

A COLLABORATIVE, SITE-SPECIFIC DANCE PERFORMANCE FOR ALTON
BAKER PARK IN EUGENE, OREGON: FOCUS ON COMMUNITY
BUILDING FOR PARTICIPATING ARTISTS THROUGH
THE CONCEPTS OF SPACE AND TIME

by

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THESIS ABSTRACT

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Master of Fine Arts

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Title: A Collaborative, Site-Specific Dance Performance for Alton Baker Park in Eugene, Oregon: Focus on Community Building for Participating Artists Through the Concepts of Space and Time

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The focus of this study was a free site-specific dance and music performance for the general public in Alton Baker Park (Eugene, Oregon), designed to enhance public engagement with the park and with dance. Collaborative processes with participating dancers, composers, and musicians fostered community building between the artists. Informing literature covers the impact of site-specific dance performances on communities, choreographic methodology, the history of site-specific artwork, the impact on, and consideration of, the audience in site-specific projects, and collaboration in the arts. Consideration of the surrounding community and the inherent political nature of site-specific work directly influenced every decision throughout the process. Themes emerged from the focus on building community, engaging the patrons with the site, and investigating process. Themes include the Culminating Performance, Common Values, Collaboration, Audience, Process, Journaling and Research, and a Final Summary. Reflection on the process reveals insights and suggestions for future endeavors.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

As an undergraduate at the University of Colorado at Boulder, my mother and I went to a dance concert presented by the Department of Dance. The weather that evening was beautiful and the grass was a luscious green as dusk approached. The sunlight coming over Boulder's famous flatirons illuminated the scenery in an ethereal way, amplifying the color of the grass. As we approached the dance building, we noticed a crowd gathered at the entranceway. Instinctively we knew to keep our voices hushed. As we walked closer, we noticed what seemed like statues in the lawn, but they were dancers. The dancers were wearing canvas-like material and were covered completely with clay: hair, skin, and material. They were moving so slowly it was almost imperceptible. Incense was burning at the perimeter of the group, the smell and smoke filling the air. We all stood, motionless, letting the realization of the experience sink in - that these dancers were opening the dance concert. I had never before been to a dance concert where a portion of it happened outside or any place other than on the stage.

Around eight o'clock, when the show was to begin, the statuesque dancers slowly began to proceed into the theatre. As they exited their performance space, we all quietly followed them in and took our seats. The dancers made their way past the audience, onto the stage and finally, they were gone. The rest of the dance concert proceeded in the way I was accustomed to, but the memory of the clay-covered women moving in slow motion in the grass with the smoke all around stayed with me as a concrete and tangible memory.

The unexpected surprise of the dancing statues delighted me. After that performance, every time I passed that spot, I was aware of the absence of the dancers. Their presence in that specific location changed the site for me. I had walked past that place before, but this new experience changed my relationship with the site. That experience is still a very clear memory.

When dancers inhabit a space, it is transformed. What had previously been merely landscaping between a sidewalk and a building became a place of calmness for me, a special place. This site-specific dance made a deep impact on me. This dance could have easily been done on the stage space, but because it was outside, the experience was more profound for me. The backdrop of vibrant green grass amplified the stark contrast of the clay-covered bodies. The more natural setting created a sense of connection to the natural world, whereas if the dance had been performed on the stage, the impact of the dancers would have been altered and the proscenium would have created a barrier between the performance and the audience. The connection between the dancers and the audience is heightened when the performance is site-specific because there are no clearly demarcated barriers or positions identified as more advantageous than any alternate perspective.

The memory of the calm that washed over the audience still resonates. The quietness of the performance and the slowing down of time seemed to create a parallel universe. I began to only see the slowly moving dancers while the audience was frozen in time. I sensed this performance as sight and smell, hearing nothing. It was as if the rest of the world ceased to exist and time stood still. This quiet moment felt out of body,

yet I connected to the dancers in a grounded, real way. I knew none of the dancers but felt as if they were somehow a part of me. We had all experienced this moment in time together, a communal connection with each other and the site.

I began to understand that the setting transformed the dance for me. It was transformed by allowing the audience to encounter dance in a non-traditional space, right there in the grass between a sidewalk and a building. This transfer can give new contexts to the places in which the dance is happening, places the audience members may have previously encountered. Site-specific dance gives new meaning and memory to familiar places, transforming the site. After experiencing my first site-specific dance performance, I have been yearning to create dance experiences like the one I had, for others. I began to understand that I would like to share this kind of dancing with as many people as possible.

I offered a similar opportunity for others to engage with a site, specifically Alton Baker Park in Eugene, Oregon. This park hosts many areas of architectural appeal in relation to the structures that function as commuting byways. I choreographed and directed site-specific dance rehearsals with a culminating performance that surprised and invited park patrons to engage with the park in a new way. I was able to personally engage more deeply with Alton Baker Park through site-specific choreography, which ultimately helped me to offer others a similar experience of connection to the park. This connection was focused on collaborations with composers and dancers as a means for community building for the performers, and engagement with the site for the audience viewing the performance.

The emphasis of my process was on the use of space and time, as dance is an art form that inherently exists in that paradigm. The use of space was crafted through site-specific choreography relating to the site and through placement of performers in the space. Time is an aspect of life that we all experience differently; the dancers, musicians and I cultivated an acute awareness of this during our working process by exploring the myriad ways to clearly express time variance. We discussed the concept of time and how to manipulate it in order to generate particular effects of a slowing, a quickening, or even a sense of timelessness.

This project focused on the immediacy and awareness of the current moment as a conduit for communal connection between the performers. I endeavored to establish this connection as artistic director and community organizer: collaborating with the space, the local community, composers, musicians, and dancers. The relationships between each of the participating artists grew deeper as we continued to work together, building an acute awareness of the passing of time and our limited time together.

Orientation to the Study

I have come to this study through a long process of experiences and inspirations in addition to my first encounter with site-specific dance performance. Marcie Mamura, fellow graduate student in the Department of Dance, inspired my focus on time. Her choreography in Spring Loft 2010, titled “Hour Messengers,” focused on the concept of how we, as people, perceive the passing of time and how we relate to others in that time. As a dancer, I had a strong reaction to these concepts while I was actively dancing. The

deep sense of connection I experienced with the other dancers while dancing was fostered by Mamura's process in rehearsals. The process was not always about the movement material, but rather about how we, as individuals, were relating to the movement material and choreographic theme.

This related directly to my own choreographic and rehearsal process for the Spring Student Dance Concert prior to rehearsing with Mamura. In rehearsals, I asked my dancers to free-write about topics related to my choreographic theme. The dance was investigating the process of experiencing a period of darkness in one's life and the transition toward light, or freedom from the grasp of darkness. The dancers openly shared their own experiences, which created trust within the group and this trust eventually developed into friendships. The openness of the dancers allowed for the necessary vulnerability to perform their experiences of darkness in front of an audience. For this piece I collaborated with David Horton, a composer, whose composition added a significant amount of emotional fodder that helped the dancers connect to the movement, music, and my artistic intent. My experience with that group of dancers, and friends, urged me toward creating a similar kind of community for this proposed project.

Throughout the past three years, I have collaborated with several composers in addition to Horton. The most significant to this project was a collaboration with Mark Knippel. The collaboration involved Knippel, three musicians, and myself moving, dancing and playing music together in the space. The performance happened to be in a dance studio, but was intended to be transferrable to the out of doors. The idea of dancing with musicians, rather than dancing to musicians playing music, expanded the

possibilities of performance. The intention to perform this collaboration outside prompted my idea to create site-specific work. This was the first inspiration for this project, which would include collaborations with composers, musicians, and dancers at a specific site.

For *Merge*, the dancers, musicians, and I presented dance in a place where it was not expected, bringing dance to the public. Through this approach, the public was invited to acknowledge the dancing bodies in front of them. People were presented with a range of choices from continuing on their current path to choosing to stop and consider the encounter with dance happening in their experience during every rehearsal until the culminating performance. This acknowledgment of dance materializing before them may very well have been a short-lived experience. However, it may have reached far enough to inspire someone to learn to dance, go to a dance concert in the future, or it may have simply allowed a relationship with dance that was not part of their lives before.

My chosen site to bring dance to the public was Alton Baker Park in Eugene, Oregon. Alton Baker Park is the largest developed park in the city of Eugene (City of Eugene Willakenzie Parks Website) as well as the most popular (Eugene City Parks Website). Specific areas of the park were utilized as performance spaces; the performance took place beginning with musicians and dancers crossing the DeFazio Bridge over the Willamette River, and then moving down the stairs where dancers interacted with a tree, the audience, and the base structure of the bridge. The dancers also danced in an intimate area surrounded by the bridge and pathways. The finale of the performance took place at the goose pond with dancers and musicians on the island and

bridge of the pond, and finally all dispersed separately into the world. The park patrons in this area were not confined to any one section because there was no amphitheatre or seating. The southwest portion of the park offered both long and short-range panoramic views of the DeFazio bridge area, creating multiple perspectives. This area of the park is a high traffic area where the likelihood of the greatest exposure could occur throughout our ten weeks of rehearsals until the culminating performance.

Statement of Purpose

The focus of this study was to choreograph a site-specific dance and music performance for Eugene, Oregon's Alton Baker Park, presented to the general public through collaborative processes with ten participating dancers, three composers, and six musicians. This one-time, free performance was designed to enhance public engagement with Alton Baker Park through dance. The collaborative exchange fostered community building between the dancers, the composers, the musicians, and myself.

I acted as the artistic director, community organizer, and liaison between the participating groups. My direction focused the content of the choreography and collaborations with the dancers, composers, and musicians on four separate, but related sections. I collaborated specifically on one section with the dancers and left room for dancer input throughout as I choreographed the other three sections. I organized and scheduled for all involved and coordinated with the City of Eugene Parks and Open Space for access to Alton Baker Park.

Sub-purposes

The content and choreographic theme emphasized the concepts of space and time. The theme of space involved the site itself and placement of dancers within that setting. Their relationship to each other was defined by their relationships within the space. I utilized the concept of time as a way to specifically generate community building within the group of participating artists. As the artists are from disparate backgrounds, their coming together for this momentary performance and dispersing to their individual experiences again helped to direct the emphasis of the preciousness of time. The focus was on the immediacy and awareness of the moment happening in the now. However, the content allowed for chance and emergent themes to develop throughout the process.

I was driven to explore how my current curiosities as a student of dance directly relate to the academic setting. I was initially interested in the similarities of how students come together each year for school, and as students graduate, students disperse. While in this situation, we have intense and intimate experiences with our friends and colleagues that impact our lives much in the way my life has been impacted through my relationships with Mamura, Horton, and Knippel. This experience of school is exciting and also bittersweet. Special. Momentary. It seems to take forever and simultaneously flies by. It is difficult and rewarding. There are plans and surprises. Friendships. Relationships. Work. Play. Beauty. And then those times when you are so exhausted that you are not yourself anymore. Lastly, the goodbyes come with tears and joy.

Actualizing the performance in the park required my role as choreographer, collaborator, and artistic director to be multifaceted. First and foremost, I designed research to engage with the site itself, creating movement specifically for Alton Baker Park. I used the architectural functions and structures of the park to inspire choreography that investigated the site. The investigation showcased my interpretation of the possibilities of meaning for the DeFazio Bridge over the Willamette River and the connected stairs, the ramp encompassing a grassy area, and the nearby pond. My intentioned framing of perspective of these sites through music and dance was intended to enhance the engagement of the general public to the park.

I also directed and facilitated the congruent collaborative relationships with distinct areas of the park where the performance took place. I worked with three composers, David Horton, Simon Hutchinson, and Mark Knippel: all doctoral or masters candidates of the University of Oregon's School of Music and Dance. I had previously worked with all three composers individually. Horton, Hutchinson, and Knippel all have distinctive styles and voices that contributed a great amount of variety to this project. I met with the composers collectively and we discussed the scheduling and creative aspects for this performance. We then met separately at the park to focus on each musical composition specifically designed for the space they, as individuals, had chosen to work with. Each composer chose to produce music for one or two of the movements corresponding with the four architectural structures and areas where I had chosen to choreograph: Knippel composed for the bridge, Horton composed for the stairs and the grassy area, and Hutchinson composed for the pond.

My choreographic and artistic intention was to present dance to the general public in an inviting way. Through research and by simply becoming intimately acquainted with the space, the design of the performance communicated the substance of this project. This implication resonates to me as an artistic endeavor designed not for entertainment and spectacle, but as a representation of my relationship to this particular space and my relationships with my dancers and collaborators. The content of the choreography was specific to the site and the involved artists in a meaningful way as we worked collaboratively and made decisions together.

This project intended to offer a one-time experience for those attending the park the day of the performance, but our rehearsals resulted in long-term and even repeated exposure to dance in the park. This experience likely surprised most park patrons, which aligned with my purpose of reaching the general public as well as the dance advocating community. I was hoping to introduce dance to a wide variety of people from all walks of life: people of all ages, gender, background, and interests. My intended outcome was not to scare people away with surprise dancing but to invite them into viewing the dance. It is important to me to share dance with a wide variety of people and the largest possible audience and I believe that our recurring presence in the park allowed for this to take place. I feel that there is not enough dance and art making in modern American society and as dance made contact with each individual at the park, it was and is my hope that our presence inspired, impacted, and opened peoples' lives to dance and art making. Even our way of working in rehearsal was informative in the democratic sense, offering each participant a voice that was heard and given full weight. This transferred from the

dancers' relationships with each other during rehearsals, and the performance, to the audience through a general sense of equality and unity in the performing group. This unity was tangible, at least to me, and read as a symbiotic community. The involved artists were able to abstractly convey the strength of their relationships through our working methods and the artwork. This transfer of understanding became even more tangible during the culminating performance when the audience began moving through space organically with the dancers through the sections of the park, similar to the flocks of birds surrounding us in the park.

Assumptions/Biases

If park patrons were not actively interested in the arts, it is my hope that this performance might have increased accessibility to and interest in art for the patrons. If dance is something that the audience would not normally experience, then this was an opportunity for investigation into dance for a number of people. An intention for this event was focused on enriching peoples' lives, including the participating artists and performers.

Delimitations

This performance took place on one Saturday, at Alton Baker Park in Eugene, Oregon, outside, and not in the usual concert setting (defined as a theatre where the audience sits in seats oriented to face directly toward the proscenium). For this study, the focus of the audience was subtly crafted and directed through the use of movement and

music rather than through seating facings. The location and focus of the musicians toward the dancers helped to focus the attention of viewers. However, the audience was invited to move around during the performance to choose their own perspective. Due to the nature of this site-specific and public performance, the room for variability was incalculable, which was understood and embraced.

Limitations of Study

The main limitation of this study was the site itself. Due to the fact that the performance took place outside, rain was a potential issue, especially in Oregon. However, the performance was going to happen no matter the weather and, actually, the rain provided a gray backdrop that made the colors of the dancers' costumes more prominent.

Significance of Study

Only I can offer insight from this particular corner of the world, from this specific lived experience, as it is my own. It is important to me to share dance with the world and I believe that dance needs to be seen and people need to see dance. The relationship and exchange is symbiotic.

Methodology

Site-specificity was imperative during the choreographic process and rehearsals. For some reason, I had expected to hold some of the first rehearsals in the dance building,

but was unable to, at all, due to a fire. This change in my initial plan forced the realization that the rehearsals and creative process for this project did not belong indoors and that it would be completely unnecessary to try to force it, so I went to the park. As I began improvising at the park alone, I began to get my first glimpses of the power of dance in the public sphere. Although I usually prefer to work in the studio alone to generate choreography, I quickly realized that no matter how insecure I felt about dancing outside, people were going to be there, see me, and stare. I gave up the insecurity of creating movement in public, seeing that it only hampered my ability to do so, and I began to really see and feel the park and the bridge for the first time.

Preparing for the rehearsals, I focused on clarity of articulation of my goals for the project, inspired by Anne Bogart's *and then, you act* – which I will discuss later, to help orient the composers and dancers to my vision. I used Liz Lerman's book *Critical Response Process* to set up a working environment of equality by using circles for all conversations/dialogues. I also listened to Twyla Tharp's words in *The Creative Habit* – which I will also discuss later, and created a warm-up (done in a circle facing each other) that we did habitually at the beginning of each rehearsal and performance. Implementing these tools started a positive, equitable, group dynamic that would intensify throughout the process.

The dancers and I set four sections in less than eight weeks beginning in August running through September with dress rehearsals beginning in October. We had two-hour rehearsals four nights a week at the park, dancing until long after the sun had set. We danced in the sun, heat, rain, and cold, with dogs, children, runners, bikers, geese, ducks,

and cranes as our background music and scenery backdrop. Each of these environmental factors affected our work. I wrote in my journal, “I do think the energy of the group goes down with the sun. As we lose light, we will have to be aware of that and push through,” (Ernst, August 11, 2010). Being so affected by the natural environment was actually grounding; we were city people who had forgotten the power of the cosmos – which is ironic in that there is a “Eugene Solar System: A One Billionth Scale Model” with the Sun in Alton Baker Park near our working area. The cosmos, weather, animals, people, and the place all profoundly impacted not only our energy levels, but also our interactions, and ultimately, our work.

As for the collaborations with composers, I met with them collectively and individually to discuss the specifics of the content and choreographic themes of space and time as initiators for our creative work together. As a group, we decided the overall feel of the performance with the individual sections presenting distinct aspects of space and time. The focus on the immediacy and awareness of the moment happening in the now played a vital role as inspirational fodder for the collaborations. As these three composers are currently in the academic setting, I expected that they would be able to connect with the idea of coming from disparate experiences to this shared moment in time and dispersing to their own experiences again, as with graduating students. The feeling of time could be perceived as moving quickly or slowing down, depending on each composer-collaboration.

The individual meetings between myself and collaborating composers at Alton Baker Park were planned to experience the site while we simultaneously discussed the

general layout: the music and dance began with dancers entering Alton Baker Park on the DeFazio bridge, traversing down the stairs to the grassy area by the ramp, and back toward the pond with no break between sections. The musicians opened the performance by leading the dancers across the bridge and inviting the audience to direct their attention to the bridge. This theme continued as the dancers exited the bridge and began descending the stairs, a flute solo calling them to descend from below. As the dancers traversed through the sections, the music continued to play or to call them to the next section.

The composers and I worked together to create collaborations specifically for each of the four areas with one composer composing two sections. For the bridge section entitled “Finding Community,” Mark Knippel and I first decided we wanted a fanfare for the beginning section as a call to the audience. After discussing that the dancers were representing the transition from isolation into community, from familiar to the unknown, our original idea of having a fanfare to call to the audience no longer seemed appropriate. We felt a gradual gathering of people and sound seemed suitable. This became a slowly progressing entrance that evolved from ambiguous sound and pedestrian movement to more rhythmical and ‘dance-like.’ Knippel’s composition felt to some like a funeral march at the beginning. The performance began with Knippel playing trumpet, followed by a French horn, trombone, tuba, and two percussionists: one playing a hand drum and the other playing the railing of the bridge. Each instrument introduced itself with the main motif while others held eerie harmonies. I thought the opening music sounded personal, individuals coming together in harmonies to create a new song together,

somewhat resembling a New Orleans funeral march. The opening sounds represented the ending of one experience and the beginnings of something altogether new and unknown, which symbolized the passing of time, past relationships, and embarking on a new journey. This new journey was a coming together of a new community of individuals that could explore and grow together.

Each of the four sections had two weeks to become fully realized. For the first section, “Finding Community,” I only used two phrases of movement but repeated and reordered them as the dancers moved across the bridge. This allowed for people to recognize some of the movement, which was necessary as the bridge was so expansive and the dancers were traveling quite a distance. I tried to help ground the audience by offering familiarity and continuity.

This section also had phrases that were inspired by and to be performed when a biker, runner, or dog passed the dancers. Generally, when the dancers and musicians were working this part within “Finding Community,” people would stop to watch, which kept interaction between performers and the community from occurring in the way I had planned. Eventually, I had the lead dancer yell which phrase she was going to do (whether or not there was a passerby) so the musicians could play along. Otherwise, without the interaction of passersby, the dancers would simply walk and the musicians would be silent. This part of “Finding Community” had intentions of interaction but became problematic when passersby stopped passing by in order to watch.

The most difficult section to set was the collaboration with the dancers, entitled “We Work and Play Together.” Not only were there eleven minds working mostly in

harmony, but this section had the most site elements to work with: stairs, under the stairs, the tree, the area, and under the bridge. Using Liz Lerman's online Toolbox, we began with #12: Movement Parameters, which begins with partners (Liz Lerman Dance Exchange website accessed April 14, 2010). One partner observed while their partner danced freely for several minutes, then describe what they have observed based entirely on physical movement, without judgment. Finally, the observer offers movement parameters to expand possibilities for the next improvisation. This got everyone in the space and challenging each other to react to the site, engaging more deeply with their own responses to Alton Baker Park. Asking the improvisers to focus on the site created numerous movement possibilities. When asked to clarify and expand their movement choices, a real sense of site exploration began to occur. Next I used #9: Detail, which was confusing and difficult due to the many steps in the process of getting to details, but it led us to writing descriptive words about the site that we used as a jumping off place for structured improvisations on the stairs.

Once we came to moving away from the stairs, I asked the dancers to simply follow their impulse on where to go next. Many dancers *ran* to this huge tree and began climbing, hanging, and jumping onto and away from it. Suddenly, I realized, "*there is a tree!*" All this time I had spent in the park and I did not *see* that tree and I had not seen it in that way. It enlivened us all. The tree changed everything. The tree was the one natural element in the area we were working with and it was a sizable, glorious oak tree: it had a thick, sturdy base supporting large, full branches that expanded into a massive and classic-looking family tree or mother tree. This tree came to represent many aspects

of the project. The phrase and improvisational structure that developed from interacting with the tree became fundamental in the entirety of *Merge*. The phrase and improvisational structure were reinstated in other sections and within our collaboration; the ideas of ‘rooting,’ in and out, up and down, infiltrated our dance. The tree gave us something, an energy that grounded us and helped us to feel even more connected to each other and the site. It sheltered and supported us. One dancer commented that by opening up to the connection to others brings awareness to the immediacy of the now. The tree revealed all of this to us. And I did not even see it. Collaboration truly does lead us to new prospects, understandings, and outcomes.

All of the awareness of each other, the self, and the site was enhanced by David Horton’s composition, a flute solo. This was a drastic change from the ensemble that had opened *Merge*. The playful melody was countered by erratic pulsations, which both matched and opposed the dancers’ playful structured improvisation. As the energy of this section changed from play into a settling down at the tree, the flute carried through what I sensed as the sounds of a waterfall splashing, or of birds dipping in and out of the water. Horton’s composition mirrored the natural environment surrounding the dancers and tied the movement and conceptual design together.

The third section, “The Awakening,” was designed to explore the horizontal dance space, or not standing, and how navigating toward and within a different perspective can be illuminating. Due to the who-knows-what in the soggy grass, I added an eighteen by eighteen-foot blanket of bright-white vinyl fabric to protect the dancers. This also created a dance floor that contrasted the green grass and the dancers’ colorful

costumes. The white of the blanket also represented purity of thought, as this section explores a communal enlightenment. Horton's composition was a flowing cello and flute duet that was contrasted by one dancer speaking through a bullhorn. She was speaking words that the dancers and I wrote as we discussed the meaning of our communal enlightenment. Here are the words:

“We are together, connection in pulse and heart.
We listen, we dream, and because we are dreaming together,
we are unified.

We work together, we play together, we imagine together,
to make tangible our hopes and dreams.

Our unification dissolves fears
creating a new perspective of hope.
We wake up to see together.
We. Together.

We see we are the same
and we are all connected
and we are all affected.”

The dancers approached the blanket in threes and separately began the dance phrase, finally arriving at the same place to repeat the dance phrase with a new facing in unison. This signified to me the changes in the individuals within the community and the common changes for the group. Their shared perspective, all from the clarity of a sort of blank slate, eventually led them to arrive on their own two feet, ready to move into the future.

The music for the final section, “The Farewell,” composed by Simon Hutchinson, began as the first dancer left the blanket in “The Awakening.” She walked through the audience and led the other dancers out onto the duck pond's stone footbridge, connecting

the surrounding land to the island where the musicians were waiting. This collaboration with Hutchinson was a bittersweet final reverie. The melody became our song, the song that directed us to each other and into our separate futures, and the melody lingered in our minds. As the dancers wove in and out of each other on the stone bridge steps, their reflection on the water revealed the reflection of the dancers as they dance together in one last celebration and remember their shared journey as they turn toward the future.

The dancers exited the bridge one by one to find their own place encircling the pond. Their final moment of unison surrounded the duck pond, allowed the distance between them to be seen, but not felt. The musicians, in the meantime, left the island and played on the stone bridge, their music traveling on the top of the water into the vastness. Finally, the dancers chose their time to pause and see the others one last time before dispersing. From that moment on, they were no longer bound by space and time, but by memories.

Eventually, all the sections tied together, yet remained distinct. The clarity of the form for “Finding Community,” the first section, came only after we finished setting all four sections. Understanding the overall flow and progression of *Merge* allowed for all artists to delve into a deeper relationship with each other. The immediacy of connecting with community in the now opened possibilities inside relationships beyond language, which were only available through the dancers immersing themselves in the experience. I anticipated that experiencing individualism with a sense of community provided the dancers the ability to find that for themselves in future communities. That is my hope.

In order to fulfill my hopes, I turned to various research materials that might provide me with the breadth and depth needed to actualize them. I first sought out documentation on site-specific work of all genres in order to gain perspective on the possibilities of working with place. Running parallel in significance was work on collaborations in the music and dance relationship and beyond. Looking at the myriad possibilities of collaborations on the individual level between the dancers and myself, the composers and myself, the composers and the dancers, and moving toward more broad relationships between the City of Eugene Parks and Open Space and myself, and the Department of Dance and myself, I began to notice that the collaborations were complex in both artistic and practical natures. This led me in the direction of considering the surrounding community of Alton Baker Park and Eugene, or our audience, and the aligning political nature of site-specific work; all which directly influenced every choice and decision throughout the process. Identifying the web of connections running through each aspect of the project, helped to cohesively strengthen and support the relationships and decisions therein.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

This chapter identifies literature covering, respectively, the impact of site-specific dance performances on the surrounding community, choreographic methodology, the history of site-specific artwork, the impact on and consideration of the audience in site-specific projects, examples of theses and dissertations about the nature of site-specific work, and collaborations. The following espoused literature highlights and reflects methodology, concerns, and questions of practical application to this project.

Site-Specific Dance Performance and Community

Site Dance: Choreographers and the Lure of Alternative Spaces, 2010, edited by Melanie Kloetzel and Carolyn Pavlik is a collection of interviews with and essays by the pioneers of site-specific work, including Meredith Monk, Joanna Haigood, Stephan Koplowitz, Heidi Duckler, Ann Carlson, Olive Bieringa, Otto Ramstad, Leah Stein, Marylee Hardenbergh, Eiko Otake, Sally Jacques, Sara Pearson, Patrik Widrig, Jo Kreiter, Tamar Rogoff, and Martha Bowers. This collection is essential in understanding the history of site-specific work. It offers insight into how and why these choreographers got involved in site-specific work and their processes and includes examples of their work. Four sections categorize the choreographers by their definitions of site-specific dance: Part 1. Excavating Place: Memory and Spectacle, Part 2. Environmental Dialogues: Sensing Site, Part 3. Revering Beauty: The Essence of Place, and Part 4. Civic

Interventions: Accessing Community. Understanding the categories has helped me to define my own site-specific work and visions for the future, which includes all four categories.

All of the artists have their own working definitions for site-specific work, what it is, how they engage with sites, and for what purpose. Meredith Monk, in an interview by Kloetzel, answered why she produces site-specific work:

“So I think that what we are trying to do as artists, or at least what I am trying to do, is to create an antidote to the numbness. And sometimes that is quite painful for people. Sometimes it is easier to turn on the television than to be in the silence. It feels bracing and maybe uncomfortable to be in the silence. But then, after you get past that initial discomfort, you feel a lot better. In a sense, art allows you to go past the discursive part of your mind. The discursive part of your mind is that part that is narrating your experience. It is very verbal and does not really allow for real direct experience to come in. I think that art has the capacity, particularly site-specific work, to bring back the notion of awe. Not shock and awe, but *awe* and wonder. I am always interested in wonder and the power of imagination,” (Monk in Kloetzel and Pavlik 2009, 38-39).

After hearing statements like Monk’s, Kloetzel and Pavlik further inquire during their interviews by asking the artists if their work is political. Site-specific work tends to have a political agenda due to the mere fact that work placed in non-traditional performance spaces creates an atmosphere of consideration for the traditional versus the non-traditional. Site-specific work asks the audience to reconsider previous assumptions about place as they encounter dance performance in a parking lot, a river, or on a bridge. The audience is asked to see this familiar place in a new way, which challenges any previous beliefs. It is a political act to wake people up from the numbness and become open to new possibilities and ideas.

As more people are confronted with site-specific dance, especially the general public who happen upon performances by chance, the audience for dance expands. Site-specific work also allows for a wider audience base seeing that it is usually free and performed in public spaces where there is greater accessibility to dance. Stephan Koplowitz sums up this idea:

“One reason I have devoted so much time to site work is in response to my experience of how contemporary dance has become somewhat insular in terms of who attends concerts. The habit of making the trip to the proscenium theater is not one shared by all, especially when we compete more and more with home theaters and movies. Also, in our society, certain art forms seem to grow more and more removed from the public eye. Look at how poetry was once a hugely popular art form, with best sellers and newspapers printing poetry and with poets being celebrated in society. That situation has changed, of course, in a way that is similar to the place of contemporary dance; neither is seen as part of the public discourse. So the excitement of doing work for me is to interject my art into daily life, into the public square, to become part of the public discourse,” (Koplowitz in Kloetzel and Pavlik 2009, 65-66).

Koplowitz’s point of view parallels my perspective for this project. Contemporary dance is so hidden away that on several campuses around the United States, students do not even know that there is a dance department at their university. Oftentimes, the only contact the general public has with dance is on television or the Internet. Popular forms of dance vary greatly from what is being produced in dance theaters. With site-specific dance, the public has the opportunity to engage with dance in a public space, which mostly likely will challenge their current beliefs and ideas about that space and what dance might mean to them. This takes us back to the idea that site-specific dance can be more politically motivated or prominent. In an interview with Pavlik, Heidi Duckler, who also happens to be a graduate of University of Oregon Dance

Department in 1976, spoke to the question “speaking of politics, does activism figure into your work as a site artist?”

“Well, it’s not what motivates me initially. Yet it goes with the territory, because when you bring art to people where they live and work and you connect directly to their own experience, you are an activist. Politics is inherent in my work though it may not be the source of my inspiration. I try to look at a site as a world full of feelings and ideas without a prescribed political agenda,” (Duckler in Kloetzel and Pavlik 2009, 90).

Each interview in *Site Dance* held vital information and points of view that I found applicable to *Merge*. I found I could connect with each artist in one way or another and was inspired by their work and words. This book is the current quintessential book for anyone interested in site-specific dance. The interviews and essays with these greats of site-specific dance are interlaced with history while gaining insights on their methodologies. Seeing how each artist attended to each site allowed for a deeper understanding of my own work and methodology.

“Site-Specific Dance: Dance as Big as All Outdoors. Creators of site-specific dance works consider Mother Nature a collaborator” by Camille LeFevre was helpful to my project because of the article’s deep consideration of the affects of site-specific work on audiences and their connection to the space and each other. In the introduction, LeFevre points out the disconnection that modern life creates between people and their communities and she acknowledges that site-specific dance challenges audiences to reconsider their community and environment. She states that as ancient peoples took part in communal dance events as a way of life, desire for communal celebration through dance became inherent in all of us. To come together as human bodies dancing or

viewing dance in a particular place, reminds us of our purpose and place in the world and connects us to each other. As our sense of community is heightened, our empathy towards others is heightened as well. “Such work is ecumenical; it traverses economic, racial, and religious borders, often while expanding its own context beyond that of ‘art’ to involve the community, the spirit, and the environment,” (LeFevre 1996: 68). This statement by LeFevre highlights the concept that heightened self-awareness acts as a conduit for communal connection.

Heightened awareness also amplifies the engagement with the space in a new way, in this case allowing for the audience to have the experience of art in the park, which ultimately transforms their relationship to the park in some way. This is the type of experience that I offered to the patrons of Alton Baker Park. It is my belief that the performance of this project created connections within the community through the awareness of the space brought on by the performers. The communal connection among the performers heightened their awareness of each other, the audience, and the space. As the audience experienced the dancers’ awareness, they were able to see and interact with the park and other park patrons in a new way.

LeFevre emphasizes the impact that site-specific work can have for all involved by providing background information about the work of Elise Bernhardt (of New York’s *Dancing in the Streets*), Heidi Duckler (of Los Angeles’ *Urban Extinction Series*), and Mary Lee Hardenbergh (of Minneapolis). She gives context to the choreographers and their work as a mode of transmission for understanding the nature of site-specific work. “Most importantly, site-specific dance is transformative. For the individual audience

member, perception of place is forever changed by the dance that occurred there. For the audience as a whole, the dance is a collective experience that engenders a sense of community and connection,” (LeFevre 1996: 68).

LeFevre’s article emphasizes the notion that site-specific dance performance helps to create connections between the artwork, the site, and the viewers. To help foster and build an inner sense of community within the dancing and collaborative community of artists that were a part of this project, I attempted to keep awareness of the potential impact we could have on the audience at the forefront of our minds as we worked.

Arts & Cultural Programming: A Leisure Perspective by Gaylene Carpenter and Doug Blandy outlines the process and outcomes involved in cultural planning. Information pertaining to how people choose to spend their leisure time enlightens readers, followed by offerings of methods to engage the public in the arts through desirable leisure activities. The freedom a participant is allowed to be involved with the activity varies. The audience could be completely passive or the audience can participate fully, operating and organizing their own experiences (Carpenter and Blandy 2008, 24-25). The amount of freedom an audience member/participant perceives they have, the more likely they are going to engage in the experience and desire similar experiences in the future (Carpenter and Blandy 2008, 17).

Understanding the role of the audience for *Merge* to be somewhere between passive and fully organizing the event, helped me to clarify the conceptual design and choreography. I wanted to engage the audience beyond being passive viewers. This aspect of the performance remained a mystery until the culminating performance. How

would the audience actualize their experience? Knowing I had little control as to what they would do and how they would react, it seemed imperative to invite the audience to observe from any perspective that they cared to choose. Although not everyone had a program with the invitation on the front to “choose your own perspective,” those that did moved freely about which encouraged others to follow suit. I felt the change in the audience as people surged forward to the next perspective and then suddenly paused in unison, somehow aligning themselves to allow everyone to see and far enough away to leave room for the dancers. This experience of moving together into the unknown felt charged and alive, escalating the experience.

“You can’t prevent the making of art. You can’t prevent people from wanting to connect with art. Nothing else can compete with the moment these two connect. Our job is to create more and more moments!” (George Thorn in Carpenter and Blandy 2008, 14). For me, this relates to Anne Bogart’s book *and then, you act: making art in an unpredictable world*, 2007, which I will discuss later in more detail. Bogart states, “The theater makes witnesses out of the audience. A witness is not a bystander, but rather a perceiver whose presence makes a difference. Being a witness makes you responsible. Once an observer, you have become a participant,” (Bogart 2007, 56). The moment when the audience merges with the art and the site, the community unites, and all are transformed.

Choreographic Methodology

Heidi Landgraf's article, "Location, Location, Location: Collage Dance Theatre sets work in the where and now," discusses the processes of working within a community through the work of Heidi Duckler in Los Angeles. Landgraf's descriptive elements include detailed explanations of Duckler's site-specific works, but the primary focus is on the inspirational elements for her choreography and Duckler's methods that influenced each piece. These ideas helped me to be aware of and consider cues from my local community and the site itself.

Much of Duckler's choreographic stimulation sourced from the influence of the sites themselves and through collaborations with her dancers. Duckler left room for choreographic discoveries in rehearsals as she collaborated. Duckler states, "sometimes the process can be difficult with twenty artistic opinions being contributed. It is like a marriage – you have to find a mutual vocabulary. But we have no divas; the work always comes first," (Landgraf 2002: 77). This idea was essential as I worked towards creating site-specific work and began collaborating with my own dancers and composers, especially as situations changed throughout the process and as the dancers were able to engage more deeply in the process some days more than others.

Anne Bogart's book *and then, you act: making art in an unpredictable world* was a profound reading for this project and for my life as an artist. Bogart's perspective on art making rings true with my own ideas and future hopes. She also gives tools and general concepts to be used to create art. The tools are Context, Articulation, Intention, Attention, Magnetism, Attitude, Content, and Time. These categories are unveiled with a

sense of the past informing the future and Bogart's past informing my future. Bogart identifies and presents real-life examples from her own work in theater, and posits additional solid pockets of insight that fully explore the relationships between the theoretical and the applicable.

“Articulation is born from the attempt to create bridges from the realm of private suffering to the outside world. From the heat of experience, you signal to others. Fueled by thought and feelings, its objective is clarity. Words and sentences articulate but so do many sorts of actions and inaction. The irritations of daily life and the aggravations of social and political difficulties are frustrations that can be harnessed and transformed into the energy necessary for expression and articulation. Aim for clarity even in an atmosphere of insecurity and change,”
(Bogart 2007, 19).

The articulation of the choreographic theme for the opening of *Merge* began with dancers transitioning from one end of the bridge, beginning as individuals, toward a gathering of community. This concept is perfectly described by Bogart above. We were signaling to others to join us, to gather together, bridging differences to find commonalities in our humanity; this idea is what I find particularly poignant for site work. The visual metaphor of bridging differences took place on a bridge, further driving home the message of bridging any divides. The literal bridge came to symbolize the overarching themes in the artwork, which articulated the influence of the park on the dance and the dance's influence on the park.

“The artist's job is to stay alive and awake in the space between convictions and certainties. The truth in art exists in the tension between contrasting realities. You try to find shapes that embody current ambiguities and uncertainties. While resisting certainty, you try to be as lucid and exact as possible from the state of imbalance and uncertainty. You act from a direct experience of the environment,”
(Bogart 2007, 3).

The contrast of the unexpected blending with the familiar engages people, asking them to consider their surroundings. This was my vision, carried out by the performers, which asked all of us to consider and eventually question the familiar. This questioning in the form of dance and music in a familiar place helps to make finding a new answer more accessible as it is knowledge from within. The questions may not even be so prominent that the audience is aware of them. There is just a sensation that moves through the thoughts and into the body, finding resolution in the place that is natural for each person. Illumination can come from a matchstick or from the sun, either way a light shines into the audience that enlightens them in some way.

“Art reimagines time and space, and its success can be measured by the extent to which an audience can not only access that world but becomes engaged to the point where they understand something about themselves that they did not know before,” (Bogart 2007, 12).

Anne Bogart speaks to the heart of my being as I connect the power of using my intention and articulation to effectively put into context the content of my artistic vision with the outcome of the project *Merge*. Focusing on building community between the artists became the means by which I intended for audiences to engage with Alton Baker Park. This ties my statement of purpose together in a real way; Bogart gave me the focus to tie together the strings of thought cohesively, which allowed my artistic vision to flow out freely without struggle. By focusing on my intentions rather than the end product, I was able to arrive at the culmination of *Merge* to observe the unfolding of my intentions into a fully developed vision. Bogart’s book informed me beyond tactics, she allowed me to connect to purity in thought during creation of choreography and interaction with the performers.

The Liz Lerman Dance Exchange is highlighted in the book *Dialogue in Artistic Practice: case studies from animating democracy* edited by Pam Korza and Barbara Schaffer Bacon. In the chapter “Liz Lerman Dance Exchange: An Aesthetic of Inquiry, an Ethos of Dialogue,” John Borstel clearly demonstrates the willingness and desire of Liz Lerman to create and share a working methodology that builds a dialogue for choreographic structures as a means for collaboration within communities. More specifically, the Dance Exchange engages in working definitions that sponsor a dialogue between people of varied ages, backgrounds and experiences. This dialogue is the catalyst for artistic production of choreographic material for Lerman’s choreography and workshops. As liaison between the artist groups I worked with, I used Lerman’s tools from the online toolbox to help create a common working dialogue for this project, specifically for the collaboration between the dancers and myself. This working dialogue was necessary to clearly translate ideas. Lerman’s toolbox served as a recurring starting point, which allowed for us to find our own improvisational and choreographic path.

In addition to the four questions the Dance Exchange proposes: Who gets to dance? Where is it happening? What is it about? and Why does it matter? (Borstel 2005: 58), there are numerous examples of the development of the Dance Exchange methods and toolbox. These methods are practical applications for working with different groups of people to create art and present it in a variety of venues. Lerman’s methodologies for community building aided my process by building a strong foundation. Some examples of these methods are building trust, asking questions as artistic fodder, and generating dialogue: both verbal and nonverbal. “Perhaps the most pertinent to the

practice of civic dialogue, the Dance Exchange uses questioning as one of the central drivers for creating art through community engagement,” (Borstel in Korza and Bacon 2005: 62). The use of questions helped to create equity among the dancers by inviting everyone to participate in discovering solutions to the questions. This way of working epitomized the kind of active engagement from the dancers that I wanted to transfer to the audience. The Question-Answer session after the performance in the park promoted a community engagement beyond the performance itself, although it was not centralized. The audience naturally dispersed into small groups discussing interpretations with performers. I fielded a few questions and heard comments divulged by people I knew, nevertheless furthering the verbal dialogue.

Liz Lerman and John Borstel’s *Critical Response Process: A method for getting useful feedback on anything you make, from dance to dessert* (2003), was significant in preparation for working collaboratively with the group of dancers and musicians. The language used in the Critical Response Process (Process) helps to avoid placing value or judgment when giving feedback. By asking Neutral Questions, which eliminates implied meanings, the feedback is stated in such a way that allows the receiver to find the answers for themselves. An example from the text will help clarify:

“Thus, instead of saying, ‘It’s too long,’ (an opinion) or ‘Why are your pieces always so long?’ (a question that couches an opinion), a person might ask, ‘What were you trying to accomplish in the final section?’ or ‘Tell me the most important ideas you want us to get and where is that happening in this piece?’” (Lerman and Borstel 2003, 20).

This semantic guide helped identify ways in which to speak to my fellow artists that allowed for equality amongst the group. Implied meanings were left out of questions

and feedback during movement creation in collaboration, which kept the dancers from feeling judged. Instead of giving feedback in the negative, “Don’t do it like that,” I asked, “Next time can you try this?” which inevitably left judgment out of the picture. The dancers identified this purposeful use of language as helpful throughout our process in that it helped to build them up rather than break them down.

Another important and prominent element from the Process was the use of a circle formation during any and all dialogue. This formation is a fundamental part of the Process. “The best shape for the Critical Response Process is usually a circle, and facilitators should make every effort to move participants into this configuration which promotes participation, exchange, eye-contact, and helps to balance perceptions of power,” (Lerman and Borstel 2003, 29). The Process idea of a circle was a key ingredient in setting up an equitable sense of power throughout this project, ranging in use from our warm-up, in conversations, and in choreographic or artistic decision-making. We created one circle anytime we gathered for informal or more formal conversations. The circle was another visual metaphor for our close-knit community coming together as equals.

History of Site-Specific Artwork

In addition to collaborating with other people, I also collaborated with the space. By looking at space from diverse disciplines of site-specific artwork, I have found commonalities and through-lines that relate to localized site-specific dance performances. The book *Site-Specific Art: Performance, Place and Documentation* by Nick Kaye is an

overview of several artists, mostly non-dancers, providing commentary on their experiences with site-specific works. The most imperative concept I gleaned from this book is that each site-specific work is created truly and only for that place, that site. This impacted my approach to understanding how to choreograph site-specifically. I understood that if a work is inspired by a site and set specifically at that site, it cannot be removed and remain intact. This was true for this project; all of the compositions, choreography, and collaborations were specifically designed for the space of Alton Baker Park.

Another important distinction I was made aware of was that once the site-specific artwork is in place or in performance, “the audience discovers that ‘there’s not a single viewpoint (...) there’s no way to stand outside it to try and define or divine the material,” (McLucas, Morgan and Pearson 1995: 17 in Kaye 2000: 55). Alton Baker Park has a definitive appearance and ambience that is at once expansive and inviting. The view of the bridge from the pond area is expansive while the view of the bridge from the grassy area is limited. Understanding that the audience viewpoint is not singular opened my choreographic frame, which became a more three-dimensional enterprise. Despite all efforts to consider each viewpoint, I was unable to accurately predict exactly where any one-audience member would choose to view the event as there were unlimited and changing perspectives available. As stated by McLucas, Morgan, and Pearson, neither the audience, nor I, could experience this performance from any one perspective. The perspectives were unlimited in possibilities, but limited in scope individually. This

created an individual experience of the site for each audience member, but this was, of course, in relation to all other audience members.

Radical Street Performance: An International Anthology edited by Jan Cohen-Cruz describes various types of public performances categorized by Agit-prop, Witness, Integration, Utopia, and Tradition. These categories represent commonalities between artists in their approaches to performing radical theatrical acts in public spaces for social change, protest, or political agendas. In her introduction, Cohen-Cruz elaborates on the political nature of public performance versus ‘cultural spaces.’

“Radical street performance draws people who comprise a contested reality into what its creators hope will be a changing script. Typically, theatre transports the audience to a reality apart from the everyday; radical street performance strives to transport everyday reality to something more ideal. Because the desired spectators are not necessarily predisposed to theatre-going, it takes place in public spaces and is usually free of charge. Potentially, street performance creates a bridge between imagined and real actions, often facilitated by taking place at the very sites that the performance makers want transformed,” (Cohen-Cruz 1998, 1).

This concept was influential for me as I began to design the project. All aspects of the performance were shaped by the focus to bring the artwork to the people and place. This presentation of work at a specific site as a free event opens the possibilities for more varied interactions with a wider audience, as the audience may be simply passing by. The work is a bridge to a new perspective, not just of the work, but of the everyday experience. For me this bridging became a central concept as the site for my project was dominated by the first suspension bridge for pedestrians and bikers. The DeFazio Bridge literally stood as the metaphor for connection between individuals and community, dance and the general public of Alton Baker Park, and the journey or process of transforming

from isolation into a sense of place within a community. The patrons' relationship to the park, either commuting or spending leisure time there, may have changed as they experienced dance on and around the bridge and may have sparked a new appreciation for the place. The dancing and music, opening the realm of possibilities for Alton Baker Park, challenged the everyday experience.

Another significant and essential idea for *Merge was*, “not only space but also time is more contiguous with everyday life in street performance than in conventional theatre,” (Cohen-Cruz 1998, 2). The concepts of space and time are integral to dance, but the emphasis changes when dance is happening in an otherwise ‘normal’ situation. Alton Baker Park does not usually host dance and music on its bike pathways, which allowed for multiple encounters with that scene for many people. The sense of time both quickened and slowed down during different aspects of the performance. This fluctuation of time during the performance inherently altered park patrons’ experiences of the park, giving them an entirely different engagement with the park.

Radical Street Performance showed me a variety of examples of the possibilities of public artwork performance. The Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo simply walk Argentina’s central square to bear witness to the ‘disappearance’ of their children due to brutal military dictatorship (Taylor 1998, 74 in Cohen-Cruz 1998). Their constant presence in the square, demonstrating with their bodies as billboards stating their cause, is a reminder to others of the Dirty War. I found it significant that a powerful display did not include spectacle and entertainment, but mere consistency. This led me to understand that *Merge* could further influence the patrons of Alton Baker Park by simply increasing

the exposure of dance in the park to the public. Political statements do not need to be shouted, but can just exist within a group of people who are willing to commit to presence. Simply being in the park became a statement of purpose in and of itself as the public began to interact with our dancing in the present moment in public space, day after day.

Audience

The influence from Nick Kaye's site-specific book considering the audiences' experience lead me to Sally Banes' article "Choreographing Community: Dancing in the Kitchen," a detailed account of the history of the Kitchen Center for Music, Video, and Dance (now called the Kitchen Center for Video, Music, Dance, Performance, Film, and Literature) in the SoHo area of New York City beginning in 1971. At the time of the publication of this article, Elise Bernhardt, the executive director of The Kitchen, described The Kitchen as a "cultural center" and that her vision of this alternative space "had to do with balancing neighborhood engagement and support for experimentation by the artists," (Banes 2002: 143).

The bulk of the article focuses on the types of art produced, generally depending: on the amount and sources of funding, who was running the dance programs and their particular perspective towards promoting dance, and lastly, the connection of the Kitchen to the community. The relationship of the Kitchen to community outreach has been transformative. In the early years, funding from the National Endowment for the Arts was abundant so the artists were able to experiment and produce works that were not

necessarily designed for or reliant on audience income. As funding began to diminish, the art took a turn towards appropriation and referencing popular culture in an effort to foster a larger dance going audience. The Kitchen directors, recognizing the need for change in order to remain in business, began including more community-based works to bring attention to The Kitchen, which united community members in the shared experience of art. With the appointment of Bernhardt, a larger vision for the Kitchen emerged.

“Bernhardt’s view of art’s agenda as community-building verging on social services and her insistence on bringing people together with art over meals, on one hand, returns full-circle to an ethos of communication and commensalism embraced by the founders of the Kitchen, who were rooted in a utopian, collectivist 1960s alternative culture, but on the other hand conceptualizes that community in a very different key, one that suits the other hand of multiculturalism, of targeting the needs and rights of special interest groups, of esteem-building, and of anti-elitism in the arts. The community the early Kitchen fostered was a community of avant-garde artist-participants, whereas Bernhardt’s Kitchen seeks to make art accessible to a flourishing neighborhood community,” (Banes 2002:144).

By opening The Kitchen to the surrounding community, relationships were developed that supported both the artwork produced for and by The Kitchen while also growing the audience base. This gave the surrounding community a sense of togetherness as people were connected by The Kitchen’s events. The fostering of a wider audience base proved to be successful in maintaining the center, even allowing it to expand as time passed.

Over time, the focus of The Kitchen became more inclusive of the ranges of artistic genres through the inclusion of the community to become active in the community-based art. The focus also changed to a more community focused and friendly

model to bring people in. By including a more diverse base of art genres, The Kitchen opened itself up to engaging with the surrounding community. With the expansion of inclusiveness, the framework provided a model in which audience and community growth was fostered. This model connects the Kitchen directly to the diverse community and thus is reflected in the artwork. Banes summarizes:

“Since its founding in 1971, the Kitchen’s notions of community, and with it the dance series’ notions of community, changed from a constituency of artists to a constituency of audiences, leading to its current focus on prospective audiences. And the organization’s relationship to that perceived community shifted from presenting new art to audience development, leading to its current aim to demystify art – clearly a response, in part, to the 1990s funding backlash against what was perceived as elitism and obscurity in experimental art,” (Banes 2002: 158).

This statement provides a clear history from one case study in the dance genre on the role the community audience plays in dance. For The Kitchen, the audience had become a pivotal aspect for producing contemporary dance and monetary gain. From my point of view, it is not necessary to fulfill the needs and wants of any particular audience. However, the necessity to strengthen the relationship between dance and the audience has become a relevant issue. Not only does dance need the audience, but also the audience needs the dance, as evidenced by The Kitchen’s history.

The Kitchen’s history is telling of the state of affairs for dance and the arts. For artwork to exist and survive, it is imperative that there is an audience. It is helpful if that audience is consistently involved and growing, as the monetary aspects of producing artwork have become requisite. In this economy, it may be difficult for the general population to afford anything but the basics. Yet, especially in this economy, expression

through artwork is essential for the masses. This project provided an opportunity for the general public to experience dance as a free art form on multiple occasions. It was my hope that this performance was inviting for the audience to have a new, special engagement with dance in Alton Baker Park. As the community of Eugene engaged with dance in the park, potentially the audience base for dance expanded.

Site-Specific Dance in Academia

There are many studies on site-specific dance performances in academia. There are foci on choreography through women's perspectives, the act of choreographing for the site, and the impact of site-specific work through the lens of technology. The dissertation by Katrinka Somdahl, University of Texas at Austin, "Dancing in place: The radical production of civic spaces," reiterates the political ramifications of site-specific work. Somdahl writes:

"Public spaces can be manipulated by choreographers to create political identifications that last long beyond the ephemeral performance event. How public space is defined and utilized is intimately connected with a society's definition of who is to be included and the kind of political community to be fostered," (Somdahl 2007).

This explanation of the impact that site-specific performances can have on an audience is relevant to my project. However, Somdahl's focus differed from mine, seeking to engage with civic spaces through three choreographers' use of symbolism, social narratives concerning the site, and social mores. Somdahl's interest was to argue that women can "create meaningful public spaces where women express political attitudes, assert claims to the public realm, and actively use it for their own purposes," (Somdahl 2007: vii). By

focusing on the political and public realms of the artwork and choreography of women, Somdahl directed her work on social commentary from a feminist point of view.

In a similar vein to Somdahl, is Ryan Nicole Chrisman's University of Maryland masters thesis, "Place." Chrisman's focus was on the act of collaborating with artists as a means to an end in and of itself. She wrote that she would look at "how placing sound and movement in the space constructed time, altered perception, and taught me about the beauty of an ensemble," (Chrisman 2008). This aligned with my choreographic intentions. My plan was to investigate the concepts of space and time in order to build community amongst the group of artists. It was my hope that the connection between the performers would resonate with the audience, but it was not my intention to monitor that in any way. The focus of Chrisman's thesis seemed to concentrate on the artist's personal investigation of choreography, whereas my interest was an inquiry into community building and enhancing public engagement with the site itself.

Andrew Brian Marcus's Arizona State University masters thesis entitled, "Toward a metaphysics of performance, and transdisciplinary implications," seems to connect Somdahl, Chrisman, and my project. Marcus's focus was through a phenomenological narrative to explore the "perceptions of being in a reconsideration of audience/performer/site relationships" (Marcus 2008). Although he worked with technological applications for choreographic methodology, his interest was in the "evolving concept of fine art dance performance as a vehicle for shared metaphysical experience between performers and audience," (Marcus 2008). Marcus utilized motion-sensing technology to create a dynamic creative system as a "means of transcendence of

dualities such as artist and audience and subject and object” (Marcus 2008), in other words, metaphysical phenomenology.

Marcus’ study brought together collaborations with space and people while looking to investigate the exchange between performance and impact on audience. In the thesis and dissertation discussed here, and with my project as well, there is a deep concern with audience and site-specific works. This is due to much site-specific work being encountered by the audience by chance and often for free. The chance encounter is oftentimes out of the ordinary, which throws the off equilibrium of ‘normal.’ When working site-specifically, the audiences’ potential reactions have to be taken into consideration.

There are many examples of site-specific works where the audience is present specifically for the performance, be it in the woods, at a river, or on a busy street corner (LeFevre 1996, Landgraf 2002, Kaye 2000). When an artist brings site-specific work to the audience, the concern with audience becomes a central issue. The meanings of that public place and its normal functions become transformed as status quo is questioned by the artwork. Existing ideas of place and space alter, challenging the audience to consider new possibilities about appropriate public behaviors. When the audience comes into contact with the dancers’ bodies moving in ways the audience is not accustomed to seeing in that place, their understanding shifts to include this experience and possibility. This is where the real work occurs, in the moment of the paradigm shift.

Collaboration

Twyla Tharp's book, "The Collaborative Habit: Life Lessons for Working Together," is an excellent resource for collaborators working with and beyond dance. Tharp uses her personal experience to outline common issues that arise when collaborating. Through years of learning through trial and error, Tharp gained valuable insight and has identified basic concepts and methodologies applicable to collaboration. Outlining her successes, she provides the reader a consideration of the issues inherent in collaboration, which she asserts is necessary before beginning a collaborative project. Helpful hints and tips are highlighted throughout the entire book. Included separately from the bulk of the book are inserts focused on individuals who are accomplished collaborative artists as musicians, directors of dance companies, costume designers, and sports coaches. These stories give a breadth of knowledge that supports and augments Tharp's personal experiences in collaboration.

Tharp also incorporates her values in working throughout the book. Her expertise identifies the proficiency of her personal working methodologies as a system to be shared to help others, which I found to be personally significant. A few examples of Tharp's advice are clear communication between artists, flexibility, and willingness to adapt. Through her many experiences, she has found collaborative methodologies that have proven successful multiple times that I incorporated into my own collaborations. Her insights helped to guide my approaches to collaborating with the artists involved in *Merge*. She helped me to keep in mind the importance of community building among the group of artists not only to support the collaboration, but also as a contribution to society.

Tharp focuses on the importance of being a collaborator in our society, which focuses on the individual. By working in a group, collaboratively, we are reconstructing our own experience, and thus igniting positive change.

“Collaboration is how most of our ancestors used to work and live, before machines came along and fragmented our society...the result is that most of us grew up in a culture that applauded only individual achievement. We are, each of us, generals in an ego-driven “army of one,” each at the center of an absurd cosmos, taking such happiness as we can find. Collaboration? Why bother? You only live once; grab whatever you can.” (Tharp 2009, 6 - 7).

Tharp insists on the importance of collaboration in contemporary society, stating that, “collaboration is the buzzword of the new millennium,” (Tharp 2009, 7). She impresses upon the reader that not only is collaboration instinctual and something that has been lost in society, but also that it provides a source of personal growth and learning through the challenges of working with others. This idea is personally significant to me and was at the heart of my working methodology beyond the creative aspects of *Merge* as a means for social change. Through a concentrated effort stemming from the idea that Tharp emphasized above, working collaboratively can effectively incite equitable human interactions beyond this project.

The key point of the book is that collaboration is essential to artists, and truly, to all people. To effectively work with others, the tools of collaboration that Tharp suggests also transcend dance making; “Collaborations offer tutorials in reality. And that tutorial always presents the unexpected,” (Tharp 2009, 63). As I found in *Merge*, creating and stating values helps participants in a group to share common goals, maintaining autonomy of the group as the creative work moves forward.

Examples of Tharp's values can be summed up in this sentence:

“Collaborators aren't born, they're made. Or, to be more precise, built, one day at a time, through practice, through attention, through discipline, through passion and commitment – and, most of all, through habit,” (Tharp 2009, 12).

These values are reiterated through examples of Tharp's own collaborations. Put into context, the practice of attention, discipline, passion, commitment, and habit are at the core of Tharp's methods and clearly demonstrate their effectiveness. These values reach beyond the working process, but also serve as a theoretical approach to understanding how collaborating has become essential to our future world.

“It's my feeling that we're at a crisis point, a moment of deciding what will happen to life on this planet. Is it meaningless and pointless, or have we – slowly and painfully – learned something about living creatively and in harmony with others? In short, will we take what we know about collaboration and act on it? If my way of thinking and acting prevails, art becomes as central to life as – oh, entertainment. And then we'll come to see that art *is* entertainment, and that learning, improving ourselves, coming closer to our best selves is more rewarding than mindless ‘fun,’” (Tharp 2009, 103).

Twyla Tharp has produced a body of work during her lifetime that supports her call to others to work collaboratively as a function for personal growth and connection to others. Some of her masterpieces have been collaborations, for example with Mikhail Baryshnikov in *Push Comes to Shove* and separately, Billy Joel in *Movin' Out*. This growth and connection strengthens the understanding of others and the art generated through collaborations for all involved artists and audience. Tharp wrote,

“the image we created was less important than the process – learning to speak a common language, struggling to see the same possibilities. In this process, I found myself far outside the parameters of my own art. Nothing's more liberating than gaining new perspective from a totally unlikely and “different” place,” (Tharp 2009, 115-116).

In *Merge*, I found a deep connection between our working values, relationships, and the art we created together. Collaboration allows for a transformation to comprehension beyond the work - into the self and, most significantly, to a real connection to others. Through reinstating our values throughout the process, we came to understand more deeply what others valued which helped identify our own priorities within the work. This is the experience that Tharp reveals in her book and it is the experience I had working with dancers and musicians in *Merge*.

I also looked to Twyla Tharp's book, *The Creative Habit: Learn It and Use It For Life*, as a supplemental reading to working collaboratively in addition to *The Collaborative Habit*. *The Creative Habit* was a reminder for me to approach my rehearsals with dancers with a sense of consistency in order to establish a kind of 'home-base' as we were rehearsing in a park, away from our usual surroundings in the studio. "By making the start of the sequence automatic, they replace doubt and fear with comfort and routine," (Tharp 2003, 18). Our warm-up was the same every rehearsal, which helped to unify us and allowed us to focus in although we were in such a grandiose space where distractions were numerous. Unifying our minds and bodies spurred us toward more deeply engaged collaborations.

I used Tharp's advice to prepare for creative generative moments. As I was planning to choreograph for this park specifically, which initially involved improvising and setting phrase-work alone in the park, I knew I would have to mentally prepare to embark on that endeavor. As Tharp suggested, I created specific preparation habits before arriving at the park so as to best use the time I had allotted for movement

generation, and later for planning rehearsals. “This more than anything else, is what rituals of preparation give us: They arm us with confidence and self-reliance,” (Tharp 2003, 20). I was able to lean on this advice focusing on consistency as a means for allowing the creative to be honed in and extracted. I felt that with each repetition of the warm-up and my preparation activities, I became more in tune with Alton Baker Park and thus, the work.

Generation WE: How Millennial Youth Are Taking Over America And Changing Our World Forever, 2008, by Eric Greenberg with Karl Weber, provided one of the most unifying aspects of *Merge*. The generation of people born between the years 1978 – 2000 had previously been labeled as Generation Y, a simple tag-on to Generation X (1960-1978), until *we* emerged as a united generation, thus generating the name WE. The characteristics of Generation WE were compiled by The Greenberg Millennials Study, an in-depth survey of 2,000 individuals age 18-29, which “used a mix of methodologies to explore the unique beliefs and attitudes of the Millennial generation,” (Greenberg with Weber 2008, 190). The study included a series of “12 geographically and demographically diverse focus groups of mixed gender, including one made up of white college graduates, one of white non-college grads, one of African Americans, one consisting of Evangelical Christians, two containing Hispanics, and two groups selected to include Millennials with children of their own,” (Greenberg with Weber 2008, 190). This diverse group shares in common beliefs on almost all issues including economics, environment, health care, education, energy, infrastructure, and social security. The groups, of course, may not have agreed on *how* to go about dealing with the issues in the

survey, but there was agreement that something needed to be done to change the current state of affairs.

Realizing that the people I was working with on *Merge* were all a part of Generation WE and that we shared similar views on the world, helped me to see how we were all connected in order to collaborate. Words that describe Generation WE and some of our interests are; “hopeful, optimistic, progressive, forward-thinking, independent, charity, volunteerism, activism, entrepreneurship, political organizing, honesty, shared goals, innovative thinking, responsibility, open-minded, resilient, generous, practical, and well-educated, (Greenberg with Weber 2008, 28, 30, 106, 152). These words are examples of how Millennials generally think and behave; which influences political, religious, and social constructs.

As I read the issues Generation WE is concerned with and some of the solutions offered by Greenberg and Weber, I started to see the group of artists working on *Merge* differently. I began to notice the ways in which each member of the group embodied several of these descriptive words in their own words and actions. For the first time in my life, I felt connected to my generation in a real way. I used to live under the common misconception that my generation is full of self-centered, material-goods consuming, careless machines just doing what the commercials told them to do. Generation WE opened my eyes to the reality taking place “off-camera,” the reality full of genuine, innovative, educated, and optimistic individuals who are willing to work together toward a better future.

Often times, our generation can be defined by the extreme examples of the negative effects technology can have, but away from the seemingly-popular and superficiality of reality television programs, is a group of smart, creative, united people, coming of age. To understand that the people in my generation think similarly helps me to find more entry points into connecting with this group in order to collaborate effectively. Knowing that underneath the technology, there is a common, underlying belief uniting us, helped me to connect with depth to my fellow artists concerning real issues of our shared situation in society. Technology seems to separate us but working collaboratively with my peers was a chance for me to understand that this group truly is made up of resilient, forward-thinking people who are willing to do what it takes to improve the world we live in. This large group of people, 93 million strong; out numbers the 74 million Baby Boomers in this country. Thinking about the possibilities of this large group, and the real demands that many people require simply to survive, made me see the imperative of this group uniting toward making a better future. Greenberg reiterated the idea that this generation of people will only accomplish their/our goals for the future by working together, collaboratively.

The group of dancers and I discussed at length our own values in this project and for our futures. Understanding each other's priorities and the importance in honoring those was necessary as priorities and values affected the people around us. Uniting is the ultimate lesson. To work toward a better future, practicing collaborating and working together is the first step. *Generation WE* helped to bring us to the table so to speak, to a common goal that we could each input equally, this is what we learned.

CHAPTER III

EVALUATION

The evaluation of this project was done through a journaling process, in which I documented rehearsal plans, notes on dancers' conversations and movement contributions during rehearsals, and finally, reflections on rehearsal and research. My committee members visited our rehearsals to observe and provide responses about the work throughout the process. The ability for them to truly spectate from multiple perspectives in the park helped give me a wider vision for the content of this project. My committee members were able to help me fully realize the optimal ebb and flow of the use of time through music and dance. I also hired two videographers for the culminating performance who were to capture both the dancers and the audience so I could attempt to evaluate, in retrospect, the engagement of the audience with the site.

Journaling to compile and synthesize information from dancers at rehearsals, my choreographic process, and my research, I was able to tease out common threads of emergent themes. These themes result from the project foci on building community within the group of artists, engaging the patrons of Alton Baker Park with the site, and investigating the process. Themes include:

1. Culminating Performance.
2. Common Values: of the dancers and how that translated into movement and relationships.
3. Collaboration: the effects and implications of collaborating.

4. Audience: perspective, comments, and reactions during all rehearsals and the culminating performance.
5. Process: investigation into the evolution of rehearsals and artistic content over time.
6. Journaling and Research: the emergent themes of the project.
7. Final Summary.

These themes pooled together created a working methodology. The emergence of shifting priorities throughout the process pushed me to simultaneously let go of power while continuing to focus on the project's purpose. The needs of the group of artists shifted, as people do, throughout the process. I paid constant attention to power dynamics within the group in reaction to interactions with the audience, the park, and each other. The subtle shifts accumulated and by the culminating project, new themes had emerged that began to coalesce into a changing perspective for me.

Culminating Performance

On the day of the culminating performance, to create a marker to gather people in the spacious park, I set up two tents in the grass clearing between the bridge and the goose pond, which were generously loaned by the Petersen Barn Community Center. I had no idea what the weather would be on October 9th in Eugene; sometimes it is still warm and summery at that time of year. This particular October 9th proved to be cloudy and gray with a few showers – a fairly dreary day. The tents housed an information table including a donation bowl and a place for people to gather. Generally, people gathered

between the tent and the bridge but about 40 people were already on the bridge. I did not expect people to gather on the bridge but the poster's picture of the DeFazio Bridge must have led them there. I do not know if dancers and musicians told their families and friends, but I liked the idea that perhaps the bridge was a natural starting place. At the end of the performance, I invited everyone over to the tent for a Q&A but it seemed more natural for people to talk in constantly shifting groups, greeting each other and congratulating the performers.

The culminating performance was really exciting, compared to any of the rehearsals or dress rehearsals preceding it, because of the energy of the audience that had gathered specifically to be witness to *Merge*. Despite a misty rain, the audience was prepared with rain jackets and umbrellas, which added color to the dreary day. The dancers were wearing bright colored dresses with cardigans. Their costumes made them seem almost dressed appropriately - but not quite - for a rainy day; letting the dancers both stand out from, and mingle with, the audience. The combination of about 150-200 rain jackets, umbrellas, and the colorful dancers created a vibrant grouping against the gray sky, cement, and reflective water. The final section with the dancers on the low-lying footbridge on the pond became a reflected mirror image of dancing colors. This was a shared moment in time for the audience, as we gazed upon the dancers and the dancers reflected on the pond. The weather, which had seemingly been terrible to begin with, created the perfect lighting that contrasted the dreariness with the beauty and the separation between the open expanse of the park and the tight-knit gathering of a community.

Common Values

Community building for the group of participating artists was at the forefront of my mind during choreographing, planning of rehearsals, and daily interactions before, during, and after rehearsals. Our working relationship was paramount to work together toward the common goal of producing a performance. This goes beyond being colleagues; the dancers would need to *know* each other. We worked together for almost four weeks before I realized that *we* needed to state our values, not just my values for this project, especially now that we had established a base working relationship together. This was during our collaboration on “We Work and Play Together,” which was a prime opportunity to find common values. The ten values we identified were: Support, Process, Time, Dancing, Environment, Each Other, Awareness, Opportunity to Learn, Word Choice, and Curiosity. The following is from my journal reflecting on the conversation concerning our values:

At the beginning of rehearsal I talked about my question about community: what are the qualities or aspects that create a productive and sustaining group that works toward a common goal but retains autonomy of the self for individuals in the group? One dancer said that for a group to work, there must be a set of values that are shared by the group. I thought that those values must be reinstated from time to time, as a reminder and refresher for the group. So I asked for what each of us may value in this project and this is what was said:

Support – in varying aspects, literal support in dancing, support in friendship, artistry, strength etc. The Process – is valued first by me, which allows others to engage in the process more fully. Also, this process allows for *our* input.

Time - the time we are together, dancing and talking, bonding and sharing, growing and taking risks. Devoted time. Dancing – we all value dancing, that we can be here together sharing in the joys that our bodies provide.

Environment – the site itself and becoming more intimately acquainted with Alton Baker Park and the working/dancing/playing environment that I started but that we all participate in. Many feel that there is equality in all aspects and that each voice can be heard and valued.

Each Other – each individual is important to the process and adds to the group. We are learning so much from each other, watching how we work together teaches us how we *can* work together!

Awareness – of what and why we are doing this project, the site, environment, passersby, each other, Alton Baker Park, etc.

Opportunity to Learn – we value learning from each other and ourselves, learning dance, process, and relationships. Word Choice – not hearing “not like that, like this,” which can diminish creativity, expression, and each other. By using directives in the positive, we lead each other to open new doors rather than to shut them.

Curiosity – to explore the possibilities and to ask questions. Perhaps allowing for questioning and taking questions into deep consideration, even if it is hard, is one key to developing a strong, united, focused community. The input from the dancers is when I am learning the most. (Ernst August 24, 2010).

After that point, to focus we simply had to remind each other of our values. The work flowed from us all as we honed in on imperative concepts within the work. We were all able to dig deeper into each task and find the dimensions which fulfilled our values, knowing that if we were right-minded in connection to our goals, our choices were supported. The flow stopped immediately if and when anyone began to stray. As the project continued, the relationships between the dancers and myself continued to deepen. Rehearsing four nights a week for two hours per night brought us together quite quickly. After realizing that the sinking sun affected our energy levels, I attempted to end each rehearsal with a conversation or writing activity. Engaging the dancers in the project not only as movers but also as idea contributors opened the range of possibilities for expression and understanding. I began to know them beyond the artistic expression of their bodies, connecting their movement preferences and choices to their ideas and

values. The expression of shared values brought us to a common ground during our ending conversations we spoke almost as one, each contribution furthering understanding of our work and each other. Toward the end of the project, we were able to speak with clarity on new ideas from the basis of our shared values.

Part of the effectiveness of these values was based in clear communication. Through tactful honesty and prompt communication, any disagreement was squelched, which kept issues from escalating and developing into larger problems. Communication continued to be the medium for our values to be reinstated through words and actions. Reciprocity also played its hand in this. When one person reciprocates the shared values back to the group, this reinforces the values and strengthens the group. Eventually the reciprocity of clear, honest, and tactful communication bolstered the relationships, encouraging further development as individuals, a community, and as artists.

Collaboration

Through the choreographic process of collaborations, the group of artists and myself were able to cohesively construct a culmination performance that effectively built a sense of community. The collaborative process allowed multiple voices to be heard, offering a greater range of potential outcomes. In rehearsals, the focus on community building, and balance within that community, allowed for equity amongst the group that transferred the role of the dancers from subordinates to counterparts in the creative process. Equity allowed the artists to deepen their relationships, furthering the connection not only between each other, but also within the dancing. Dancers asking, “is

this what you want?” keeps the hegemonic rehearsal process divided and unbalanced. My aim for artistic articulation was to arrive at the answer together. “A rehearsal can be a mutual attempt to find something for which neither party has any easy answer,” (Bogart 2007, 24-25).

Each individual contributed to ideas and reinforced group decisions through actions such as going “full out.” As we attempted to create “We Work and Play Together,” no one person could mark the movement; otherwise the vision would have been unclear. One issue was that *I* was not dancing during this time because I needed to see what was developing and to catch the moments of interest. This however, created a dynamic of ‘Other.’ I was no longer a part of the group, but the director, tipping the power balance. “Because I was not always actively dancing, the dancers viewed me differently. I don’t know exactly what they thought, but I got the impression that they wanted more from me. From my perspective, this felt as though they wanted me to tell them exactly what to do,” (Ernst August 27, 2010). We had tipped from an equity-based, value-sharing group, to a flock of sheep looking for a dictator, which I was not interested in being. This was a lesson to me in leading a collaboration, which brought up the question “what is a true collaboration?” I believe we were collaborating, but it was under the umbrella of my vision, my project, which skews the collaborative balance.

I would have liked to explore working toward more of a shared vision and playing with the idea that the power should shift amongst the group. I should have rotated dancers in and out from being movement creators to being witnesses to the process so that they could each fully understand what we were making together in its entirety. They

expressed to me that they had never seen certain aspects of the performance, for example at the stairs. The stairs wound around with dancers on top and under the stairs, which was visually interesting to viewers, but dancers could not interact in any way because they were separated by concrete. Although the audience members would never be able to see it all either, the lack of connection between the dancers negatively affected the group chemistry and thus the collaboration. This section was particularly difficult and we reworked it several times. Had some of them stepped out to view, I am sure the outcome of our collaboration would have been more harmonious.

Collaborating with the composers presented an entirely different scenario. Mark Knippel observed several rehearsals but I didn't hear music until after I had finished choreographing entirely. Simon Hutchinson was out of the country all summer but sent me music via email in an MP3 format before rehearsals began. He had created the music on a computer program so it did not accurately represent the actual sound of instruments. During our first few days on the stairs, David Horton came to rehearsals and took videos to compose to, which felt the most like a collaboration. However, I did not hear the music until right before rehearsals with musicians and there was not time for me to dislike the music (the music was beautiful and perfect, so there was nothing to dislike).

The main issue I have run into when collaborating with musicians is the difference in our working timelines. Dance needs a lot of time; there is not a notation system that works as effectively as reading music and the instruments are people's bodies. I would prefer to have drafts of music at least two weeks to a month before a collaborating musician thinks is appropriate. That amount of time would allow for me to

make adjustments to the movement or layout and it would offer the opportunity for me to ask for adjustments in the music. This is the main difference when working with musicians in a collaborative sense, the interim between the creation of the music and dance followed by the collaborative tweaking of both to work smoothly together. In my experience, when a musician is providing prerecorded music rather than collaborating on a shared vision, the timeline is shorter. The collaborative give and take was not as present in this body of work as my previous experiences with these composers. I am not disappointed in what they created but I do think some of the process and performance could have been improved or enhanced, on both parts of the music and dance.

Audience

I viewed the rehearsals and performance in the park from many perspectives within the process as choreographer, collaborator, and director, and as a spectator outside of the performance. All helped to guide framing and influencing choreographic choices. I also realized several weeks into the process that the viewers were not only going to be there on October 9, 2010 at 4pm, but at *every* rehearsal and dress rehearsal. Each day we were dancing in the park, there was an audience.

“Thursday’s rehearsal brought about the realization of more themes and audience implications. As all our rehearsals have been at Alton Baker Park and we are rehearsing at a consistent time and place, we are starting to attract the attention of regular park patrons. I end up having a conversation with a park patron at every rehearsal (four days a week). Usually this takes place when I am standing alone, waiting or watching the dancers going through what we have set thus far. I am easily approachable since I am alone. I also draw attention since I am lugging around this suitcase full of fabric and water bottles.

I am also watching the dancers, so others follow my gaze and end up asking me questions then. Either way, the conversation involves me spreading information about this project. I have printed flyers so I can send the inquiring home with solid information. Maybe they will come to the performance, maybe not. Either way, they already made contact with dance happening in the public sphere. This dance was intriguing enough for them to inquire and our group is so friendly that most people walk away smiling or laughing. I have videos of people who are truly just passing by that interact with us in that moment. Even though those people may not know what we are doing or why, we all became a part of each other's experience. We are all changed, maybe insignificantly, but changed nonetheless.

One young man in his twenties came up to us at the end of our rehearsal and said, 'I have seen you all out here several times now, always at the same time, and I was wondering, what are you doing?' I replied, 'well, let me give you a flyer.' As I went to my suitcase to get it, the group of dancers burst out in spontaneous cheers and clapped for him. They had noticed him watching and when he asked about it, their spontaneous and unified applause was amazing and heart warming. The dancers were applauding him for asking, for watching, and for inquiring. Their unified joy *had* to speak to him as a positive interaction.

What I did learn though, is that I need to introduce myself and ask the inquiring of their names. Create connection at the moment of contact. I want to ensure that the spectators are given an invitation that lets them know we want them there, we want to know them, that their presence is connected our presence, and that awareness is the key to understanding and knowing each other. Our dancing brought us together, which brought us together with our surrounding community." (Ernst August 23, 2010).

What is next? Humanity. We can connect to others through empathy and understanding. This understanding spawns from communication. We must listen to each other to see each other. Respect. Reciprocal support provides mutual benefit. We can work together so we can play together if we keep in mind humanity, respect, and reciprocity. In this thinking we will be reminded of joy, forgiveness, understanding, and

love. This is a message inspired by Anne Bogart - she reminds me to spread a message of love and light.

However, the audience was comprised of a variety of people coming from any number of circumstances and ideologies about life and not every encounter was positive. Until the musicians began rehearsing with the dancers, many people gave the dancing women inquisitive and even skeptical looks. We rehearsed for six weeks before the musicians joined us. Once the musicians came to the rehearsals, the positive reactions from almost *every* passerby commenting on the music and saying “thank you for the music” made me realize that the previous weeks had not been filled with thanks, but strange looks. Perhaps the reason is that modern dance is not necessarily a part of the common experience for the general population and seeing women’s bodies moving in a public space did not bring delight at free art in the park but merely confused onlookers.

During our ritual warm-up in the circle, we experienced many outbursts from men passing by. Generally the shouts were antagonistic in nature, based on lewd subjects pertaining to our bodies. Although there was a “boot camp” exercise group, consisting mainly of women, in the park the hour before our rehearsal began, somehow our yoga and Pilates-based warm-up attracted the eyes of men in a way that prompted sexual commentary.

On many dark evenings toward the end of rehearsals, our group of women kept a sharp eye for strange men lingering in the shadows. We had to keep a sort of vigilante atmosphere about us to fend off any possible attempts against us. One particularly dark evening we rehearsed the pond section, “The Farewell,” on the bridge because of the

number of lights so I could see all the dancers moving in unison. Afterward, as I spoke to the dancers, who were sitting on a small ledge with only their feet actually on the pathway, a BMX biker rode close to the dancers' feet and attempted to hit them with his bike. It was in those moments that I found it difficult to maintain my vision of changing the world through dance as visions of retaliation flashed through my mind.

Navigating both positive and negative incoming messages in words, body language, and actions were difficult as reactions changed throughout the process. Once our rehearsals were seen as established by the regulars of the park, our reoccurring appearances became a welcome experience with "hellos" and positive commentary about our progress. The relationship between the dancers and audience (at any rehearsal or at the culminating performance) had to be groomed. Due to the influx of sexual commentary, we had to purposefully make eye contact with passersby and invite them into the dance despite their quizzical looks. Soon enough the dancers began to speak of the personal exchanges they had with park patrons as they danced. This directly affected the relationships the dancers had with each other. The sequence of events went as follows: dancers in the park, inquisitive or aggressive park patrons, dancers feeling vulnerable, dancers reaching out to the park patrons, positive feedback from the patrons to the dancers, and finally enhanced awareness of the surrounding environment. The quiet conversation between bodies created a welcoming atmosphere that drew the audience in and opened the dancers to all interactions.

Watching the culminating performance and moving with the rest of the audience was an exciting experience for me compared to the nightly rehearsals where the audience

mostly consisted of passersby. Initially, I felt the timidity of the crowd as they moved down the bridge, for the most part staying out of the dancers' way. However, as soon as they realized that they would have to move somewhat assertively in order to see the dancing, the overall energy changed. Audience members who had been far away, were suddenly within an arm's-reach from the dancers. As the dancers moved from the stairs to the tree, the boundary between performance space and audience space had vanished. The dancers were intermixing with the audience and even I, who knew where everyone should be, lost sight of a few dancers. This was the biggest shift in energy in the entire performance and it was at the tree.

During the section "We Work and Play Together," as the dancers rooted into the tree and the audience stood not even six feet away, a hush and stillness came over everyone. When the dancers suddenly burst away from the tree shouting, "here we come!" the inner quiet was shattered and replaced with playfulness and a childlike joy. As the dancers ran off to the next structure, the audience quickly surged forward, surrounding the dancers, and suddenly paused, leaving just enough space for the dancers. This flocking mentality truly surprised me. It was as if the audience had been choreographed or were a planned part of the performance. This rush enlivened the audience and I felt their energy pouring out to the dancers. Maybe I am superimposing my hopes for the audience to become engaged with the park through the performance, but it was so clear: the dancers' joy infected everyone.

Process

This process began as a site-specific, collaborative, dance performance for Alton Baker Park that would generate accessibility to dance and thus, change the world.

Realizing that I cannot change the world in one grand gesture, I began with trying to impact the lives of the participating artists in a meaningful way. Inherent in community-building is the discovery of similarities amongst diverse groups of people, even if all are the same age, race, gender, class, or religion. Regardless of social identifiers, we are all so very different, especially when it comes to creative work. I knew that I wanted to work with a group of people collaboratively.

As I began collaborating, I realized that it is difficult to share a collaboration 50-50. At some point, I found that I had to just make a decision to keep the process moving forward. I attempted to keep input from others in mind when making decisions and when I did this, the decision was well received. Ultimately, I was the leader of this project and held the bulk of the power and responsibility, whether or not that was my intention. I desired democracy for this project, but did not come to that understanding until upon reflection. I simply happened to work in a democratic fashion: asking for and giving weight to all participants' input, allowing for an open forum for discussions, and making the final decision based on what would be best for all. This has led me toward researching democratic experiences through dance and looking into leadership theory. The process does not begin or end within the timeframe of this project, but rather it reaches into all aspects of my life, moving me forward.

Journaling and Research

Journaling immediately following rehearsals throughout the project kept me aware of common currents that were rising to the surface in my thoughts and in rehearsals in relation to my research goals. As I read during the day, I was able to directly apply new ideas to the nightly rehearsals. Clearly translating theory into practice was the most difficult aspect of this project. I could apply easily some ideas while with others; I struggled to bring them into practical existence. However, what initially existed in my mind eventually developed into something I could see: a living, breathing being, an entity comprised of dancers, composers, musicians, concrete, animals, weather, books, and conversations. This being constantly changed, morphing identity and shape with every passing minute; it existed in space and time and it was fleeting. As I glimpsed manifestations of my ideas in the moments that eventually became the cumulative performance, other factors began to interject themselves through conversations with park patrons.

“Last night’s rehearsal was super productive. We ran all that we have set and created a middle section to the stairs. Keeping in mind the idea of creating connections to the community during rehearsals: I met some nice folks while watching the first run-through. A family of three was riding bikes past and noticed me standing on a park bench with a giant suitcase looking up at the bridge and they stopped to watch the dancers. The family responded positively to what I told them about the project and I gave them a flyer. Rick, the dad, said, ‘You know, I was born and raised in Eugene and I’ve never seen anything like this before, and yet, it is *so* Eugene – its perfect!’ This is one confirmation that this project is working *with* this community.

I have found in my research that many public performances gain attention and make their work by interrupting, surprising, stopping, shocking, or blocking the normal setting of their site. By doing so, this is aggressive and does not work with, but against, the community in

order to make their point. In *Radical Street Performance* by Jan Cohen-Cruz, even the most passive acts like the Madres in Argentina are acts of resistance through interruption. I am starting to think that what this project aims to do is slightly different, acts of unity through interruption. I am creating a sort of lead-by-example situation; working in harmony with each other toward a common goal while keeping autonomy of the self, allowing those involved to be supported by the group and flourish and staying aware of the surrounding community,” (Ernst August 24, 2010).

I often read excerpts from my research to my dancers at rehearsals. We were all moved by the ideas from Anne Bogart’s *and then, you act*. We would discuss the inherent meanings of the excerpts in relation to our work. Dancers are such multi-talented people. I was asking them to commit a large chunk of time to this project, which also meant they would need to work well with others, work hard, get dirty in the park, synthesize research excerpts, create collaboratively, dance exquisitely, and perform from their hearts. I found that by including them in my research, they could make informed and very thoughtful decisions. Often times, their comments to me profoundly changed the focus of our work. They reminded me to see the space, to make connections, and to be gracious. Their hard work did not always produce what I was expecting, but in a collaboration you have to see past your own ideas and open up to the possibilities.

The presentation of new ideas concerning the actualization of this project pushed me to compare my intentions with the collaborative possibilities and outcomes. I considered the multitudes of choices that I could make during the process and in reflection, what I would have chosen to do differently. After the culminating performance, I continued to research collaborations and site-specific works in relation to community building and I began to notice areas of this project that I would approach

differently if I were given the chance to do it again. I found that because I learned more from interactions with the dancers, that I would have liked to extend the collaboration with the dancers to encompass the entire production, rather than only one section. That being noted, I would also minimize the scope of the project by reducing the amount of sections involved in order to more effectively collaborate in the amount of time allocated. I felt that the contributions from the dancers were pivotal to the work and to my understanding of the implications of site-specific work, collaborations, and community building. Had I allowed more time for our collaboration, I think we could have gone deeper and explored our understanding of working more harmoniously as individuals within a group. The addition of a full collaboration with the group of dancers would have given their voices more weight in the conceptualization of and outcome of *Merge*. The process of working together toward a common goal, guided by common values, in complete collaboration, in a longer time period, would have shifted the dynamic capacity of art making and community building. The amount of time we had together to create could have amplified the outcomes of the art and research both intrinsically and extrinsically, making for deeper and more profound experiences for all involved.

In addition to desiring more collaboration with the dancers in the project, I would also consider involving the community of Eugene in a more fundamental way. Petersen Barn Community Center became a contact during the last month of the project as their tents were offered for our use. The Petersen Barn offers Youth, Family, and Senior activities and would be a great place to develop a relationship between dance and the greater community of Eugene (Petersen Barn Facebook, accessed May 4, 2011). By

opening up the methods of participation for people other than the dancers, there would be a chance for a deeper relationship between the general public of Eugene and dance. This would have also increased the depth of the relationship of the general public to the site.

I would also consider having only one composer to scale down the number of layers that were involved when working with several composers on one project. In conjunction with more collaborative endeavors with the dancers and the community of Eugene, it might be better for one invested composer to tie together the sounds for many groups of people to create a cohesive production. It was difficult to work with the group of musicians, simply due to the difficulty in coordinating scheduling. I would pare down the number of musicians involved, which would hopefully create a smaller group of invested musicians. If the musicians felt that they were more involved with the process, a general sense of community would have been fostered beyond the actual outcome of *Merge*. There are many aspects of the process and outcome of *Merge* that brought me to these ideas of what I would change, so without the events that took place August – October 2010, I would not be at the understanding I am now. However, hindsight has allowed me to see what aspects could have been enhanced in order to further the focus on the purposes of this study.

Final Summary

About a month before the final performance, attempting to layout the storyline of *Merge* I wrote:

“I experienced revelations concerning all aspects of the project I had not realized before. The storyline we are working with is this: During

“Finding Community” they all begin in isolation/alone. The journey across the bridge is a transition from isolation to community. The community can only exist from a gathering of individuals coming together to recognize shared values and to embody those values by acting them out in a shared system of reciprocity. The values are at the center of the group, offering multiple entry points into participation within and an understanding of how and what you attribute to the group. Although all individuals do not acclimate to this type of system effortlessly and have to deal with personal imbalances, they can only do so with the support of the community. To be able to move forward, we must do so together.

During “We Work and Play Together,” the newly balanced group, with established common values as the bonding agent, journeys forth into the world to discover the possibilities of what has been provided. While exploring the surroundings, the group is also discovering themselves, each other, and all the myriad relationships of which they are a part. This time is mixed with play and joy. There is also reverence and stillness, a quiet time to breathe and take in the world. Momentum builds as knowledge and understanding begins to coalesce. “The Awakening” is when the community wakes up to a new perspective, a new understanding of reality, another way of knowing. This awakening is of the body, mind, and soul. They realize that they have been numb to the world, unfeeling, blind, and closed off. As they have experienced the community, their role as individuals, and as people together, they also begin to recognize in unison, the understanding that they are each and all in relationships with everything around them. This new perspective reinstates the values of the community in a new way. They begin a new journey. This journey is going to be an expansion of understanding and the group.

“The Farewell” is a time that they reflect on their discoveries, experiences, and relationships built during their time in this community and celebrate the journey as it comes to a close for *this* community. Now they know they must continue to honor their shared values by opening the door for others to experience it for themselves. This shared experience that leads to a shared vision of the future, the new perspective, becomes. It does so because it is lived,” (Ernst September 8, 2010).

Rolling through this storyline are the emergent themes of this project. By focusing on community-building for the artists, a new understanding of community

surfaced. Included in community are *shared* values, goals, and work. Noting that work plays a large role is essential. Virtually nothing of worth has ever been created without the work of a community. Even lone artists were impacted by their experiences and their opportunities around them. The realization that truly and literally, we are all affected and we are all connected is the underlying current. No one exists in a vacuum. All of our work is shared in some form or another.

Beyond creative work, and work in general, the real take home message for me was the impact we each have. Every interaction with other human beings *directly* affects the other human beings. Every action or inaction that we take, affects the world around us, reaching as far as large ecological systems and as close as our own bodies and minds. Understanding *impact* on others, taking responsibility for this, is essential. Taking this message to heart, I understand that this project may play a part in saving the world. Through constant right-minded thoughts and actions/inactions, I *am* affecting everything around me. The choices I make as a person creates a chain-reaction; every interaction I have affects others, resulting in the continuing effect on future interactions. As Ghandi said, “Be the change you wish to see in the world.”

APPENDIX A

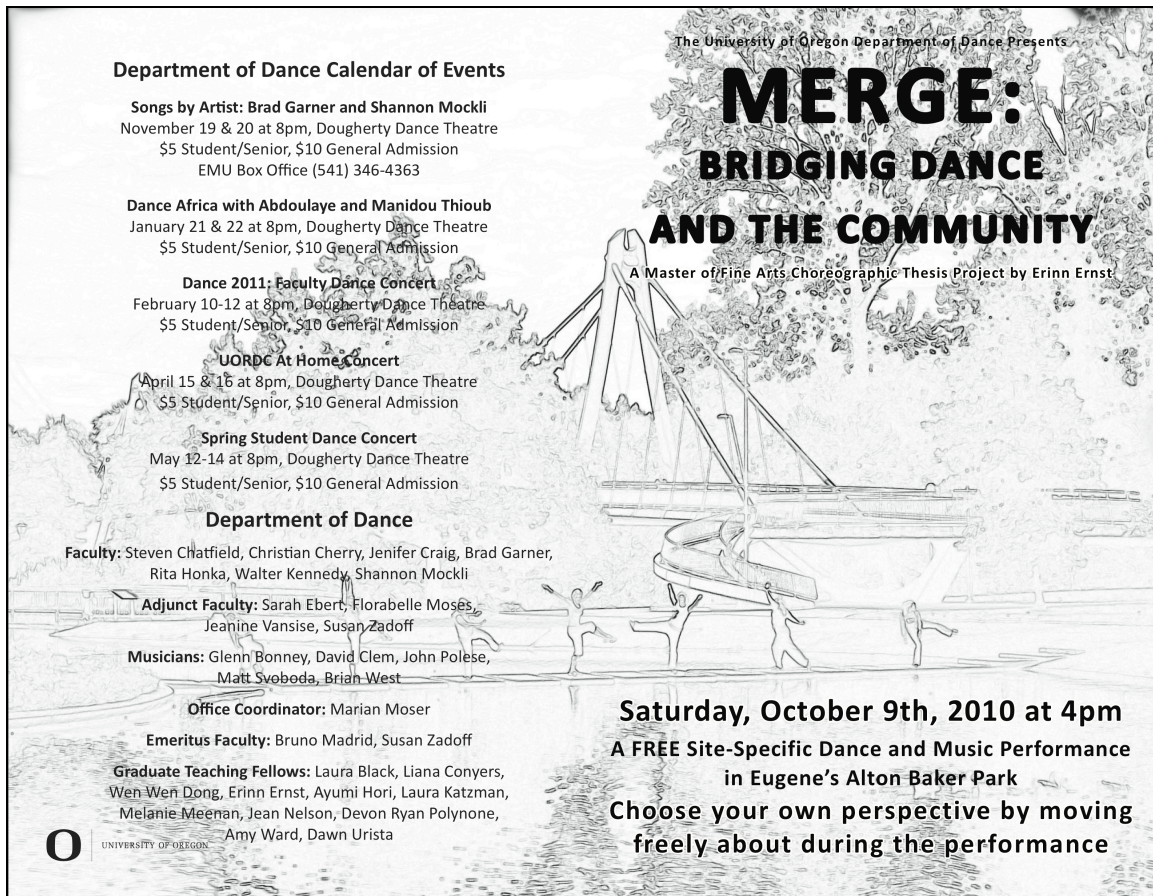
BUDGET FOR ALTON-BAKER PARK SITE-SPECIFIC

	Projected Cost	Actual Cost
Permits for Alton Baker Park	\$75-300	\$45 for 3 permits from Eugene Parks and Open Space for August (\$10), September (\$10), and October (\$25) 2010
Costumes	\$560-700	\$240.70 Purchase at Target for 9 dresses (8 at \$15, 1 at \$10.50) 10 pairs shoes (at \$10 each), & 10 inserts for shoes (\$10.20) \$4.99 Purchase at JoAnne's for vinyl straps
Publicity		
Posters	\$1/poster = \$100	\$100.09 (for 100 color posters)
Programs	\$1/program = \$200	200 Single sheets, black and white
Composer Honorarium	\$50/composer = \$200	\$100 to David Horton, \$50 to Simon Hutchinson, and \$50 to Mark Knipple
Videographer	\$500	Multi-camera video documentation by Vanguard Media of Eugene, OR
Photographer Honorarium	\$100	Documentation via digital camera by Nicci Schaefer
Miscellaneous	\$100	\$33.10 Signs and banners for Information Table \$29.00 (\$1 per yard) 29 yards of rehearsal fabric \$150 1 roll of vinyl with foam backing for 'the blanket' in "The Awakening"

Donations		<p>\$20 Purchase at Staples for 4 document stands</p> <p>\$40.00 Action Rent-All rental of bullhorn for Dress Rehearsal and Culminating Performance</p> <p>+ \$61.20 from Culminating Performance</p>
Grand Total =	\$1,545 - \$2,300	\$1,401.68

APPENDIX B

MERGE PROGRAM COPY



The University of Oregon Department of Dance Presents

MERGE: BRIDGING DANCE AND THE COMMUNITY

A Master of Fine Arts Choreographic Thesis Project by Erinn Ernst

Department of Dance Calendar of Events

Songs by Artist: Brad Garner and Shannon Mockli
November 19 & 20 at 8pm, Dougherty Dance Theatre
\$5 Student/Senior, \$10 General Admission
EMU Box Office (541) 346-4363

Dance Africa with Abdoulaye and Manidou Thioub
January 21 & 22 at 8pm, Dougherty Dance Theatre
\$5 Student/Senior, \$10 General Admission

Dance 2011: Faculty Dance Concert
February 10-12 at 8pm, Dougherty Dance Theatre
\$5 Student/Senior, \$10 General Admission

UORDC At Home Concert
April 15 & 16 at 8pm, Dougherty Dance Theatre
\$5 Student/Senior, \$10 General Admission

Spring Student Dance Concert
May 12-14 at 8pm, Dougherty Dance Theatre
\$5 Student/Senior, \$10 General Admission

Department of Dance

Faculty: Steven Chatfield, Christian Cherry, Jenifer Craig, Brad Garner, Rita Honka, Walter Kennedy, Shannon Mockli

Adjunct Faculty: Sarah Ebert, Florabelle Moses, Jeanine Vansise, Susan Zadoff

Musicians: Glenn Bonney, David Clem, John Polese, Matt Svoboda, Brian West

Office Coordinator: Marian Moser

Emeritus Faculty: Bruno Madrid, Susan Zadoff

Graduate Teaching Fellows: Laura Black, Liana Conyers, Wen Wen Dong, Erinn Ernst, Ayumi Hori, Laura Katzman, Melanie Meenan, Jean Nelson, Devon Ryan Polynone, Amy Ward, Dawn Urista

Saturday, October 9th, 2010 at 4pm
A FREE Site-Specific Dance and Music Performance
in Eugene's Alton Baker Park
Choose your own perspective by moving freely about during the performance

O UNIVERSITY OF OREGON

Welcome to

MERGE: Bridging Dance and the Community

This site-specific, collaborative, community-based project had original intentions to save the world through music and dance. Although that is difficult to judge, we hope that this brings joy into your experience with Alton Baker Park (ABP). It is our honor to present our art to you and we hope that you receive this as a gift. This is our opportunity to share with you the experience of engagement with ABP, community, and live music and dance. Thank you for witnessing with us the abstract expression of connecting, learning, growing, and finally, venturing out to share in enlightenment and joy with others.

APPRECIATION

Without the generous support of the University of Oregon Department of Dance, specifically my committee; Jenifer Craig (Chair), Christian Cherry, and Walter Kennedy, and Office Coordinator Marian Moser, this project would not have been made possible.

Thank you all very much from the bottom of my appreciative heart.

Thank you to the City of Eugene Parks and Open Space for providing quality and gracious service that positively supports the community of Eugene.

To the Dancers/The Flock: Thank you for your commitment, energy, honesty, patience, and love during this process. Without your ideas and support, this project would be lifeless. You are strong, beautiful, and inspirational creative beings and I have been so blessed to work with each of you.

To the Collaborators: You have provided the entry point for all of us to enter into this artwork. Your contributions have been true to our shared visions and I am grateful for your creative genius.

To the grads past and present: From you I have learned and am learning the most potent life lessons which I will carry with me always.

To my family and friends: You are all encapsulated somewhere inside this work. You have inspired me to be who I am and push me to be who I hope to be. Thank you and I love you.

To my Justin: You, are of course, the only reason any of this exists. Our conversations have brought me to this place of understanding, which I can now share with others. I have learned that together, we will begin to make this world a better place. Thank you and I love you.

Finding Community

Program

Choreography: Erinn Ernst

Collaborating Composer: Mark Knippel

Dancers: Jenny Allen, Liana Conyers, Jenell Davis, Ivy Farrell, Alyssa Gentry, Siobhan 'Ruby' McConnell, Rachel Slaughter, Julia Vickers, Anna Waller, Amy Ward (The Flock)

Musicians: Mark Knippel, Rebecca Olason, Dustin Shilling, Evan Stewart, Sean Turner

Costumes: Erinn Ernst and Dancers

We Work and Play Together

Choreography: Collaboration between Erinn Ernst and Dancers

Collaborating Composer: David C. Horton

Dancers: The Flock

Musician: Sarah Ogmundson

The Awakening

Choreography: Erinn Ernst

Collaborating Composer: David C. Horton

Dancers: Jenny Allen, Jenell Davis, Ivy Farrell, Alyssa Gentry, Siobhan 'Ruby' McConnell, Rachel Slaughter, Julia Vickers, Anna Waller, Amy Ward

Musicians: Sarah Ogmundson, Ralph Stricker-Chapman

Orator: Liana Conyers

The Farewell

Choreography: Erinn Ernst

Collaborating Composer: Simon Hutchinson

Dancers: The Flock

Musicians: Mark Knippel, Rebecca Olason, Dustin Shilling, Evan Stewart, Sean Turner

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