific dance production is possible anywhere, in any capacity. It has also inspired me to consider every aspect of a site, particularly the vertical plane, and how I utilize it in a way that will serve the project. For example, placing dancers on mountain tops, in trees or tall structures makes the vertical plane more apparent and encourages a shift in perspective. Ecotone has fostered values of spontaneity and genuine movement explorations that encompass attention to self, the group and the environments we find ourselves in. Site-specific dance on film has developed my ability to find focus and dance in a way that is expansive and clear. As a choreographer site-specific dance on film has inspired me to seek opportunities to take dance into nature and create live performances. It has also intrigued me to learn how dancers and the dance are effected by the natural environment.

Confident in my choice to focus on site-specific dance while in the MFA program, I pursued increasing my knowledge of people and places that would expand on my interests. In the area of dance I rediscovered Anna Halprin. My research introduced me to her extensive practice of dancing outdoors and utilizing nontraditional teaching methods to create social change, self-awareness and promote the value of interacting with nature. In this next section I will examine Anna Halprin and her extensive background in dance and teaching dance.

Anna Halprin

Many readings imply that Anna Halprin was an avant-garde dance pioneer and one of the earliest site-specific choreographers in the US. She is said to be one of the first dance artists of the avant-garde period to take movement investigations outside, into
nature and develop materials for choreographing, teaching and engaging community (Ross, Introduction). Halprin was also the initial source for my personal choreographic explorations into site-specific dance since 2012. Prior to and during my site-specific dance research I choreographed in traditional settings, such as studios and theatres. While these settings were familiar and safe, I never seemed to feel a strong connection to the creative process while in the confines of such environments. However, I do not find this to be the case when I am working on a project for a choreographer that rehearses and performs in traditional settings. While dancing and exploring movement for others in the studio or theatre, I am quite content and driven to fulfill the demands and ideas pitched at me. The same is true for my improvisation practice, although I am equally happy to improvise almost anywhere if given the opportunity. This fascinates me because the greater part of my dancing career has taken place in studios and theatres, yet my research and choreographic impulse directs me to the outdoors and public space.

Clearly I am not the first dance artist that has been intrigued by taking modern and contemporary dance out of its normal environment and set out to create something that is experiential for performers, audiences and the community. Anna Halprin has been a person of interest for me due to her methodology of taking dance and movement practices out of traditional dance settings and applying them to nature and public spaces. Additionally, I am quite drawn to her commitment to community engagement as a way of connecting with people, the environment, and reestablishing the profound link between humans and their environment. In this chapter I will examine Anna Halprin and her story – why and how she decided to take dance out of conventional spaces and into nature. I will later describe how she used her signature dance deck, for the purposes of healing,
self-expression and to engage the human/nature interface and why her methodologies and practice matter to me as a dance artist and site-specific choreographer.

**Early Dance Training**

Dance was introduced to Ann Schuman (Anna Halprin) at an early age with her mother providing dance lessons to her at the age of four. Her mother was always interested in dance so she gave Anna lessons and also had a young dancer stay at their home free of rent in exchange for dance classes for Anna. She briefly trained in the Russian style of ballet and quickly moved on to a dance class that was characteristically in the style of Isadora Duncan, one of the renowned pioneers of modern dance. As Halprin continued her dance studies she was exposed to a variety of dance styles including dance explorations such as Denishawn technique, modern, interpretive, and improvisation. However, it was not until the summer of 1937 that she attended a modern dance workshop at Bennington College in Vermont and began to fully immerse herself in modern dance technique. Bennington College, at this time, was designated as one of the primary centers for modern dance studies and it was there that Halprin met Doris Humphrey, another early modern dance pioneer of the 20th century. Although Humphrey invited Halprin to join her company, she had already promised her parents that she would complete her university education and declined the offer. (Wittmann Chapter 1)

In 1938 Halprin continued her dance studies at the University of Wisconsin under the tutelage of Margaret H’Doubler. Halprin considered this a fortunate experience as H’Doubler presented a profoundly new point of view on dance that was focused on “inner attention of the body” and the belief that “students train their mind to use the body and reflect the conditions they found in it, and also train the body to answer to an
expressive mind” (Wittmann 18). It is important, at this point, to briefly examine Margaret H’Doubler’s dance education philosophy and the fact that she was a fundamental source in the development of the first undergraduate dance degree (Wittmann 18). It is also noteworthy to address how modern dance was introduced into academia, specifically within the university structure.

**Margaret H’Doubler: Dance Education Pioneer**

As education for women took hold in the early 20th century, universities for women began to emerge. At the University of Wisconsin, where H’Doubler was a professor and Halprin an undergraduate student - science, philosophy, English, art and physical education were among some of the topics of study. Folk dances and ballet were the first dance styles H’Doubler introduced to the university structure, under the department of physical education. However, these were being offered with no systematic approach for teaching or engaging the individual students. H’Doubler observed that the students quickly became uninterested. This commercial approach to teaching dance was derived by entrepreneur Louis Chalif, who had the idea to sell dance by packaging them and shipping them to universities around the U.S. Chalif’s materials and “method” for teaching dance was the only source H’Doubler had in 1913-1916. (Wilson, Hagood, Brennan Chapter 1)

H’Doubler was also in the early stages of discovering dance for herself and searching for “a systematic approach that involved an intellectualization of dance similar to the kinds of systems approaches she understood in biology, chemistry, philosophy and even, sports” (Wilson, Hagood, Brennan, 21). Through the dance classes H’Doubler encountered during her Graduate studies in New York in 1916 she found herself resistant
to the rigidity of dance instruction methodology. H'Doubler’s experience of ballet and modern at each of the studios she attended for dance class was the same, imitative and inexpressive. Her frustration is clearly expressed in the following statement about taking dance classes in New York, “I couldn’t see where it was going to end…and I couldn’t find something that I wanted” (Wilson, Hagood, Brenann, 20). H’Doubler was desperately looking for a way to connect to dance and the education of dance the same way she connected to her studies in biology and philosophy. It is important to understand why H’Doubler was so emphatic about establishing a firm connection to dance education and how her background influenced her drive.

In 1916 H’Doubler decided to continue her graduate studies and traveled to Columbia University for the summer. At this time, Blanche Trilling, chair of the physical education department, requested that H’Doubler look into the dance scene while she was in New York with the expectation that H’Doubler would teach a course in dance the following summer. H’Doubler was a reluctant dance teacher because she was primarily focused on Philosophy during her graduate studies. Due to her background in science, philosophy, athletics, and teaching H’Doubler was a person interested in the educational benefits of dance. She desired “systems, organized knowledge, and sequential approaches” to dance that would allow her to ‘teach’ dance rather than bring it to students for them to do (Wilson, Hagood, Brenann, 20).

In the spring of 1917, H’Doubler encountered Alys Bentley, a music teacher who made her students move their bodies while creating songs. Through Bentley, H’Doubler had finally found the connection between dance, expression and science and came to a revelation through the introduction of floor work. Bentley introduced exercises on the
floor and almost immediately H’Doubler thought this was revolutionary, as she saw it as a way of experiencing movement without the hindrance of gravity. H’Doubler’s excitement over this process led her to devise a clear goal for teaching dance which would remain in effect throughout her career. (Wilson, Hagood, Brennan Chapter 1)

The discovery of this goal was monumental to H’Doubler and served as a guide to her teaching practice that would eventually become a part of her dance curriculum and the development of the first undergraduate dance degree. As written by Beatrice Richardson in her 1937 article “The Development of Dance at the University of Wisconsin” she posits that the stimulation of movement and music:

combined in some way to produce for Miss H’Doubler a clear concept of her goal – that goal, now as then, to be the expression of the individual’s experience in terms of artistic movement; to deepen finer concepts by such artistic expression; and always to bring about further development of the individual personality (Richardson in Thomas, Hagood, Brenann, 23).

H’Doubler’s goal and approach to teaching dance would have a profound effect on the status of dance in academia and even more so on her students. Though H’Doubler was never a dancer, she was, and still is, nationally recognized as a pioneer in dance education. Instilling in Halprin that dance should be ‘an arena for self-discovery’ and self-expression (Ross, 32). There is clear evidence that Halprin’s studies at the University of Wisconsin helped to shape and inform her approach to teaching, choreography and movement practices.
Teaching, the Dance Deck and Social Uses of Art

Though H’Doubler was highly influential to Halprin’s development of nontraditional approaches to dance making and pedagogy, landscape architect, Lawrence Halprin introduced her to the design of space through landscape architecture and architecture. This had a profound effect on Halprin and led way to her ability to connect people to space and their environment. Lawrence eventually became Anna’s husband in 1940, and the two continued their artistic and life collaboration for the next 75 years.

Once Anna graduated in 1942, she joined Lawrence in Cambridge, Massachusetts, where he had received a scholarship in landscape architecture. Anna was immediately introduced to Bauhaus and the creative director of Bauhaus and Lawrence’s new friend, Walter Gropius. Fresh out of college and surrounded by a community of artists, she was primed to begin developing her own movement aesthetic, artistic voice and teaching philosophy. (Ross Chapter 3)

She almost immediately began teaching junior high and high school students at a private school called Winsor School, and would be the first Jewish person to set foot on that campus. Teaching at one of Boston’s elite private schools, Halprin discovered that the student’s movement and writing abilities were quite advanced and so, she was able to introduce complex dance skills, poetry and an approach to dance making that would promote personal expression. She turned the dance studio into a sacred place for movement and introduced a processional ritual that different students would be in charge of upon entering the space each week. As Halprin continued to develop her teaching skills at the Winsor School, she began teaching classes at the South End Settlement House in the community of South End Boston in 1943. (Ross Chapter 3)
The Settlement House was the polar opposite of the Winsor School and nothing Halprin had previously experienced before. Although Anna’s upbringing was very communal and supportive, at the Settlement House she encountered a community that exposed her to the dark realities of a society that was poor and underserved in education and basic community services. Through her experience of teaching at both the Winsor School and the Settlement House, Halprin came to realize that the children she was working with were clear products of their environment. Understanding the stark differences between the two communities Halprin reaffirmed the importance of creating a safe and sacred place for movement and self-expression, something she continues to provide and promote today. It was also at this time that she recognized that until now her dance training and teaching had been rather sheltered and although her experience with the children at the Settlement House opened her eyes to the importance of the ‘social uses of art’ (Ross 55). This also gave rise to the importance of an individual’s movement experience and the idea that a person, at any age, brings with them active patterns that are relevant to the types of movement they contribute or chose to explore. (Ross 56)

As Halprin continued her movement and teaching investigations, she was learning more about Bauhaus and immersing herself in architecture and design. Through teaching, attending lectures, social gatherings, and learning more about design aesthetics, Halprin realized she was considering everything she was learning and practicing with a strong pedagogical mind. She began to understand that in order to see a dramatic shift in the way people viewed and understood the arts, the arts had to be linked to a radical approach to teaching. For Halprin, dance and Bauhaus were interconnected. She saw Bauhaus as a new teaching method and related to Gropius’s ideals of “aesthetic
production and social change”. The ideas behind Bauhaus inspired how she conducted her dance classes (Ross 57). She was drawing out unpredictable impulses in her students and expanding their approach to movement by emphasizing personal experiences, their relationship to the space and accountability.

Understanding the importance of innovative teaching, Halprin saw that all of her students were benefitting from her approaches to teaching. Those at the Settlement House would use art to fulfill particular voids in their life while those at the Winsor School were stimulated to take their studies and artistic expressions beyond the classroom. Halprin would also successfully implement architectural design into her dance classes and eventually caught the attention of Barbara Mettler. (Ross, 59) Mettler is responsible for giving Halprin her first opportunity to teach and experiment with dance in a natural environment. This circumstance fostered her teaching philosophy and explorations in genuine movement experiences in nature. I believe it is at this point that Halprin began to realize the magnitude of how vital environment and awareness of space, social engagement and self-expression were to the wellbeing of all people, not only dancers or those of privilege.

During her time in Cambridge, when Halprin was not teaching, she worked in the studio alone developing a series of solo dances. Anna and Lawrence found themselves immersed in a community made of artists from broadly varied disciplines. Anna had several opportunities to develop and perform her work in this environment. Meanwhile, Lawrence began to see his design work in terms of movement, space and form. Both she and Lawrence thrived in this environment and continued their artistic explorations with this community until Lawrence was called into the Navy in 1943. By 1944 Anna was
living in New York City, and once again crossed paths with Doris Humphrey. Halprin auditioned for the Humphrey Weidman Company and this time she grabbed the opportunity to dance with the world renowned group. She became a lead dancer and had much success in the coming years, recognized as a reputable dance comedienne. (Worth, Poynor 7)

**Establishing Roots on the West Coast**

Once Lawrence was discharged from the Navy in 1945, the Halprins’ moved to San Francisco where Anna founded the Marin Dance Co-operatives in 1947 (Worth, Poynor 9). Halprin’s intention with the cooperative was to provide dance classes at low costs for anybody, at any age that wanted to dance. Her primary focus was teaching children and she involved parents and families into the class process which created a communal sensibility. (Wittmann 22) The cooperative also served as Halprin’s research for developing a movement curriculum that was grounded in experiential learning and open and closed improvisation. When Halprin was not teaching at the cooperative she was developing and presenting her solo pieces. She was even invited by Martha Graham to perform in a festival in New York City in 1955 to great acclaim. (Worth, Poynor 11)

But it was during her experience in New York that she felt the tremendous dissonance between modern dance and her interests in movement explorations and the human connection to the environment. That same year, Halprin extracted herself from the New York City modern dance scene and began working with the San Francisco Dancers’ Workshop. Instead of conducting typical modern technique classes, she relied on task driven improvisations as a way of furthering her research of the body and environment, and discovered how the two knit seamlessly together. At this time the environment was
especially important to Anna as she was directing all of her classes and movement explorations at her home on an outdoor studio designed by Lawrence Halprin and Arch Lauterer located in the foothills of Mount Tamalpais outside San Francisco, CA. (Wittmann 23)

Halprin’s open air studio, famously called the ‘dance deck’, became the center for outdoor movement workshops and where she developed and led innovative workshops heavily based in improvisation, common movement tasks, and self-expression. After a few years of experimenting with improvisation as a way to tap into unpredictable movement, Halprin began solidifying her teaching methods while simultaneously creating choreography based on the interactions between the human body and the environment. Halprin’s methodologies and use of the dance deck to explore movement in nature were also praised by friend Merce Cunningham for the environment’s ability to change the performers’ consciousness and provide the freedom to utilize all aspects of space (Ross 54).

This was indeed one of Halprin’s goals; to take the mind and body outside and reorganize how people, and performers, approached space and movement. She was additionally interested in how the natural world could positively affect individuals, recalling that dancing outside heightened her awareness to her physical and sensual body. She became acutely aware that nature was tangible and real so she felt the need to dance about things that were real. (Wittmann 27) No longer would Halprin be satisfied with imitating modern dance of the time but rather she would focus on the process of movement exploration and not the product. She was convinced that the influence of nature on the body would open people to experience their environment in unpredictable
and therapeutic ways. Halprin asserts, “I believe if more of us could contact the natural world in a directly experiential way, this would alter the way we treat our environment, ourselves and one another” (Halprin, Website). As she pursued the development of her movement practices and frequently offered workshops to anyone interested in kinetic explorations in nature, she became popular with East Coast dancers Yvonne Rainer, Meredith Monk, Simone Forti and Trisha Brown, to name a few. These are the same people who would later give rise to the postmodern dance movement. In response to what Postmodernism choreographers considered overtly formalized modern dance, they valued pedestrian movements and process driven work instead. Although the development of postmodern dance emphasized the individual, pedestrian experimentations and minimalism, Halprin diverged by maintaining an emphasis on self-expression and merging life and art as a way to create community among artists and among audiences.

Figure 1: Anna Halprin (tamalpa.org)  Figure 2: Anna Halprin leading a workshop on the dance deck (annahalprin.org)
As Halprin continued developing her materials for teaching she became increasingly interested in the human/nature interface. Her emphasis on working in the natural environment led to fundamental principles that guided her work and were ‘based on three beliefs: that the human body is a microcosm of the Earth, processes of nature offer aesthetic guidelines and nature is a healer’ (Worth, Poynor 32-33). While Halprin continued her research on methods for teaching in an open space and creating dances, she was also cultivating a relationship with the Pomo Indians in Northern California. As she became a participant observer of some of the tribes ceremonial rituals she was further convinced that duration in movement, and nature, created environmental and individual awareness. Through this process she affirmed that the two are formerly related to the wellbeing of each. (Worth, Poynor 90)

Halprin went on to create several dances and movement explorations for dancers and the community as a way of grounding people’s experiences to their environment and one another. Notable choreographies are Parades and Changes (1965), Ceremony of Us (1969), Citydance (1977), and Planetary Dance (1987). Each of these works are key examples of Halprin’s commitment to the belief that utilizing art for social activism and awareness of environment had a profound effect on the individual and their community. In addition to the social uses of art, Halprin’s work is anchored in her belief that “…reconnecting to nature will lend a us a vocabulary for our art and for our lives…It is my hope that this experiential contact with nature…will…move us…towards a deeper understanding of the sanctity of the earth and our place upon it” (Halprin 1995: 225 in Worth, Poynor 86).
Parades and Changes, one of Halprin’s core works and a seminal piece in the history of dance in the 1960’s, is a clear depiction of her early improvisation practices set for the stage. The nudity in Parades and Changes proved to be challenging for some audiences, yet it was integral to how the dancers and the audience experienced the work.

Ceremony of Us was developed in response to the Watts Riots in Los Angeles in 1968. Halprin was invited to create a work that integrated black performers for the Los Angeles Festival of Performing Arts, but she was more interested in involving the public so she proposed an entirely different project. She worked separately with a group of black performers in Los Angeles and a group of white performers in San Francisco, assigning them the same tasks regarding the personal, creative, and community process. The process and the merging of the two groups to create the work brought up honest topics of “sexuality, abandonment…The issues about finding your differences, finding your commonalities…And by the way in which the power of dance was able to heal very, very deep social wounds”(Wittmann 42). This gave way to a new meaning of social engagement which gave her another fascinating outlook on the power of dance, community and environment.

Continuing her work with dancers and the public, Halprin developed Citydance, a full day of arranged dances and spontaneous acts of art that traveled throughout New York City. Citydance could most certainly be considered Halprin’s introduction to engaging large communities with dance and the arts, with an emphasis on environment and explorations in movement. Planetary Dance, formerly known as Earth Dance, furthered her work with large communities. In the process of making Planetary Dance, Halprin guided community movement explorations in a natural environment and allowed
them to unfold as a ceremonial or ritual dance in reverence to the earth. Influenced by this process, Halprin had the impulse to take her connection with her immediate community and extend it to the world community. Therefore, she developed a work that everyone and anyone could participate in during the spring equinox. Initially performed in 1987, *Planetary Dance* is still done today and has become a ritual in its own right. It is said that “In its observance of the change of seasons, the reaffirmation of community, and a desire for peace, *Planetary Dance* is a contemporary ritualistic expression of connection and continuity” (Wittmann 186).

**What matters to me about Anna Halprin**

Why does Anna Halprin’s work – teaching, choreographing dance and outdoor movement explorations – matter to me? As mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, Halprin has been a person of interest for me since 2012. As part of a research project I was looking for artists to whom I related. I was actively searching for artists that I felt shared the same ideas and values regarding the act of performing dance and dance making. I was also becoming more engaged with site-specific dance and was inspired to find artists that focused on dance in nontraditional environments, specifically in nature. All environments are of great interest to me. However, my concern is primarily with how the natural environment effects choreographic choices and all other facets of dance, especially for those performing and those observing. In this section I will talk about how and why I relate to Halprin’s Five Stages of Healing through movement and her outdoor movement practices.

In the last two years I have been able to genuinely face and express real life experiences in my personal performance. I have discovered that I value this sort of
expression and believe it can be applied to every dance experience. It serves as a sort of conduit for deepening the expression of dance and self-healing, which can apply to both performers and audiences. Self-healing through movement and nature is an area of practice Halprin has dedicated a good portion of her work towards. It is a topic I have always aligned with but have only recently been able to formulate a true understanding of what it means.

The path to healing through dance, nature and art came from Halprin’s personal experience with cancer. She discovered her cancer through a class she was teaching. She and her students drew life sized self-portraits as a way of seeing the individual in a different state. Through her portrait she discovered a dark area on her hip that she continued to revisit so she could make the area darker and more pronounced. Later she discovered this was the site of her cancer. At this stage in her life, Halprin immersed herself in studying the relationship between mind, body and emotion and developed a practice called the Five Stages of Healing - Identification, Confrontation, Release, Change, and Assimilation (adapted from Halprin with Kaplan 1995: 16-17 and Halprin Khalighi 1989: 46-56 in Worth, Poynor 128). Through the stages of healing Halprin concentrated on how dance could be used as a healing practice for the individual and community, in a class setting and in performance. I find this especially valuable in this day and age where society and the environment are heavily under the influence of irresponsible progress. As I share many of the same values as Halprin I feel a responsibility as a dance artist to apply my art in similar ways.

Creating a safe place for restoring health is an important step in aiding to the process of healing. This is also true when taking dance outdoors and into a natural
environment. I certainly relate to Halprin and her process of taking dance and movement explorations into nature. I hardly have a philosophy on how to conduct such practices, except to listen and follow what nature and the environment tell me. Halprin, on the other hand has developed and utilized materials over the course of more than 60 years. I have only just begun to gather ideas and values about how I would guide outdoor movement classes. What I have gathered so far is that I tend to rely on the elements and the environment to inform how I structure a choreographic task or improvisation. As I continue my journey as a dance artist, I am fascinated with how to structure a dance technique class in nature that is based on a heightened awareness of the environment. I am equally intent on how to foster the individual’s expressivity as a human so they do not rely on simply executing movement. Like Halprin, I am interested in tapping into the physical and sensual body in nature, with the hope that that sensation translates to the studio or concert stage, and into everyday life.

Rediscovering the physical, sensual body through dance in the natural environment is not only for the dancer. Audience members and observers are included in the experiential process of tapping into a heightened awareness of the environment. This happens through watching the dancer and by simply being in the space. However, it is the presence and generosity of the dancer that influences how audiences take in the space. Likewise, those observing must be open and receptive to the movement of the performers. They must recognize the effects the environment has on the dancers, taking in how the dancer and the observer receive the space. Similar to Halprin, I wish for performers and audiences to develop a bond between one another and the environment they are sharing. As Halprin attests, “…I want very much to deal with people…who are
identifying with very real experiences in life, in such a way that the audiences can identify themselves with the so-called performers…I want the audience to be able to identify and realize that this is a person more than he is a dancer, a person who identifies with very real things.” (Halprin in Brown 129).

**Personal Teaching Values**

I believe in order for a dancer to reach that state where she is experiencing life through dance requires study and the guidance of a teacher. As a dancer I think of myself as a lifelong student, constantly learning new things about my body and artistry as they change over time. However, the role of dance teacher has had a profound effect on my life as an artist and as a human. Though technique class and performing feels like home, teaching is like the key to the front door, unlocking possibilities for growth, empowerment and self-expression. Although Halprin has developed her teaching practice over several decades I believe some of my teaching values are similar.

Over the past 15 years many nontraditional teaching situations have helped me develop what I think is of value to a dance class. In order to provide a clear knowledge of dance I make an effort to see dance through the eyes of the student. I present my experiences with dance in a way that my students will relate to and gain a deeper understanding of what dance means to them. I strive to provide a structure for dance in which students feel safe, free to play, and to explore their movement possibilities. Providing this structure can also help reassure students of their mental and physical capabilities. Once students are aware of their capacities they have the opportunity to bring more to their dance experience, beyond design and shape. This statement is true for students, professionals and teachers. Each of these individuals must have the ability to
bring more of themselves to the process of dance not just their physical bodies. Ultimately, creativity, passion, kinship, logic and spirituality are elements I believe should be brought forward when approaching a class or choreography. I firmly uphold that students, professionals and teachers must bring to the table something to say, regardless if the movement is abstract or narrative. There has to be a belief or a statement that supports the act of dance.

Teaching dance is yet another way to promote and introduce modern dance. However, just as the approaches to presenting modern dance have to shift so does the practice of teaching. Using nontraditional teaching methods to further the education of dance is integral to building audiences and for sustaining its future. By providing a supportive environment for learning dance, students are empowered to express themselves and face the world they inhabit.

In addition to innovative teaching practices, the way modern dance is passed on would benefit from new systematic approaches. In recent years I have experienced a new method for presenting and passing on the master works of American choreographers through the American Dance Legacy Initiative (ADLI). In the summer of 2012 I had the opportunity to join a group of colleagues to work with ADLI through a course offered by the Arts Learning Lab at the University of New Mexico, led by Dr. Mary Anne Santos Newhall. Through the course I was introduced to new and untraditional methods for teaching dance. One of many subjects I related to were ADLI’s Repertory Etudes. Each Etude focuses on a master choreographer and their contributions to the art of modern dance. The Etudes I have been fortunate to learn and perform are Robert Battle’s ‘Battleworks Etude’, the ‘Limón Etude’, the ‘Parsons Etude’ and Donald McKayle’s
‘Rainbow Etude’. These Etudes are not only for professional dancers. Because of ADLI’S methodology and materials they make the Etudes accessible to anyone who wants to utilize the materials for teaching, performance and to embody dance history. The work is passed on in a nontraditional way which fosters accessibility to dance. Materials such as teaching and coaching videos of the Etudes and lesson plans based on the history of the Etude make the work available to anyone. This is a groundbreaking method for how dances are received and studied. This method of sharing and passing on dance is fascinating and innovative. I see that ADLI is reaching an audience that is broadly diverse and very unlike the general theatre going public. The reach goes beyond traditional audiences and invites children, the elderly, the “at risk”, professional dance artists, and people to experience dance in a particular way.

Having the opportunity to learn and perform the Etudes and take my experience to coaching a group of young dancers was exceptional. It made me realize that I am not only interested in creating dance in untraditional spaces but I am also inspired to share dance using untraditional methods. What I mean by sharing is the act of teaching. I have had the great fortune of teaching and performing in a variety of settings. In many situations I was met with extremely diverse populations that had never heard of modern or contemporary dance. Knowing this, I have always felt that it is my job to present dance in a way that students and audiences can physically, emotionally, and mentally relate to the experience of dance. In doing so I hoped they would feel what it was like to express anger, and frustrations, and joy in ways that were nonviolent yet intense. This sensation would hopefully alter or change how they view themselves and the world, and likewise how they view themselves in the world. In my previous teaching experience I
was dealing with many students that were growing up in situations that they felt had already predetermined their futures, either by death or incarceration. With the Etudes I believe I can take dance anywhere and create an environment in which people feel safe to freely express their stories.

Though I had a strong belief in ADLI and the Repertory Etudes it wasn’t until I came back from a trip to Providence, Rhode Island where I worked with ADLI at Brown University on their Minifest. ADLI’S annual Minifest is comprised of four days of rehearsals, dance workshops, art instillations and performances. At the Minifest I had the opportunity to see firsthand how the repertory Etudes effect people’s lives. Again, the population that was in attendance was diverse and profound. From young college students and underserved high school students to a Dance for Parkinson’s disease group (Dance for PD). It made me realize that teaching dance through outreach classes is something I feel is important in my life.
CHAPTER TWO

How and Why I Chose to Create a Site-Specific Dance for My MFA Concert

Human and Environmental Inspirations

Community - what does community have to do with dance? What does community have to do with site-specific dance? We can think of community in a variety of ways. In dance, for example, a choreographer may bring a group of artists together and create a community. This community of dance artists may come together on a regular basis for a period of time and develop something that can only be found in this particular setting. Typically, this setting is in a studio then usually a concert stage, rooms and structures that protect its inhabitants from the elements and keep elements under control. This situation happens all the time. It has become routine to rehearse, and foster this community in the studios and structures. Eventually, the artists and the developed work are transplanted into a theatre and onto the concert stage. If you’re lucky, the community is nurtured and becomes a significant part of each artist’s life.

However, this may not always be the situation. Regardless, there is this act of bodies coming together to form a group that will aid in the process of expressing a choreographer’s vision through movement. Ideally, the artist’s self-expression of the work will also be conveyed. So what happens when the routine is changed? What happens when you take the choreographer and dance artists out of the studio, out of the theater and into the elements of the natural environment or public space? What process does the individual go through and how does this process effect their approach to creation, movement, expression and connection to their community? To answer some of these
First and foremost, I am a dancer. I have a fair amount of experience with the routine of rehearsing in the studio then moving the work to the theatre. It is something that I truly love. This routine has become a part of my being, how I function in the world, how I set my schedule. So, I do not think it is surprising that I have become intrigued by what site specific dance has to offer. When I was first learning about modern and contemporary dance my curiosity was piqued when I was exposed to video documentation, pictures, and articles about modern dance pioneers dancing outdoors. Subconsciously, seeing my foremothers and forefathers outside, dancing, I wondered “what are they doing out there?” Then I wondered what it was like out there, and I became curious about what could be learned from taking dance outside. What can be learned about the artist, the body, about mental and emotional stability, and the world?

Figure 3: Isadora Duncan (isadorasdancelegacy.com)
Figure 4: Mary Wigman (tanzarchiv-leipzig.de)
While I was intrigued by seeing modern dance pioneers dancing outdoors many years ago, I had become quite inspired by my recent studies of ancient New Mexico landscape architecture at the University of New Mexico through a course titled ‘Gardens in the Sand’ led by Professor Baker Morrow. Through this course I discovered how ancient Native Americans sustained themselves through the eventual migration to the middle Rio Grande Valley. An area where plant and animal diversity is highly significant. It is thought that this migration was due to the fact that:
Elevations in the Rio Grande corridor range from five thousand feet to ten thousand feet…and contains many different geologic substrates and soil types. These variables translate into a wide range of moisture and temperature patterns, and in nature such climatic variability is the key to determining what grows where. (Dunmire, Tierney 9-10).

Furthermore, the high biodiversity of this area not only provided ample sources of food but also supplied an abundance of plants for fibers and implements to aide in the construction of living spaces. Additionally, the accessibility of a broad range of vegetation provided an important assortment of “plants with medicinal properties which became the origin of Native American herbal medicine, a vital source for the wellness of ancient Pueblo people and still relied upon today” (Dunmire, Tierney 11).

Evidently, as time progressed, the introduction and development of formal gardening by the Spanish altered the way in which Native Americans worked with the land, yet spiritual reverence to their environment remained intact. This is apparent through the continued rituals and dances that are performed by Pueblo people in New Mexico to this day. As I learned more about my surroundings and the circumstances of the ancient Pueblo land and people, my urge to create a dance in a natural environment deepened.

Because of this new found knowledge, at least two factors contributed to my decision to make a site specific dance in a natural environment. First, I wanted to find a way to create a practice that would allow me to honor the land where I grew up and have remained in amazement of throughout my life. Furthermore, my inspiration and desire to bring modern and contemporary dance out of the theatre and into what we might think an
atypical venue is credited to Pueblo dances in New Mexico. I have observed, witnessed, and lost myself in ritual dances performed by Pueblo Native Americans, specifically the Jemez, Cochiti and Santo Domingo pueblos. As these dances transported me to a transcendent state, I thought, how profound it is to be able to express gratitude, respect, prayer and community through dance but in a setting that is natural and innately communal. Likewise, I was captivated by the use of time and focus. Duration, repetition and rhythm are highly utilized though their use is complex. The use of focus is simultaneously internal and external. The internal focus remains grounded and attentive to the community of dancers, singers and drummers. The external focus is to the earth, the harvest or feast.

Second, I wanted to understand what it would be like to experience the land through my eyes as a 21st century dancer and choreographer. Rather than simply produce a work in a studio and place it in an environment, I wanted to feel what it was like to work with tricky terrain and unpredictable elements. I wanted to be informed by my environment and relate with it in a way that would shift my ideas of how to make dance. Finally, I wanted to share this experience with others, such as the dance artists I would recruit, as well as audience members. The act of sharing this experience with others was an important component, especially because as a community, we share this environment and are not alone in our experiences.

Beyond my aspiration to pay reverence to the land and to develop my own awareness, I came to realize that Albuquerque’s rural surroundings would be an ideal setting for dance. Not only is the landscape inspiring for site-specific dance, but it is a remarkable place for people to witness and experience dance in nature. It made sense to
me to produce a work that people of all backgrounds could attend in an environment that is usually reserved for leisure, wildlife and nature. Why not create something inspired by the environment, particularly in places where dance is not expected? Because New Mexico is a destination for culture and outdoor activity, presenting dance in such environments seemed ideal for exposing people to an art-form that is typically reserved for a concert stage. Additionally, it has been my experience that humans are desperately trying to reconnect with their environments; whether it be natural or urban, place is important. It speaks to where we come from and where we are going. It helps us identify our roots and guides us to share and pass on the traditions that place extends.

**Inspired Writings and Actions of Aldo Leopold**

As my knowledge of landscape architecture in New Mexico grew and the importance of place became prominent in my thinking, I was introduced to the work and writing of early 20th century environmentalist Aldo Leopold. This was through a course at UNM under the Sustainability Program led by Dr. Lisa Gerber. The class was devoted to Leopold’s writing and conservation work, specifically in New Mexico. I believe what is intriguing about Leopold is that his work was primarily done in southern New Mexico, specifically the Gila Mountains. He played a prominent role in securing wildlife and the natural habitat of the Gila Mountains which is still in place today. Although his work in New Mexico was heavily focused on the Gila Mountains, Leopold was able to see the value in all natural environments that were at risk of being utilized for development and progress. (Leopold, “The Land Ethic” in *A Sand County Almanac*)

My tie to Leopold stems from his urgency to protect New Mexico wildlife and environments. He took a special interest in making sure that the New Mexico landscape
would be preserved, he saw the importance in that, and worked diligently to protect all that he could. Because of Leopold there are several protective bills, laws and legislation that were put in place and remain active. I appreciate and respect Leopold’s work and commitment to New Mexico and I feel that his writing deepened my understanding of the valuable process in which nature conducts itself. This became relevant to me upon reading his book *A Sand County Almanac* written in 1949. I became enamored by Leopold’s writing and colorful descriptions of his experience with the land and wildlife. It seemed as though the words were dancing on the page, which I found familiar to how I might approach dance and choreography. As an example, the following is a short excerpt from *A Sand County Almanac*, “Our ability to perceive quality in nature begins, as in art, with the pretty. It expands through successive stages of the beautiful to values as yet uncaptured by language.” (Leopold 96). Leopold’s poetic writings inspired me to take a deeper look into what a site specific dance may look and feel like in a natural environment.

The same way Leopold keenly observed his surroundings and wrote about them with such grace, I imagined the possibilities of creating a dance in this way. By observing my surroundings and the environment I would allow these influences to guide me in creating a work that would highlight the environment, not simply cover it with dance. In addition to Leopold’s vivid descriptions and fluid writing, he was also a visionary, a man ahead of his time with regard to environmental topics he chose to focus on and write about. Leopold’s awareness and insight to the troubles Mother Nature would confront are relevant to this day. His writing and philosophy on how to deal with the complex environmental issues we continue to face are still studied by scholars,
conservationists, and the general public on how to deal with the complex environmental issues we continue to face. Needless to say, Leopold was considered somewhat of a radical, because he was raising awareness on issues that others resisted either for political reasons or simply because people could not comprehend his forethought. Now, I will not compare myself to Aldo Leopold by saying I am a radical choreographer for taking dance into nature. However, I will assert that the idea of presenting modern and contemporary dance in atypical environments, specifically in nature, is radical. Why? Because I believe it challenges people to look beyond where and how modern and contemporary dance should be presented. It asks people to raise their awareness of what they’re seeing, demanding that they become participant observers rather than passive audience members. Whereas in a theatre, audience members are less accountable for their behavior (possibly due to the familiarity of the theatre, the dark seating area or simple disregard for the environment they are in). When viewing a site-specific work their awareness of the environment becomes heightened and the senses activate; feeling the shift in temperature, walking the uneven terrain and tuning in to the surrounding wildlife.

The level of commitment Aldo Leopold had for his work is another reason why I identify with him. I understand why he felt his work needed to be seen and available to all. I, too, am committed to this mission and believe that site-specific dance needs to be seen and must be accessible to all as a way of introducing dance into public consciousness. It is important because modern dance is part of American culture, and continues to play a significant role in how dancers and choreographers tell their stories and express social, political, and environmental matters of the day. Research from the Aldo Leopold course and Leopold’s writings inspired me to develop an outdoor dance
curriculum that teaches students about Leopold and the importance of nature and the land. A syllabus can be found in Appendix G.

Figure 6: Aldo Leopold (aldoleopold.org)
Preparations for the Process

Once I decided to do a site-specific dance for my MFA concert, I had to gather a group of artists that would be willing and able to take their previous experiences as dancers and enter into a situation that would be challenging yet liberating. I set audition dates and decided to conduct the audition in the grassy landscape in front of the Elizabeth Waters Center for Dance at Carlisle Gym on the University of New Mexico’s main campus. It was important for me to see how the artists would take in their surroundings and deal with choreography in an open space. I started the audition in a studio and talked about the process of site specific dance and some of my inspiration. At the time I had just completed the Aldo Leopold class and was very intent on making a dance in nature as a way of bringing awareness to the environment through the discipline of dance. I emphasized the time commitment and the potential challenges we might face regarding the elements, such as terrain and weather.

I moved the audition outside, into the grass and trees. I started by giving participants the task of exploring the environment, then I had them find a tree to conduct personal research. By using improvisational tasks in the environment, I was able to gage each dancer’s receptivity to the outdoor space and see their personalities as artists and humans. I was pleasantly surprised by each person and their willingness to interact with the space and one another. After the improvisation portion of the audition, I moved on to
teaching a phrase of choreography inspired by the space. I was certain to utilize locomotive movements and floor work to sense the movement possibilities and to see how the dancers negotiated time and space in this setting. Choreographing and teaching the phrase informed me about energy and exertion in an outdoor environment. For example, if I do a jumping phrase in the grass which is soft and uneven, I must know how much energy I need to exert in order to leave the ground and reenter as seamlessly as possible. I must be open to how the environment directs my movement so that I have a sense of familiarity and degree of control. An element that is important for me to highlight is the time of day each audition took place. It was mid-May and one audition was conducted on a Friday afternoon at 1:30 p.m. and the second audition was on a Saturday morning at 10:30 a.m. Mid-May in Albuquerque typically has a high of 80 degrees with approximately 14 hours of daylight and almost no rainfall. At both auditions the participants and I quickly became aware of the elements of light and temperature.

These elements may not be relative in a studio, but, they contribute to a heightened sense of how much energy to exert when dancing outdoors. For example, the light of the sun is in a constant state of progression and may disorient a dancer. One moment it is slightly over head and of no concern, the next moment it is directly in your face. It becomes distracting from executing choreography because you are instinctually attempting to protect your eyes. In this situation, in order for the dancer to maintain quality of movement and focus, they must go against their instinct. The progression of temperature may be more subtle but it is more physically challenging to the dancer. For example, with the shift of light it is possible to change angles, wear sunglasses or find a
shady place. Temperature can be unrelenting, unpredictable and nearly impossible to escape when dancing outdoors. It quickly drains energy and induces fatigue differently than dancing indoors.

Once the dancers were selected I set a rehearsal schedule and began researching areas in and around Albuquerque that might be conducive to the work I envisioned. I knew from the beginning that I wanted all rehearsals to be conducted outdoors so that we could begin the training process of dancing outside in addition to raising our awareness of the environment. Although a site was not confirmed by the time the rehearsal process started, I remained steadfast on having rehearsals outside, no matter the place. We started rehearsing on various locations at the University of New Mexico’s main campus. This was a great way to introduce the dancers and me to an outdoor setting. We began the process of navigating through the vast amount of space around us and the unstable terrain below. The time we spent on the UNM campus served as our training ground. We danced on flat, grassy areas surrounded by great ponderosa pine trees, and on a sloping hill while in the company of a Coopers hawk. We took walks looking for the edible forest. We utilized the comfort of shady trees and concrete when our energy was low. The diversity of each space we danced in broadened our awareness to place, mentally and viscerally. Dancing in places different from where we would normally dance made us recognize the fluctuations in the elements. For example, rehearsals began in mid-May and continued up until the performance in mid-October. We experienced dramatic shifts in temperature, daylight, color, and the changing of seasons. Our senses were constantly taking in new information. The open space and endless sky were dizzying and made it difficult to find a solid focus, internally and externally. One day the
grass was supple, the next day it was dry. Some days small creatures showed up and observed us from a safe distance. Our awareness of space and time in each environment developed and we learned to be ready for anything in any space.

**Dancing into the Valley: Natures Impulse, Challenges and Beautiful Distractions**

Through the generosity of Jennifer Predock-Linnell and Jim Linnell we confirmed our performance site at their home in Albuquerque’s South Valley located in the Rio Grande Valley. The site was open and had long grassy meadows from east to west with cottonwood and elm trees surrounding the perimeter. There were several areas around the home that made the space diverse and it was a perfect setting for exploration. We learned that the Valle de Oro National Wildlife Refuge was directly across from the Linnells’ home which helped to confirm that we were in the right place.

![Figure 7: Looking east towards the Valle de Oro National Wildlife Refuge. (Paschich)](image1)

![Figure 8: Looking west at the performance space at Jim and Jennifer Linnell’s home. (Paschich)](image2)

As the reality of our performance space set in so did other elements that we did not anticipate. Albuquerque is considered a high desert because it sits at an elevation of
approximately 5,000 to 7,000 feet in the city proper, not including the Sandia Mountains which reaches approximately 10,000 feet. There is also the Rio Grande river which is surrounded by a Cottonwood forest also known as the Bosque. Although Albuquerque’s climate tends to be dry, along the Bosque it is lush and humid, at least for a desert. The Linnell’s house was 20 minutes southwest of the UNM campus and it was hot, muggy, and full of mosquitoes. It also had a mystical beauty that only this community of dancers would experience for the next several months. And so our ritual began. We organized carpooling to the site, took turns supplying bug spray, and instinctively took care of one another throughout the process.

Prior to the group coming into the space I experienced an introduction and ritual of my own. The following is an account from my first time alone at the site:

Tramping through the performance site is pleasurable yet comes with a daunting task. How do I take this magnificent space and develop my story? What is the story? Tree, insects, grass, birds, water, plants, humans and their story as community and as individuals. The views are stunning! Mountains, fields, forest, urbanization in the distance. The internal landscape is equally intriguing. At ground level there is a view of tall grasses, tree trunks and exposed roots. Colorful flowers and busy insects. Nature’s architecture. Looking up there are networks of sophisticated branches, cloud formations, and Monarchs and hummingbirds in flight. A plane or two may cruise by but only when you are deep in thought. There is an entirely different network of life beneath the surface. Roots of the grass, insects, stones, webs and leaves all tell stories of beings that otherwise go unnoticed. Color knows no boundaries just as the sky knows no limit.
Taking in the space and writing my observations was one way for me to get to know the site on a holistic level. I knew this was important so that whatever I created from this process would reflect my reverence and understanding of this particular place.

Although the dancers and I seemed to have little time in the space for rehearsals, I was certain to make time to come together and take in the space as a group. This was a useful way to ground ourselves and mentally prepare for rehearsal. Since much of the movement vocabulary had been developed it was time to allow the environment to help shape and define the dance. During this process I gave improvisation tasks that related to objects found in the space. We played with altering choreography so that it would travel the length of the field. And we took time to develop personal movement explorations with trees.

Though the process was mostly inspiring, there were certainly challenges. Although the dancers had been training outside it was difficult to break through how to organize the body in a natural environment. They were used to dancing on stable ground, in a controlled environment and suddenly that control was taken away. Simple movements that seemed simple in a traditional setting became a different challenge. There was frustration and doubt about the ability to dance full out without being anxious about the precarious terrain or tree branches overhead. This presented a new way of thinking about and performing movements. For example, the mind had to let go of the sensation of how to balance on neutral ground because balancing on an even, stable surface is much easier to navigate, especially in a controlled environment. However, if the wind is howling and the ground is extremely difficult, the body has to take over so that all senses come alive. There were also issues with becoming disoriented while
dancing and not feeling grounded. Since there were no walls, tricky terrain and a vast sky it was easy to lose balance and focus. Our new space also proved to be very distracting at times. Everything around us was beautiful and it was new to us every time we were there. Insects became friends with names. Trees became sources for the discovery of habitats. And the sky was just too beautiful to ignore. Most times I had to wrangle the focus back to rehearsal, other times we all just had to stop and take in what the environment was offering. I recall an evening when we kept postponing a run through because the full moon was rising over the Manzano mountains and there was no way to compete with that. The mosquitos were out in full force, the air was moist, the sky was the lightest blue and the mountains majestic in purple. As the full moon rose from behind the Monzanos everyone was stopped in their tracks with amazement. The massive, luminescent moon slowed time and gifted an image that is emblazoned in the hearts and minds of those present.

Through this process I thought it was important to document the dancer’s experiences in their words. I gathered firsthand accounts from some of the dancers to show how the environment and the process effected them personally and as artists.

I wanted to connect back with dance. And there’s something inherently human about connecting with nature. No matter what we’re led to believe with our current structure in society, I feel like it’s one of the most human things you can do. To dance with nature and to just be in it and really be present. (Molly Cudia, cast member)

There’s this moment of giving in to the earth instead of trying to anticipate where it’s going to be rocky, where there’s going to be a bump. We’ve all gained strength and trust in ourselves, and in each other and in you…While I’m in it, it’s lovely. (Peter Bennett, cast member)
I knew I would grow as a dancer working with you but I didn’t realize how much I would grow as a person working out here. I was so focused on getting the choreography and getting the sequence…I wasn’t exploring the space…and now I find myself in the middle of the show and can’t help but smile…I feel so touched and loved by the sky and my comrades.

(Elysia Pope, cast member)

What I love about this work is that it’s all the same world…this is a world we’ve been in and we’re inhabiting every moment we’re here, so there’s not that separation. I don’t become an abstract figure, I’m a being in space. (Rachel Goldman, cast member)

“It takes a bravery, but it takes a faith, too.” (Anna Peralta, videographer)

From these accounts I realized the amount of trust that goes into doing site-specific dance. The dancers trust that I will not put them in a hazardous space and that I will
listen to their concerns. They also have to trust that my ideas and choreographic choices will work, such as climbing up a tree to end the show. I also had to trust that the dancers would come together and bond with the environment and one another so they would feel supported throughout the dance. I had to trust in myself that I would create something with the dancers that was true to the environment and true to our experience. This trust was confirmed one day as I was developing movement in the site and also speaks to how the environment provided impulses for choreography and the effects that followed:

In the process of creating movement I stood with bare feet in soft, supple grass that was seemingly unstable. It seemed unstable to me because I was used to dancing on very stable floors most of my life. Little did I realize that the ground was perfectly stable and that it was I that did not understand how to stabilize myself in this situation. I remember the whole experience. I remember the light, I remember the sensation of the ground beneath me, and I remember feeling a charge of energy. While balancing on one foot I could feel the grass, the roots and the soil beneath my foot shifting, cradling my entire body. Instead of my mind making the choice for the next movement it was the earth that made the choices for me. The energy that was coming from the earth, through my foot and up through the rest of my body dictated where I was to go next. Fortunately, I was able to listen to what the earth and my surroundings were telling me. This opened up a whole new level of accepting, letting go and allowing intuition and the elements to support where I would go next.

This openness to the environment provided the inspiration to make sure that my composer and costume designers spent time in the space so that the performance would be as fluid as the environment. Costume designers Erik Flores and Jessica Greaves took in the environment and developed the color palette and structure of the costumes. They
paid close attention to how colors naturally juxtaposed one another and how the trees and tall grass moved in the wind. Similarly, composer Carl Landa created music and soundscapes that supported the environment. He was certain to make a score that would not take away from the sounds that were already living in the space, such as the call of migrating cranes and the chirp of cicadas.

As I set out to create a site-specific dance for my MFA concert, I could not have anticipated the work and rewards that would come. Working out the logistics of carpools to providing a port a potty for audiences made the time I had with the dancers and the space that much richer. Likewise, the new experience of choreographing in nature heightened my awareness of how the environment moves the dance and how both the dance and the environment reflect one another.

Merging my ideas about how dance in nature has the ability to offer a shared experience between performers and audience members. I was able to provide an experience for dance artists and the audience. As one audience member recalls, “Beyond words! Radicles was 'connective', deep, rich, full of meaning and mystery... like this beauty way land we are privileged to call home. I look forward to seeing more!” (Julie Brokken, audience member). In addition to raising awareness to dance in nature, I was able to promote the work of the Valle de Oro National Wildlife Refuge. Refuge manager, Jennifer Owen-White wrote, “Your choreography was an amazing demonstration of our connection to the land and was a wonderful representation of what Valle de Oro NWR is and will be.” (Owen-White, Valle de Oro NWR manager).

Doing this work has given me the inspiration and courage to continue making site-specific dance. It has also set the ground work for collaborating with other artists on
presenting more site-specific dance in and around Albuquerque and New Mexico. I realize that doing site-specific work in nature can highlight social and political issues. I consider myself an environmentalist and doing this type of work is my way of getting people into the natural environment with the hope that they surrender to that place. I also wish for people to understand their connection to the environment, why it is important and what they can to maintain its health. I intend for people to experience nature with full presence and to become a part of the dance and environment that is presented before them. I will continue to develop my craft of dancing and teaching in nature and wish to incorporate more of the community so I may continue to raise awareness of dance and the environment.

Figure 11: Cast of *Radicles* (Paschich)
Conclusion

Cultivating a rich dance experience for people can happen in innumerable ways. A few I discussed in this dissertation were: relating dance to the human experience; creating awareness to the natural environment through site-specific dance; and relating modern and contemporary dance to the general public. These ideas may seem lofty, yet, through this dissertation the possibilities have made themselves evident. As we saw through Anna Halprin’s history and the developments she has made over the last 75 years, dance can be life-changing, and not just life-changing for the dancer or the person participating in the experience. It can be life changing for those who regularly support dance and to those who encounter it as happen chance. Halprin has proven that if an experiential process to movement and making dances is provided then people will relate to dance in a way that taps into their innate ability to move and be moved. Through Halprin and other site-specific works we have seen the impact of taking dance into nature. By utilizing the environment it is possible to recognize in oneself the life experiences that guide us and remind us of our place on this earth. Throughout her history Halprin introduced a holistic point of view for dancers and the community as a way of inspiring people to change their behavior. This change can be as simple as altering a movement pattern to healing the body and mind through the process of dance. In essence Halprin has dedicated her life and led the charge to joining humans with their environments in order to build community, promote self-discovery, and to see our role as stewards of the earth.

Similar to Halprin, I believe dance has the ability to alter a person’s outlook on the arts and how they choose to live their life. I relate to her nontraditional methods of teaching dance and her ability to take dance out of its traditional setting to create
choreography that is guided by the environment, such as bringing dance into the natural world and places typically reserved for simply existing in. Presenting dance this way is one approach to introducing and promoting modern dance to the public consciousness.

Why is this important? It is important because in a time where society is confronted with rapid change, new and innovative ways of sharing modern dance must be explored.

Through the progression of technology people have an abundance of options on how to spend time with the performing arts. Instead of going to a traditional theatre to watch dance, people can just as easily find it online. Additionally, the mainstream population is likely to never go to the theatre to see a modern dance performance. Most people will live their lives without experiencing modern dance and will be none the wiser. This is where innovative approaches to presenting dance are important. By taking dance into nontraditional environments people are then exposed to the art form. They are made aware of the style of dance they are seeing and hopefully become curious enough to learn more. Even if their experience does not reach beyond what they are seeing in that moment in time, at least the dance has come into their world, albeit for a short period of time. This is one role of site-specific dance; to promote modern dance that engages the community in an experiential way and can introduce dance in a holistic and human way.

This goal is not far-fetched; through the ability of the dancers to express their genuine selves those observing are likely to relate on an emotional and physical level. However, this does not mean that site-specific dance is the only way to raise awareness of modern dance and the environment. There are other innovative developments on how to bring dance into public awareness, such as dance on film. Through a virtual experience dance on film may provide a greater understanding of dance and the environment. It can
transport viewers to another world by altering how we see space and experience time. Through the manipulation of editing technology environments in film can rapidly change and introduce multiple environments for dance to take place. Although dance on film can showcase energy and movement it does have the potential of reducing the impact live performance innately carries.

Inspired by personal experience and ADLI teaching methodologies when I think of dance classes through outreach programming I immediately think about the populations and communities that have little to no experience with modern and contemporary dance. Upon exiting the MFA program I intend to take the four Repertory Etudes I know and propose teaching them to communities in New Mexico, the Southwest, West and Northwest regions. I wish to collaborate with other artists to find diverse populations that can benefit and relate to any of the four Etudes and begin cultivating a lasting relationship and exchange wherever I go. I am not limiting myself to the United States and foresee taking my experience with the Etudes anywhere in the world.

Having also been inspired by Anna Halprin’s nontraditional approaches to teaching, community engagement and creating site-specific dance in nature, I see these topics as a springboard for the direction in which my work is going in. I will continue the path to making site-specific dance and begin exploring the imbalance between humans and nature with an intense process that will progressively become larger in scale. I think the volcanoes would be a good place to start. I look forward to expanding my sites for dance to urban structures in Albuquerque and gaining support from Cultural Affairs, promoting the culture of modern and contemporary dance while promoting the diversity
of the city. Likewise, I hope to develop my work with the Valle de Oro NWR, creating site-specific dances for their site, with the intention of bringing awareness to dance and the work of the Valle de Oro.

I will dance and perform locally, nationally and internationally and inform artists and audiences about the developments in modern and contemporary dance in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Doing so will happen through the support and leadership of SHIFT Contemporary Dance Collective, made up of three women, Jacqueline Garcia, Lisa Nevada and Kelsey Paschich. It is our mission to invigorate and sustain the art of modern and contemporary dance in Albuquerque through a committed network of creative professionals and advocates, we believe in cultivating lasting exchange between artists in our community and beyond. My work with Ecotone will continue, always. Yet, if I am not physically present, I will take my experiences with Ecotone everywhere I go. Furthermore, I wish to engage more in dance on film so I may remain involved in this highly innovative form of presenting dance.

As I plan ahead and turn my attention to future dance projects I feel charged and ready to promote modern and contemporary dance in Albuquerque through the process of site-specific dance. Likewise, the time has come for me to formulate methods for teaching dance technique in the natural environment and initiate that process in my community. I see how my early research and the research I have done during the MFA program have fueled my interests in how I chose to present and sustain dance. And so, the process of this dissertation has served as the catalyst for how I wish to share the art of dance. I aim to share dance in a way that will engage and alter the human perspective on nature and the role of the individual in relation to the natural environment.
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APPENDIX A

_Radicles: Rediscovering humankind’s primary roots_ Concert – October 16-18, 2014

Submitted as a Supplementary File to LoboVault Repository

In addition to the completion of an admissible dissertation, each UNM candidate for an MFA in Dance is required to create an evening-long presentation of original choreography.

_Radicles: Rediscovering humankind’s primary roots_ was performed on October 16, 17 and 18, 2014 in Albuquerque’s South Valley at the home of Jennifer Predock-Linnell and Jim Linnell, New Mexico. An unedited video of the performance has been archived as a “supplementary file” to the LoboVault repository.

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Appendix B

Radicles: Rediscovering humankind’s primary roots Concert Poster

Poster Design: Kyrsten Sanderson, 2014

UNM Department of Theatre and Dance Presents

RADICLES
Rediscovering humankind’s primary roots
A site specific dance choreographed by MFA in Dance Candidate Lisa Nevada

10/16-10/18 | 6:00pm
10/16 preview

856 Laguna Trail SW | ABQ, NM 87105
$12 General, $10 UNM Faculty and Seniors
$8 UNM Staff & Students
$20 cash only at the door
Advanced tickets recommended

theatre.unm.edu
this is an outdoor event, carpooling encouraged
APPENDIX C

Radicles: Rediscovering humankind’s primary roots Concert Program

Show order, Cast, Composer, and Costumes Designers

Program Design: Taylor Blueher
APPENDIX D

Radicles: Rediscovering humankind’s primary roots

Production Team, Faculty and Staff, and Special Thanks

Program Design: Taylor Blueher

Presented by: The UNM Department of Theatre and Dance

UNM Department of Theatre and Dance Faculty and Staff
William Licota, Associate Professor, Design, Chair
Donna Jewell, Associate Professor, Head of Dance, Associate Chair
Eva Encinas-Sandoval, Professor, Dance
Mary Anne Santos Newhall, Associate Professor, CFA Dean of Research, Dance
Vladimir Conde Roche, Assistant Professor, Dance
Marisol Encinas, Lecturer, Dance
Karen Price, Lecturer, Dance
Dorothy Eace, Professor, Head of Design
Issuing Park, Assistant Professor, Design
David Rauschkolb, Assistant Professor, Design
Richard Hess, Lecturer, Design
Bill Walters, Associate Professor, Head of Theatre
Joe Alberti, Assistant Professor, Theatre
Kristen Lonnee, Assistant Professor, Theatre
Gregory Moss, Assistant Professor, Theatre
Matthew McDuffie, Professor of Practice, Theatre
Caroline Pough, Visiting Professor, Theatre
Kathleen Clawsen, Lecturer, Theatre
Stacia Smith, Lecturer, Theatre
Matthew Yde, Visiting Professor, Theatre
Sarah Lenz, Department Administrator
Roman Alkon, Fiscal Services Tech
Ben Jackson, Administrative Assistant II
Kathleen Vent, Administrative Assistant I
Shawn Nielson, Master Electrician

Adjunct Faculty
Alisa Alba, Anna Avery, Jessie Brown, Steve Carmichael, Rujako Dumbulshena, Jacqueline Garcia, Melissa Harden-Cordaro, Juli Hendren, Elythe Kana, Dodie Montgomery, Erika Pujic, Simone Roche, Sheryl Sobel, Sarah Williams, Giny Wilmerding

Production Staff
Stage Manager: Ana Arechiga
Assistant Stage Manager: Anna Lee DeSaulnier
Light Board Operator: Brianna Reed
Sound Board Operator: Elena Williamson
Publicity: Lisa Nevada, Kathleen Clawsen
Video Documentation: Anna Paralta
Production Photography: Kelsey Paschich
Graphic Design: Kyrstyn Sanderson
Program Design: Taylor Blueher
House Manager: Irene Loy
Master Electrician: Shawn Nielson

Special Thanks: To Jen Condliff and Jennifer Bredahl-Condlif for allowing the dancers and I to make art on their land. To my incredible Mama, for her unconditional love and support of my life’s work and unwavering commitment to my wellbeing. To my ever-supportive and understanding husband, spoils. To my Dad, Sue, Mark, Sue, Fischer, Broders, and my dear Grandma. To Mary Anne, Newhall, Donna Jewell, Vladimir Conde Roche, Enita Roche, Carl Banks, Kelsey Paschich, Anna DeSaulnier, Jacqueline Garcia, Dear Aunt, Erin Crowley-Woods, Ana Arechiga, Richard Page, Sarah Lenz, Mike Lenz, Denver Alumni, Bill Barta, Dean Kembery Brown, Rosa Rauschkolb, Kathy Clawsen, Ari Buzaj, Carolyn Sanderson, Jessica Bratton, Erik Flores, and my radical crew of dancers!
APPENDIX E

Artistic Statement

As a person and a dance artist, I seek infinite knowledge that will ideally help to inform how I approach movement, interact with society and encounter moving bodies. Such knowledge may range from finding the depth of my demi plié to understanding the environments in which I find myself. I have no grand philosophy about why I dance except that I wish to express ideas and emotions honestly. My hope is that this honest expression comes through in performance and equally so during a rehearsal process. I strive to achieve a heightened state of sensation through dance and aim to invite spectators into my world of discovery and story. Certainly, life experience has enhanced the way I experience movement and has led me to remain open yet clear about how I choreograph, improvise and perform. Ultimately, the pursuit of dance has demanded that I remain curious and invested in the art form and in life. It is my intention to actively seek opportunities to join my approach to performance with my methods for creating dance. In doing so I wish to create an environment for modern dance that is inviting to the general public and that is provocative to all artists. The goal is to create a sense of community among all moving bodies and emphasize the value of dance to public consciousness. By performing, creating and teaching dance it is possible to cultivate a wide reaching audience that will contribute to upholding the cultural validity of modern dance.
APPENDIX F

Teaching Philosophy:

Influences of Teaching Dance in Nontraditional Settings Combined with Nontraditional Approaches

Over the last 15 years I have had the fortunate opportunity to teach dance, creative movement, strengthening classes, and improvisation in some capacity. I began my teaching career with children, guiding them through creative movement explorations and basic fundamentals of ballet and modern techniques. As I continued to teach and grow I began working with adults, teaching them modern dance technique, improvisation and strengthening classes. My teaching soon expanded to leading outreach programs, and other social engagement programming. Through the outreach programs I had the great opportunity to teach elementary school children that were a part of the Title I Homeless Project. This dynamic program provides homeless children with afterschool tutoring, meals, creative outlets, yoga and dance classes. I also worked with incarcerated youth through a dance program that was specifically designed for kids who were serving jail sentences for various reasons. The dance program was integrated into the regular school day and was part of my life for more than eight years.

At the same time I was also teaching pre-professional students, adults and working with university dance students and professionals. While each of these populations seemed far removed from one another it is fascinating to reflect on how much they had in common. They were all humans but going through a different process in their lives. Regardless of the process they were connected by the fact that every single one of them knew what it was like to feel joy, happiness, anger, frustration, depression,
they all knew what it was to feel life. I find this time in my teaching career highly influential and continues to influence my outlook and understanding of how to engage and teach students, and how to share with them the art form of dance.

So what have I taken from these experiences? I developed a strong awareness of the importance of providing a structure for dance in which students felt safe, free to play, and to explore their movement possibilities. I became aware that the classes that I was providing were often the only opportunities they had in their lives to play and move freely. I came to the sad realization that my meeting time with students once a week was their once a week of playtime and physical exploration. Otherwise they spent the rest of their time trying to be kids at school but ultimately had to take on the stress and trauma of being an adult at a very young age. Understanding this, I developed classes, with the help of others, in which the students could let their guard down and be a child, and hopefully provide them with outlets and sources they were missing in their development, such as combining literacy with movement, music and movement, and problem solving through movement. For example, taking a student’s writing or poetry and guiding them towards personal movement explorations and inspiring the creation of choreography as a group built trust and a sense of community. Alternately, combining music and movement in a way that brought the students awareness to their personal feelings and emotions was another way to engage the group. Through this process students recognized how their mood would shift depending on the type of music we were using with a set phrase of choreography. We tried a variety of music such as reggae, classical, rap, punk rock and set the choreography to each of these pieces of music, then wrote and discussed how that made us feel. This may seem basic, but for these children this made a huge impact and
gave them permission to express themselves. Perhaps that self-expression would go beyond movement, inspiring explorations into other art forms. Either way, students became aware that they could utilize dance and other art forms as a way of communicating, expressing and releasing the stress that was engrained in them due to their life situation. These situations crossed over from working with the students through the Title I Homeless Project as well as working with incarcerated youth through the dance program at the Youth Diagnostic and Development Center also known as YDDC.

I believe it was fortunate to teach these diverse populations while also teaching young dancers going through a pre-professional dance program that was to prepare them for the next step in their dance career whether professionally or within the university. At the time I also experienced working with young people of privilege in a private school setting. Needless to say, the students were taking dance classes because they wanted to and they had strong family support systems in place. There were certainly variations from student to student on why they wanted to be there, whether for social purposes or to further their development and understanding of dance and performance. It would seem that the students who were there because they wanted to attend dance class would be easier or provide more satisfaction from a teaching perspective. However, each group presented interesting challenges. The students who wanted to take dance could lack appreciation or enthusiasm for the opportunity to dance, take classes and perform. They saw the opportunity to dance on a daily basis as a normal part of everyday life. However, sometimes when you have access to something every day you begin to take it for granted and even sometimes forget the value and fortune of having that in your life. As a teacher, when your students experience this sensation it becomes more difficult to draw out their
motivation and you have to work harder to keep the students engaged, interested and grateful for what they have. The students I interacted with in the outreach programs presented a different challenge. They were not all interested in taking dance classes and initially they tended to build a wall and test the boundaries of the class. Often times the students considered taking a dance class as a joke. However, once that wall came down the benefits and the exchange that developed over the course of time made those challenges seem minuscule.

Each of these situations has made me a better teacher, a better student and a better dancer. It made me a better teacher because I had to be prepared with a lesson plan for each class but I also had to be prepared to change my plan, and then change it again if the initial two were not working the way I hoped. It made me understand the importance of following the energy of the students but also remaining steadfast in my class structure, and maintaining control of the class. The awareness of how a class was flowing also made me sensitive to the needs of each student. To me it was, and still is, extremely important to reassure students of their mental and physical capacity, but doing so in a way that would keep them grounded and learning to support others in class, while also finding ways of supporting themselves. This goes back to creating that safe and sacred space for dance and understanding that it is a vital component to any population at any stage of their dancing life or life in general.

These experiences made me a better teacher. Seeing dance through the student’s eyes opened me up to questions and ways of thinking about dance that along the way I had taken for granted. To this day, regardless of the population or age group that I am teaching, I carry on this idea of seeing dance through the eyes of the student. I try to
bring my experiences forward in a way that my students will connect with and gain a
deeper understanding of what dance means to them. Through the process of teaching I
have become a better student, partially because I understand what a teacher faces on a
daily basis. But I am also genuinely curious about all facets of dance and realize that the
more I learn the more I still do not know. There are times I will come across a situation in
 technique class or in choreography and wonder, how would one of my students approach
this problem? What would they see and how would this affect them?

I mention choreography because I still feel like I am a student of choreography
and it is a continuous learning process. Each project raises a new challenge, information
and ideas that somehow have to be worked out in order for the choreography to be
successful. I feel the same is true as a dancer. There is continuous problem-solving in
the body and the mind. This raises the idea of being a thinking dancer, one who takes
initiative when learning a dance but also one who can relate the dance experience to their
real life experience. As each person is unique each experience will hopefully be
different. One may relate their dancing experience to a book or article they have recently
read. Another may relate the dance to a point in time of their life or to their current life
situation. Nevertheless, the dancer and the student must bring more to the experience
than design or shape. This statement is true for students, dancers and teachers alike.
They all must have the capacity to bring more of themselves to the process of dance, not
just their physical bodies.

Creativity, passion, kinship, logic and spirituality are a few examples of what I
believe should be brought forward when approaching a class or choreography. I firmly
uphold that students and dancers must bring to the table something to say, regardless if
the movement is abstract or narrative. There has to be a belief or a statement that supports the act of dance. I am no longer interested in seeing a beautiful body performing dance without intention or thought. I am thoroughly intrigued by those who express themselves through movement in a way that lets me into their world. I like being invited to join the dancer on their journey, so that I may gain a deeper understanding of what the work is telling me. Despite the subject matter, light or dark or strange, I wish for my students and dancers to let me in and raise my awareness to what it is they want to communicate to me and the world.
APPENDIX G

Creative Movement for Land Appreciation:

Humans and the Land We Live On

This unit is focused on introducing and highlighting the connections people and communities have to the land. It incorporates discussion inspired by words found in Aldo Leopold’s Land Ethic, specifically “The Community Concept” found in *A Sand County Almanac*. The class continues with physical explorations based on characteristics of the land as well as key words such as soil, water, plants and trees, and animals.

**Activities**

*Objective:* To spark student’s imaginations and explore movement to the words soil, water, plants and trees, and animals, and to further investigate movement related to Characteristics of the Land such as the textures and sensations.

*Materials:* The instructor should scout out the area where class is to be held so that soil, water, plants and tree, and animals are naturally occurring. If this is not the case, the instructor should bring medium to large containers that will hold sufficient amounts of soil and water for students to see, touch and smell. The instructor will also need to bring a plant or two and perhaps a large picture of an animal that is native to the region. Or they may use any type of animal that is in the surrounding area as an example, such as birds. You will also need a large paper pad, markers and a copy of *A Sand County Almanac* by Aldo Leopold.

*Process:*
Part I  Have students gather around soil, water, plants and trees, and animals. (In a natural outdoor setting the instructor may need to guide the group around the space) Begin by asking students about what they see. Then ask students to touch and/or hold each item and ask them to give a word that describes what they are seeing and touching. On the large paper pad write down Soil, Water, Plants and Tree, and Animals, then write the responses the students used to describe each item.

Warm-up
As a warm-up use the word Soil to explore movement on the low level. Use the corresponding responses to guide students through movement exploration. For example, if a student used the word mud to describe soil, you can guide the students to explore heavy, low movement, or low and slow movement. Go on to the word Water and investigate movement in the low and medium levels. Perhaps a student used the word flowy for water, guide them to play with movement that is continuous and locomotive. For the words Plants and Trees, encourage students to engage with the high level at first, similar to large trees towering over. Then ask students to explore all levels using their descriptions for plants and trees. For the word Animals allow students to investigate any type of animal found in nature and prompt the students to play with various pathways such as circular, straight, curvy or zigzag.

Part II  Now that the students are warm and tuned in to the environment around them ask them to observe their surroundings. Have the students revisit any area of the space and have them touch the item(s) they are observing. Ask students to give a word that describes the texture or feeling of their item, then have the students smell their item and give a word that describes the smell.
Write down Texture and Smell, then write the words the students come up with to describe the texture and smell of their items. In a circle explore the words that correspond with Texture. For example, if students give words like rough, smooth and sticky, prompt them to explore movement qualities for these word. Gliding through space, rolling on the ground or percussive stomping, sticking and unsticking yourself to tress could all be examples of how to investigate this portion of the class.

Follow the same guidelines for the word Smell. Examples of words may be fresh, yummy or gross. Spinning in circles on all levels, chomping through the space using face and whole body, and leaning in and away from the space could be examples of fresh, yummy and gross.

To conclude the movement portion of class, ask students to choose a word from the list that they like the most. Have the students create a movement they can repeat in place. Then have the students use the same movement to locomote through the space using low to high levels. Once the students have explored their words in place and moving through the space, regroup in a circle once again. The instructor will then explain the game Soil/Water. When the instructor says Soil, students will perform their movement in place. When the instructor says Water, students will perform their movements traveling through space. The word Freeze or Stuck may be used as a way to pause students in shapes between Soil and Water. The goal is to have students connect with movement that is similar to nature, which tends to either stay in place for a period of time or travel through space in various forms.
End of class

End class with a recap of what the students did by asking them to give examples of what they explored and how they explored Soil, Water, Plants and Trees, and Animals.

Conclude the class by having the students locate a place to be still and rest as a group. Keeping them in a group will help to keep students from wandering off. Read an Excerpt from Aldo Leopold’s *A Sand County Almanac*. For this particular unit “August: The Green Pasture” on page 51-52 would be a great way to emphasize how the Soil, Water, Plants and Trees and Animals come together to make a most beautiful painting.

Creative Movement for Land Appreciation: Humans as a Part of Nature

This unit is designed as a continuation of “Humans and the Land We Live On” unit and is also primarily focused on the “Community Concept”. This unit specifically calls for more student interaction with the goal of further developing the student’s understanding of the process of nature. It is also meant to show students how everything in nature is interconnected and necessary. Students will spend more time on expressing what it is like to inhabit the land and how the land effects their movement and feelings.

Activities

Objective: To allow students the creative freedom to further embody the elements found in nature such as Soil, Water, Plants and Trees and Animals and to interact with one another as the these elements. Additionally, students will be encouraged to express how the land makes them feel and how it effects their movement and mood.
**Materials:** This particular unit requires a natural setting, preferably out of the classroom and in a naturally diverse area. This is especially important if the previous unit was conducted indoors or with containers of the specified elements. Instructors will need a large paper pad, markers and a copy of *A Sand County Almanac* by Aldo Leopold.

**Process:**

**Part I “How does nature make you feel?”**

Begin the class by having the students gather in a circle. Begin a short discussion on how moving and dancing outdoors makes them feel. Why do they like or dislike being outdoors? Do they think nature is important? Write down their answers and save them for later.

**Warm-up**

Have the students remain in a circle and start by reviewing some of the words from the previous class (Soil, Water, Plants and Tree, and Animals – Include the words that were developed under Texture and Smell). Use the review words as a warm-up and have the students begin to embody non-locomotive movement. The instructor may call out a series of words at different time intervals to get students engaged with the group and become aware of their surroundings. The mind-body connection will also begin to fire as the instructor has the students remember what they experienced in the previous class. In addition to introducing rhythm, the instructor may also emphasize the low, medium and high levels. Now have the students call out words they remember and continue exploring movement as a group. To bring the warm-up to a close give an example of something in nature that quietly moves in place. For example, “Now look at the branches on the trees.
Show me how the branches gently move and sway way up high. Plant your feet into the ground like the roots of the tree and gracefully move your branches. Bring your bodies to stillness and freeze in the shape of a tree.” The possibilities are endless. Be creative and have fun with coming up with your own version of stillness in nature.

**Part II** Introduce a new movement game as a way of structuring student’s movement while still having the freedom to explore their own. Set them up in two staggered, horizontal lines. The instructor should face the students while talking them through the exercise.

“Treelings and Toes”
Reach for the treelings, reach for your toes
Touch the treelings, touch your toes
Flow to the left (instructor goes towards the students left)
Stomp to the right (instructor goes to towards the students right)
Buzz around quick
And curl up tight

(Adapted from Creative Movement for All Ages by Anne Green Gilbert)

This exercise can be repeated several times, playing with fast and slow repetitions. The words may be changed out as long as there is some sort of rhythm. Get the students involved in changing out the directional words and find new ways to curl up tight. Here students work with level, direction and size.
Part III Have the students gather in a circle once again. Ask them to name an animal they see in their surroundings. A bird or a crawling creature may be discovered. Have the students explore the movements of the crawling creature, for example. Then have students explore movements of Water and Plants and Trees. Now divide the group into smaller groups of three. Assign one group as the Animal, another group as Water, and the other as Plants and Trees. Have each group explore movement based on their assigned word and have them interact only with their specific group. Then have the groups come together to interact with one another. Prompt students by asking how Plants and Trees and Water might interact. How might Animals and Plants and Trees interact? How might Animals interact with Water? To get the students organized again, ask Water to stop flowing because of drought. Ask Plants and Trees what happens to them if they don’t have water. Ask the Animals what happens to them if there is no Water and no Plants and Trees. The space should become quiet. Ask the students what happened to all the Animals, Plants and Trees and Water. Let this be a lead-in to the final discussion for class.

Ask the students how it made them feel to interact with one another as the different elements. Then ask them how it made them feel to see each of the elements disappear, one by one. Now go back to the questions from the beginning of class and see if any of their answers have changed from the beginning up to this point. There may be a shift in the student’s feelings and response, hopefully positive and insightful.

End of class

End class by having students gather in a place where they can be still and rest as a group. Read an excerpt from *A Sand County Almanac*. For this unit read “November: If I Were
the Wind” on page 66. Leopold beautifully describes the sounds and movements of the wind and gives voice to the trees and birds.