EMBODIED SPECTACLE: AN EXPLORATION OF THREE-DIMENSIONAL PERFORMANCE

by

Kathryn Patricia Sailer

A thesis submitted to the faculty of
The University of Utah
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts

Department of Modern Dance

The University of Utah

May 2012

The University of Utah Graduate School

STATEMENT OF THESIS APPROVAL

The thesis of **Kathryn Patricia Sailer**

has been approved by the following supervisory committee members:

Pamela Geber Handman	, Chair	**March 8, 2012** Date Approved
Satu Hummasti	, Member	**March 8, 2012** Date Approved
Jon Scoville	, Member	**March 8, 2012** Date Approved

and by **Stephen Koester**, Chair of the Department of **Modern Dance**

and by Charles A. Wight, Dean of The Graduate School.

ABSTRACT

This thesis chronicles a theoretical and creative journey through dance as a three-dimensional performance environment. I follow in the footsteps of architectural historians and psychologists as I propose that the performance experience is affected by its structural frame. My desire to create a performance experience which is three-dimensional, unique, and unpredictable is contextualized by a study of 20th century choreographers. The interactive performance landscape becomes a metaphor for community engagement and a symbol for diverse perspectives, as audience-participants enter into the embodied spectacle of my thesis work, *I believe in outer space.*

For all my parents

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....iii

PREFACE.....vii

INTRODUCTION.....1

Overview.....1
Research Questions.....1
The Creative Journey.....4

STRUCTURES.....8

Introduction.....8
Theater Designs.....9

SPECTATORSHIP AND PERFORMANCE.....15

Introduction.....15
The Shape of Experience.....15
Performance Experiences.....19

LINEAGES.....22

Introduction.....22
Fokine's Manifesto.....23
Modern Dance Pioneers.....25
Merce Cunningham.....26
Transformations.....28

THE CREATIVE PROCESS.....32

Introduction.....32
A Note on Audience Participation.....33
The Performance.....34
Walking into the Dark.....35
The Voice.....37
Closing The Space.....43
Reflections on the Creative Process.....44

Audience Feedback.....47
Conclusion.....49

CONCLUSION.....50

Sensual Landscapes.....51
Preserving Communities.....52

REFERENCES.....56

PREFACE

> “How curious it is then that, even though we see 'vanishing point' perspective in phenomenal nature, the notion of rendering it in pictures is not inherent.”
>
> --Sam Edgerton, Art Historian

I am interested in choreography as a three-dimensional art form. What does that mean? Isn't it always three-dimensional, by the nature of our three-dimensional world, and our three-dimensional bodies? We have height, width and depth. So does the stage. And yet, we reject the roundness that comes with three-dimensional viewings. We flatten our world, presenting two-dimensional versions as a replacement to the real thing. As Edgerton suggests, even talented visual artists must be trained to represent three-dimensional “linear perspective” on the page. For centuries, artists used their eyes and their instincts to capture forms that may have had symbolic truth. A table would be drawn from the side, but the table's contents were important and so they would all be pictured, no matter how impossible that would be from the painter's perspective. The table would simply be made larger, and the far end would be tilted up, and the objects would float above the table at unrealistic angles (p. 5).

I became curious, because as Edgerton noted, our experience of the natural world is in three dimensions. Yet, I often experience dance as two-dimensional. In class, we frequently practice dancing in front of a mirror, as if that wide, flat tableau could tell us what we need to know about our three-dimensional bodies. Often, we dance as if front

were the most important direction, as if roundness was an avoidable nuisance displayed by our wayward bodies. And then we dance on a proscenium stage, simply replacing the mirror with the audience as if they will see exactly what we saw when we were dancing alone, looking at ourselves.

For dancers, exposing ourselves three-dimensionally means that we cannot control what the audience will see. They may see us dancing from the back, and we do not know what we look like from the back, because we have never seen ourselves from that angle. If we give the audience control over the angle of their perspective, it may mean that we give up control over our own image. We no longer know how they will see us, and as performers, our very identity is attached to the act of "being seen." If we are seen in unpredictable ways, then do we become unpredictable beings, unknown even to ourselves? For a performer, wrestling with the question of audience perspective can quickly become complicated with ideas of power, control and identity.

For centuries, the world was represented two-dimensionally in the work of visual artists. In Western society, the Earth was believed to be wide and flat, with great cliffs on the edge that demarcated the end of the safe, two-dimensional world. Even as the hanging orbs of the sun and moon circled around, appearing again and again in the east, the authorities insisted that the Earth was a thin, flat pancake, and the center of all attention. In essence, they wanted to believe that the way that they saw their world was the only way that it could be seen. Their own image was the only truth. In 15th century Europe, the trip toward three-dimensional perspective began with the desire to glorify this singular truth, but it ended with a colossal shift of power and identity.

At its discovery, linear perspective was seen as a way for mere humans to become

closer to God. In Christian Europe in the Middle Ages, faith was tested by the new influences coming in from previously unknown parts of the world. New discoveries were being made in the sciences that suggested that Christian Europe was not the center of the earth-orbiting universe that it was thought to be. Three-dimensional perspective, allowing artists to represent important religious events with a new sense of spectacular tactility, could provide an invigorating energy to an uncertain society (p. 7). As we shall see, it eventually had the opposite effect, supporting the advances of sciences rather than religion.

I believe that a study of the "vanishing point" allowed a faith-focused society to become more familiar with, and more appreciative of, the human perspective. Rather than represent the world in the way that they had been told that God arranged it, artists began to look at the world with a more personal perspective. To use the previous example, instead of painting a table with all its symbolic objects visible, honoring faith with their presence, artists began to ask themselves, "What do *I* see when I look at the world?" This shift from a faith-based to a human-centered portrayal would have drastic results.

This shift begins with the story of the astronomer Galileo Galilei (1564-1642). Though he became one of the greatest scientists of Western history, he began as an art student. He studied linear perspective, which had grown in technique during a century of usage. Previously, the perspective formula had been employed to represent an illusory "back space," such as a window opening onto a magical field that existed just beyond the reaches of the real world. In time, painters introduced the forward projection, utilizing shadows to suggest objects thrusting forward toward the audience out of the picture. Galileo Galilei was a master draftsman, and he used this knowledge to make one of the

most startling discoveries of Renaissance science. Using Euclid's theories, he was one of several to create a telescope, or “perspective tube” at this time. He was the only one, however, to view the moon, with all of its “strange spottednesse [sic],” and to realize that those colors were the shadows from forward projections. In essence, he discovered that the moon was not an abstract “Eternal pearl” of the Heavens, as it was believed, but in fact a craggy mess, “a most imperfect sphere, marred and crinkled just like the lowly earth” (p. 10). This catalyzed an era of artistic and scientific discovery. Rather than accept the perfection of divine order, perspective was used to discover the beautiful imperfections of the physical world.

Another shift had occurred when sculptor Andrea del Verrocchio (1435-88) unveiled a sculpture for one of the most important religious shrines, Santa Maria del Fiore in Florence. In it, Saint Thomas the Apostle reaches out to touch the wound of the resurrected Jesus. Jesus parts his garment like a curtain to reveal the wound. According to Edgerton, cultural realities have shifted. No longer is it sufficient to represent the surreal magic of religious imagery. Even a miracle must be represented in mundane three-dimensional space, and even a devoted follower must reach out, to touch, to know the truth through feeling it with his own hand.

The collaborative artistic and scientific developments of this time period supported a cultural shift towards science and phenomenology, and away from faith. Three-dimensional perspective, which assisted in the building of telescopes and helped astronomers understand the heavens, ushered in a new era of knowledge-seeking and humility. Discoveries like Galileo's precipitated an era of scientific inquiry, leading humanity toward an understanding that the Earth is a round globe, one among many such

planets, in a solar system that orbits the sun. With the acknowledgment that the universe did not orbit Italy, a new sense of the world began to emerge. A new image of the Earth, and our place in the universe, began to change our identity. Other cultures and other religions were seen to exist, and multiple perspectives were beginning to be heard.

It is difficult to realize that one's own voice is not the only voice. On the other side of the world, there are different people, with different views that may cause us to question our own beliefs. The process of discovery that accompanied linear perspective has continued, with all of the world's people wrestling with the loss of control that comes with the loss of a singular narrative.

In my own work, I actively seek the rewards of this loss. In the past, there have been times when two-dimensional thinking was employed in order to preserve the perfection of an idea, or an image of the world. Like all cultures, European Christians in the Middle Ages wanted to hold on to their own version of events: a story that gave them an identity and a way of understanding the world. Allowing the viewer to see dance in three dimensions has become, for me, a metaphor for diverse perspectives. When choreography is seen from every angle, the control of a singular perspective is lost, but multiple perspectives that represent the true diversity of humanity may be attained. I created this thesis project with the idea that a three-dimensional performance would help us to recognize our individualities, and share in our imperfections.

Although I am not religious, I respect the power of the stories that we tell ourselves, to know ourselves, and to understand the world. However, I believe that one creation story is not enough to fill everyone's dreams. In the following document, I will address the way that I believe three-dimensional performance experiences can act as a

container for multiple stories at once, giving over control of meaning and perspective to the active participants, and allowing individual identities to flourish within a fluid community.

INTRODUCTION

> "The total stage picture was often likened to a moving painting framed by the proscenium. The choreographer played the role of the painter, selecting what the viewer saw and directing his focus to different performers or areas of the stage."
>
> --Susan Au, dance historian, on the performance experience in the early 20th century

Overview

This thesis documents creative and theoretical research in support of three-dimensional dance choreography. In December 2011, I premiered an evening-length piece, entitled *I believe in outer space*, which explored the full immersion of dancers and audience members into a three-dimensional, interactive landscape. A reflection on the creative process for this work will be contextualized by a discussion of spectatorship and performance theory, as well as an investigation into the history of performance venues and contemporary dance pioneers.

Research Questions

What is three-dimensional choreography? This question is both simple and complex. The simple answer is that I use this term to refer to choreography that will be performed in a venue that allows audience members to view a work from all angles. The performance space becomes a three-dimensional landscape, inhabited by the dancers and

the audience members together. This differs from choreography in-the-round, in which audience members may surround the performance space on all sides, viewing the piece from the outside as the dance happens in the center (Minton, 1986). My definition also differs from the ideas behind the postmodern tradition of installation art. To *install* art into an environment, perhaps a gallery or a warehouse, implies that the original space was empty or neutral, and that the art has filled the space with new information (Suderberg 2000). However, installation art is not always related to the choreography of movement. The space of the performance may be experienced three-dimensionally by a fluid flow of audience members, but the material of the performance may not be body-related. Thus, I have chosen the term three-dimensional choreography, as a way to describe the intersection of these two well-known performance styles.

What if the experience of a dance performance was like the experience of a life: three-dimensional, unique and unpredictable? This metaphor drove my research from the beginning. I am interested in artistic priorities that match life priorities. I believe that art is practice for life, in that we create for ourselves what we want for the world.

I value three-dimensionality, because it describes the literal texture and sculpture of our physical world, but also because it implies a multiplicity of perspectives, beyond the two-dimensional narrative of black versus white, good versus evil. Additionally, in a three-dimensional performance, there is no curtain, and no way to hide the rough edges or unfinished bits that exist just offstage from a lavish production. At times, this level of exposure can be vulnerable for the dancers as well as the production crew. This intimacy speaks to a sense of fallibility in three-dimensional performance. It will happen differently than what we expected, every time, and we are surprised just as the audience

is surprised.

I value uniqueness because I do not know my audience. They may think, feel, believe, and act differently than I do. Although I have made artistic work that guides audience members into *my* world, in this project I am interested in giving up that control. I want their unique perspective to guide their experience. Who am I to tell individual audience members what to look at, what to see? In conventional dance performances, in which everyone sees the same dance, everyone will be seeing it differently. I want to allow this uniqueness to come into the open, to become part of the dance.

Finally, I value unpredictability in art because it exists in life. I think it is important to challenge our capacity for unpredictability, because the world is uncertain and complex. We don't know where we are heading, and that can be scary. In many instances we seek to ease that pain with contrived simplification or surety. We tell bedtime stories in which good always vanquishes evil. We are sold social agendas that promise to answer complex problems with sound-byte solutions. We need to raise our tolerance for unpredictability and complexity, and art is a good place to begin. In designing performance experiences that ask the audience to view a piece from many angles, and participate in unforeseen ways, we can practice loving the unpredictable bumpiness of our world.

What happens when each audience member can choose to experience a piece from their own, unique, perspective? This question begins to expose the complexities inherent in the first question. As a choreographer, I am both excited by, and frightened of, opening the stage to three-dimensional viewpoints. It is a challenge to make choreography that is interesting from one front, and master choreographers spend many

years honing the craft of dance-making for the frontally-focused proscenium stage. It is a very different, and unfamiliar, set of skills needed for the craft of dance-making for the three-dimensional world.

I began this project with the goal of making choreography that is interesting from every angle, and that honors the idea of multiple perspectives and individual choice. I had no idea what would happen when I invited so much unpredictability into my process.

Who has control in the performance experience? From the beginning, I was curious how audience members would choose to interact with my work. I wondered whether they would hide in the corner, or run around shouting. Could they ruin everything I planned for them? This question became part of my self-reflection during the creative process. I tracked my response to the relinquishing of a director's control, and steadfastly refused to compromise my experiment. Although I crafted the environment for the audience members, I allowed them to make every decision about their experience of it. The dance was their journey, and each community of audience members created something entirely different.

The Creative Journey

The idea for this thesis began just as I was entering the University of Utah as a graduate student in Modern Dance. I had choreographed a few pieces for a black box theater, set up with the audience on three sides, and felt that I had not made much use of the possibilities of the environment. Previously, I had only choreographed pieces for proscenium stages, or dance studios that were converted to mimic the proscenium stage set up. I found myself at a loss for ideas, when all the interesting shapes and formations

that comprised choreography, in my experience, would only deliver the proper effect if viewed from the front. I became inspired to address this challenge.

As I began to delve into the theoretical research that could support my topic, many academic fields made contributions to my understanding of the conventional, and the three-dimensional performance experience. In the first chapter, *Structures*, I discuss the history of the shapes of our performance spaces, and how this reflects our artistic and social values. Foucault observed that architecture has the power to "transform individuals: to act on those it shelters, to provide a hold on their conduct, to carry the effects of power right to them, to make it possible to know them, to alter them" (1995, page 190). Whether performances occur on a proscenium stage, in a black box theater, on a street corner, or in a cabaret, the space defines the role of the audience within the performance experience. The space provides the cues, the limitations, or the freedoms associated with the conventions of the experience. As a choreographer, not an architect, I seek to design the audience's experience of the performance space, not the entire building. However, this chapter provides necessary insight from the artists and architects who have influenced our performance experiences through the ages.

In the next chapter, I discuss spectatorship theories from psychology, film and theater. I use these theories to ground my own experience of anonymity and detachment while sitting in the dark seats of a proscenium theater. According to film theorists, the dark auditorium of the concert hall invites a state of passivity in the viewer (Sturken & Cartwright, 2001). The passive onlooker is encouraged to identify fully with the action on the stage, at the expense of self-awareness. I often feel that watching the choreographer's world unfold on stage is a little like an out-of-body experience: in order to enter his/her

world, I often leave my own. Although the escapism of an entertaining display can be very appealing, these priorities do not match the priorities that I want to see in the world. This chapter, entitled *Spectatorship and Performance*, addresses the way that we see art, and therefore ourselves.

In the next chapter, entitled *Lineages*, I will survey a few of the artists who chose to act outside the conventions of the traditional performance experience. Although the idea of interactive, three-dimensional performance seemed very new to me at the beginning of my research, as I looked into the history of modern dance pioneers, there have been many choreographers that revolutionized the way that we experience dance. Michel Fokine and Merce Cunningham, along with many other choreographers from the latter half of the 20th century, addressed some of the very same issues that challenge me today. It continues to excite me that as humans we are unique, yet as a species we have a common voice. Although other choreographers may be puzzled or inspired by similar ideas, the solutions that result are very different from one another. I place myself, and my work, in the context of these solutions that came before me.

Finally, in *The Creative Process*, I reflect on the challenges and rewards of my creative project. I rehearsed with eleven dancers for four months to produce a forty-five minute, interactive, three-dimensional performance. I hoped to create a community experience for the audience. By moving them to participate as individuals, my goal was to give them the freedom to enter a shared experience voluntarily. In this chapter, I will discuss my own observations, as well as the results from anonymous audience polling, collected via voluntary feedback cards after each performance.

In the conclusion, I will use my reflection to elaborate on the way that I would

like to see this research contribute to the broader art world. Prolific writer and philosopher Jeanette Winterson observed that when we spend time with art, we learn less about the art and more about ourselves (1997). I have learned a great deal about myself in the process of this creative project, and I hope that my audiences were as surprised and challenged by this piece as I was. I believe that there is more room for three-dimensionality, uniqueness, and unpredictability in our world, and I hope that this research reflects those values, magnifying their effect with each new mind they touch.

STRUCTURES

"The day came when the same red curtain no longer hid surprises."

--Peter Brook, theater historian

Introduction

Theater architecture is the frame through which we experience performance. The spaces that we design for our performance experiences can tell us much about what we expect from those experiences. Yet, "like the frame of a painting or the binding of a book, architecture is often cast as necessary yet neutral to the life within" (Dovey, 1999, p. 1). Theater architecture has evolved through the years in direct response to the needs and priorities of the artistic world. Although early theaters often allowed for ease of community participation and mass, three-dimensional viewing, this trend changed over time. From the populist theaters of Ancient Greece, to the aristocratic court ballets of the Renaissance, to the multi-use community theaters of 20th century America, the shape and design of performance venues have reflected social orders and national values.

There has always been tension between the priorities of visual realism and imagination (Baldry, 1977). Theaters tend to either be designed for the effect of illusion or the dimensionality of intimacy. Large theaters and opera houses rely on the grandness of scale and production technology to lure the audience into a state of awe. Playhouses with audience on three or four sides present drama in an in-between place of

audience/performer connectivity. There is no universal theater design that could accommodate the needs of all performances. Space shapes our performance experiences and therefore should reflect the intent of the artist. This chapter looks at the many variations of theater design in the Western world, and the role these designs have played in shaping the experience of the spectator. The experience of theater performance will be addressed in general, except in cases for which the specific example of dance performance provides additional insight.

Theater Designs

There are three common theatre designs. The evolution of these designs depended on the needs and means of people in different historical periods (Mielziner, 1970, p. 23). In ancient Greece, numerous community festivals and religious celebrations necessitated a theatre design that could accommodate large groups of informally arranged participants. A large stage with seats around three sides formed the first of the open thrust theaters (p. 25).

This open air performance space was usually situated against a hill in order to take advantage of a naturally raked audience area. The wild setting, according to Harold C. Baldry, tied the theatrical action to local realities. This gave the plot a sense of subtle legitimacy, as stage directions related directly to the countryside by which they were framed (1977). Due to this integration with the natural world, and to the fact that participants in the production were not professionals but common citizens (Wiles, 2000), these early theaters seem to support the idea of intimacy and familiarity. The common life styles and artistic expectations of the community members resulted in a familiar ritual

experience, wherein neither “the plays molded the theatre [nor] the theatre shaped the plays: both were products of the same social background” (Baldry, 1977, p. 16).

The stage space became more formalized as dramas evolved and production value gained importance. In the Roman Empire, the open thrust design was altered to include a raised stage with wings, in order to facilitate more complicated sets. The potential for illusory effects grew with technological advances. The audience and the stage were sometimes covered, and the audience was seated on one side of the stage, so that everyone could see the backdrops from the same angle (Mielziner, 1970, p. 28). This trend continued into the Middle Ages, but with the advent of popular theatre in Italy, community production were performed in plazas, with audience on all four sides (p. 34).

In French courts in the 16th century, ballets were seen from above, in great royal halls filled with noblemen and women. The dancers, who were members of the court, often traced patterns or letters into the floor in order to translate meaning to the onlookers in galleries above their heads. Elaborate costuming and long, spectacular processions were meant to impress audience members with the wealth and dignity of the court (Au, 2002).

Later in the Renaissance, the “increasingly elaborate stagecraft” paired with eventual complete enclosure of the space resulted in the proscenium design. This was a result of the gradual abstraction of theatre performances, and their removal from the natural world of daylight, air and weather (Mielziner, p. 40). The stage was now viewed through the opening of a single arch, thus deepening the space and dividing the audience from the performance (p. 44). The idea of perspective was utilized in the increasingly technically produced performances, which included flying scenery, lighting design, and

raked stages (p. 45).

Proscenium arches began to appear in Restoration era theaters in London circa 1660. Iain Mackintosh argues that because the audience continued to sit upstage of the arch, or in some cases behind the actor, the arch did not symbolize a division between the artist and the audience (1993, p. 16). This encroachment of the audience into the space of the performer was common at that time, as “the fashionable” often brought “their own stools” to sit on the stage, thus reducing the acting area “to something tiny” (p. 19). This use of the proscenium stage in such an intimate way was unique to that time.

By the eighteenth century, the actor had retreated behind the “picture frame of illusion,” due to the scenic demands of the Romantic era (p. 21). The stage became deep, with wings, and the auditorium became increasingly narrow in order to improve sight lines into the space (Mielziner, 1970, p. 48). As democracy was reintroduced to the Western world, auditoriums became larger and the side boxes that used to display princely patrons were often removed. Thus, the entire audience sat more or less directly in front of the stage (p. 52).

The 18th century was a time of political and artistic revolution. Classical forms were identified with the divine rule of the monarchy, and as kings were challenged, artistic conventions that glorified their divine powers were challenged as well. The theatre of dance was just beginning to establish itself as a form capable of encompassing the full experience of art, autonomous from the monarchic purposes of the court ballets of the Renaissance (Au, 2002). For the first time, theaters were designed in order to augment the spectator's emotional experience of the artistic event, rather than to glorify the kingly producer (Pelletier, 2006, p. 25).

Important changes took place at this time in France that reflected the priority of audience experience. According to Iain Mackintosh, the more "egalitarian" the society, the less dense the packing of the auditorium became, both in absolute numbers and the square inches allowed per person. However comfortable this may be for the tired executive sitting down for a show after a large dinner, the volatile, alive atmosphere of the theater suffered for it (1993). This change was noted even at that time, when theater owners decided to replace standing room only sections with less densely packed, pricier seated tickets. French philosopher and art critic Denis Diderot lamented seating of the *parterre*, the standing section which had previously brought uproar and commotion to the now coldly silent theater (1936, p. 216).

In the 20th century, an unprecedented number of options for performance venue were available. Isadora Duncan and Loie Fuller, two of the most celebrated dance artists of the early 20th century, made use of theater spaces in very different, but equally innovative ways. Duncan stripped the stage of its elaborate backdrops, and performed her "natural dance" in a simple, intimate setting (Reynolds, 2003, p. 19). Fuller used all of the theatrical and technological advances available to create striking displays of light and material (p. 7). Although both primarily danced on proscenium stages (though Duncan was known for her dances in nature, and in intimate residential settings as well), they used to resources of the theater to build both intimate and illusory scenes.

Thus began an era of versatility in the shape and potential of the theater space. Prosceniums remained popular, and some ancient theater shapes were revived and built. In the early 1900s, the first modern arena stages were created. They consisted of informal arrangements of chairs or bleachers on all four sides of a room (Mielziner, 1970, p. 67).

Open thrust theaters were sometimes improvised in a similar way. There are fewer examples of large theaters constructed in the first half of the 20th century America because of the Great Depression (p. 71). However, after the economy recovered, the performing arts sector became a rapidly growing phenomenon in America for the first time.

The new American spectator enjoyed the performing arts in community theaters that needed to be adaptable to many types of performances, because few communities could fully support their own theater companies. A period of dedicated public and private support ameliorated the situation. American theaters were designed as multiple-use spaces which could be adapted to the needs of the community, funded by a pooling of resources in the public and private sector (p. 52). In the 1960s, arena stages and open thrust stages were built, mirroring a trend towards intimacy over illusion in the design field. Proscenium stages were still considered the most versatile, but open stages were valued for their dimensionality and approachability (p. 79). As small community theaters became more common, nontraditional stage spaces provide "environment and ambiance" that can become "features that draw an audience to a particular theater" (Elder, 1979, p. 82).

During this time, artistic descendents of Duncan and Fuller were using theater spaces, as well as nontraditional performance venues, to create entirely new performance experiences. Specific examples of the way that contemporary masters have addressed performance space will be discussed starting on page 34. Merce Cunningham, and the Judson Church choreographers changed the rules of performance during a few short decades, and the dance world would be forever altered. Performances in informal spaces,

outside spaces, and improvised spaces would become commonplace.

Although the proscenium stage has maintained a prominent place in contemporary performance, it is by no means the only option. Across the centuries, the structures that have held our performance experiences have been constantly revised. Different types of theaters are compatible with different types of performances; there will never be an all-purpose, universal theater that suits every show (Mielziner, 1970, p. 115). For my project, it was important for me to note the many different ways that performance experiences have been designed, over the years, so that I could recognize the debt that I owe to history in this research. I began to think about how to design a space that would highlight intimate potential in dancer-audience interactions, while still retaining some of the magic of an illusory performance. In essence, a space that would showcase the magic of real life.

SPECTATORSHIP AND PERFORMANCE

> "Belief in the significance of architecture is premised on the notion that we are, for better or for worse, different people in different places...and on the conviction that it is architecture's task to render vivid to us who we might ideally be."
>
> --Alain De Botton, architect

Introduction

What is the role of the spectator in a performance experience? From the proscenium stage, to the darkened theaters of the silver screen, the performance space helps to shape our identity as spectators, and as citizens.

The Shape of Experience

Theatre historian Richard Butsch has studied the effects of the performance experience on theater and television audiences. He points to the emergence of working class theaters in the 1800s as a time when the standards of theater behavior were negotiated. The audience in such rowdy venues would stand very close to the stage and often there would be interaction and engagement between the spectators and the performers. The result of this trend was an equal and opposite reaction from those who advocated more "cultivation" in spectator behavior (2000, p. 62). Butsch supplies newspaper text from the latter part of the century as evidence of the clash between those who enjoyed robust and personal theater, and cried "good, hearty tears" about it, and

those who were “appreciative and expectant of fine points, but not irresistibly swept away” (p. 62). This tension has continued, dividing audiences into those who want to be in the thick of things and be ferociously moved, and those who would prefer to watch a spectacle from a comfortable intellectual distance. Both contexts are valuable, as long as the intention of the performer is met by the capabilities of the space in providing the desired experience.

It is the interior shape of a theatre space that frames the performance, and therefore frames the audience experience. According to Mielziner, the design of theatre space requires specific artistic experience, and a methodology that attends to the critical question of audience experience. He suggests that the key lies in the acknowledgement of audience experience as a communal rite. Just as an architect would not deign to design a cathedral without understanding and reflecting the values of the religion the cathedral represents, the architect of the theatre space must be aware of the priorities of the performing arts (p. 15).

The traditional theater space is predictably designed. The line to the glassed ticket offices, the plush lobby, the stairs that lead us up into the balcony or down into the orchestra, the creaking spring loaded chairs; these conventions are sacred. They conform to our expectations, and they illicit behaviors that are appropriate within our cultural sphere of knowledge. The space that performances occupy “deeply affects how we perceive events inside it” (Kennedy, 2009, p. 133).

In different types of theaters, the audience may have a different feeling of connection to the action taking place on stage. Dennis Kennedy suggests that the audience in a proscenium theater may feel superior and invisible to the actors. This type

of theater places two barriers between the performance and the audience, the barrier of fire (the foot lights) and the barrier of space (the orchestra pit). The performer looks small and faraway, and even though all eyes are magnetized on her, the power in the situation rests with the gaze of the voyeur (p. 135).

In a more intimate stage setting, for instance the black box theater, the experience of the audience may be different. Intimacy creates familiarity, and in a small space the spectator is aware of the confines, the other audience members which share those confines and the every move of the performers. Kennedy suggests that the spectator in this situation is forced to identify with the performers even when they are uncomfortable doing so. The performers do not always acknowledge the spectators, however, which can lend a sense of surreal helplessness to the audience experience. This tension between identification and resistance can be like an out of body experience for those whose belief has been suspended (p. 142). Although formal academic research on performance experience is not done as often in nontraditional spaces, personal experience suggests that the challenges are similar to what is discussed here. In my own research, I have found that audience members enjoy the *idea* of intimacy far more than the real thing. Although art galleries, warehouses, and public streets have become more common as performance venues, intimate spaces can place audience members and performers in uncomfortably close contact.

Proscenium stages, on the other hand, have been the focus of specific scientific research on audience experience. Behavioral scientist Richard Küller suggests that the complexity and originality of design have a profound effect on the arousal rate of the audience, which can be one measure of audience engagement with the performance

experience. For example, the audience's capacity for arousal at the start of a show is substantially higher for those who have been sitting in an ornately decorated auditorium. These audience members tend to laugh and cry more quickly in response to performance stimuli compared with those who sit in a more sparsely decorated modern auditorium. Küller proposed that lavish interiors provided audience members with a higher level of stimulation, which resulted in a heightened state of arousal upon witnessing the performance. Also in support of the familiar proscenium theater, Küller finds that affection for a familiar theater places the audience in a more available aroused state. Originality of design may support a short boost of arousal rate, but the effect of the "unusual or surprising" wears off quickly (1977, p. 175).

The reaction of the audience is not universal to any given performance, nor is it possible to generalize what the optimal reaction or experience would be for any or all performances. As Judith Lynne-Hanna notes, the intentions of performers even within the same genre of dance are varied. With different intent comes different priorities about how the space should facilitate a successful communication of that intent. She points to several examples of dance events in close quarters that result in high emotions for the viewers, and then notes that "there is more emotional distance and restraint" in larger theatrical settings (1983, p. 24). She conducted voluntary studies on the audience reception of dance performances in a proscenium theater in Washington D.C. and discovered that many people enter the theatrical space expecting to be easily entertained. When asked about their response to the dances, many were not prepared to participate in this process creatively. Lynne-Hanna suggests that "the habit of passively watching television may have carried over to the passively rather than actively watching a theater

concert and participating" (p. 100). This comparison of the proscenium stage to the screen of a television speaks to one of the major issues of audience experience.

According to some early film theorists, the "darkened theater and the conditions of watching a mirror-like screen invite the viewer to regress to a childlike state" (Sturken & Cartwright, 2001). This state of passivity encourages a full identification with the action on screen, and a temporary loss of awareness of self. Kennedy makes a similar point in relation to television and publicity, in that at this point in our culture media discourses drive all impulses. We have no way of exiting onto a plane of existence where we can rest, find our own impulses, and talk to one another about our priorities. We have been trained to passively consume, and therefore we have begun to lose the skills of embodiment and presence which are demanded by live performance (p. 153).

Not only does the screen watching habit affect our ability to connect actively with live performance, but the proscenium stage offers a poor comparison to film. The television or movie screen offers the perfect illusion of controlled architectural space. It invisibly frames what we see. It offers a wide variety of seemingly magical effects that augment what we see. The proscenium stage reminds us of the magical screen but cannot hope to produce the same level of effect. This is the major detriment of the modern theater experience. Performing bodies seem to act on a removed, flattened screen, but yet are capable of disappointingly human things. As invisible voyeurs, we feel entitled to judge and objectify the performers.

Performance Experiences

What are the options in presenting dance? Advocates of the conventional proscenium or end stage theater argue that dance is best served by unencumbered space, available side entrances, and one dimensional viewing. Anything different or original creates problems for touring companies whose choreography assumes that the above conventions will be available (Armstrong & Morgan, 1984). Clearly the largest dance companies often need the stage space, fly space, and orchestra space of the opera house. Small companies, or self-produced freelance artists cannot afford such amenities, and may prefer a more intimate space to showcase smaller scale productions. Situating the audience on all sides may be more appropriate for the content of a performance that seeks to "share [its] experience of life with an audience...so that the theatre performance can be a form of debate containing giving and taking" (Edström, 1990, p. 17). Doing anything less may imply the realm of indoctrination rather than experience to such groups.

The use of hyper intimate performance spaces, coupled with vulnerable and/or confrontational performative choices, is not a new way of engaging the invisible audience. In fact, as history has shown, there were times that the uproar of a crowded theater or the encroachment of the audience onto the actor's stage broke the supposed barrier of the fourth wall between spectator and spectacle. It is perhaps because of the advent of the more recent, more passive ways of viewing, influenced by the increasing prevalence of television and film watching, that a renewed connection between audience and action seems crucial.

Statistics suggest that after the invention of home television, the amount of time that Americans spent watching or listening to anything else declined rapidly. In fact, the

time Americans spend doing any activity outside of their homes has dropped (Butsch, p. 237). I believe that this trend toward passivity must be reversed, because it eats at the fabric of an active, participatory culture. Artists can support a more active populace by encouraging us to engage. I hope to create artistic experiences in which we use our mobile, facile bodies and minds in order to interact with an intimate environment. The future in which we all sit, in our separate homes, and engage in virtual entertainment, is not for me.

Kennedy suggests that "spectation is about more than reception" (p. 13). We have the choice to support theaters that enhance the agency of the audience, and create a relevant atmosphere for spectator engagement. It may be that this engagement will be due to familiarity and comfort. It may be due to intimacy and surreal dimensionality. There is no one way to please a multitude of audiences. However, I believe that the audience must be enticed back into the welcoming arms of the communal theater experience.

In order to create a community of individuals, capable of bravely stepping out into the complex world, the art world must contribute to a practice of active engagement. The study of theater design and the performance experience is one crucial element in the proposal of this project. The next step, as I understand it, is to create art work that invites this worldview. My creative work seeks to provide an environment for activity and joy, a place where individuals can come together to participate in a community. Movement experiences provide a special container for group bonding. In my own life, dance has allowed me to access community, and participate actively in group events. Psychologically, these experiences have healed and motivated me. Providing this opportunity for others has become a higher priority than any other artistic venture.

LINEAGES

> "Dancing is a kind of contemporary ritual. It is a spiritual opportunity to share energy, join in a sense of *communitas,* and to connect to one's movement ancestors."
>
> –Mark Dendy, choreographer

Introduction

It is notoriously difficult to define the purpose of dance events. Perhaps every choreographer has a different reason for art-making. From folk dance, to stage dance, to contact improvisation, dance has been a binding factor in community and a reflection of diverse social values. According to anthropologist Adrienne L. Keppler, movement rituals can be found in every known human society, and they constitute systems of social and cultural knowledge. She has observed that through "participant observation, our bodies and eyes learn about the distinctive ways in which people move," as well as information about "social structure, politics, economics, literature, art," and every aspect of the socio-cultural environment in which the ritual is "embedded" (p. 16). It is the re-telling and experiencing of culturally specific stories that allows culture to be passed on. According to ethnologist Clarissa Pinkola Estes, "stories are medicine...(They) are embedded with instructions which guide us about the complexities of life" (2006, p. 14). Every society should look at its stories, and therefore at its dances, in order to see the lessons that are taught to its children.

I am not implying that we need to return to the stories told by the folk dances of previous generations. It is true that community-round dances have quite an appeal for me because they tend to be both participatory, and experienced three-dimensionally by audience-participants. However, it may be that the lessons they teach about society are lessons that we no longer need. For example, dances that enforce gender roles, crime and punishment, and social normalization are commonly seen in societies that still practice folk dancing. For that matter, these themes are commonly present in that ubiquitous cultural form, European ballet (Kealiinohomoku 2001). All dances "help people know themselves" (Kaeppler, p. 405). No matter what the message, I believe it is the full-bodied, participatory experience of the message that creates an engaged society. Concert dance has been looking for that engagement, looking for a broader audience. In this chapter, I detail some of the choreographers that have made progress toward my ideals of three-dimensionality, uniqueness and unpredictability in the performance experience.

Fokine's Manifesto

Michel Fokine was one of the most well-known choreographers of the Ballet Russes, an independent ballet company based in early 20th century Russia. In his time, the aristocratic life style of the Russian Imperial Court was reflected in ballets that were frontally focused, and classically designed. One ballet looked very much like another, with perhaps a different colored tutu, or a different set of mimes to support the plot.

Fokine is famous for his letter to the New York Times, in which he decried the conventions of the performing arts, and made several personal revisions to the priorities of choreography. He disliked the predominantly frontal presentation of the ballerinas, as

if the audience were royalty, “on whom no backs may be turned” (Jowitt,1989, p. 108). His choreography focused on the sculptural aspects of the space, rather than the perfect lines of earlier choreographers. The Ballet Russes was famous for incorporating lush visual designs, including sets and costumes designed by some of the most famous artists of the century: Picasso, Matisse, and Bakst, among others. According to drawings and memories of these lavish presentations, the lush vitality of his dances supported the image of an “enclosed three-dimensional world” on stage (p. 117).

Though he was burdened by the decrees of the Imperial Theater in his early career, his innovative choreography with the Ballet Russes gained him substantial international recognition. Throughout his career, he continued to push ballet performance into new frontiers. According to dance historian Susan Au, Fokine “attacked ballet's blind conformity to tradition, such as its dependence upon a highly stylized and artificial form of mime that was meaningless to most of the audience” (p. 72). Given that balletic mime is still regularly performed in classical ballets today, his public exclamation was a courageous move, far ahead of its time. Fokine pushed the communicative potential of ballet, using movement to tell stories of love and betrayal, sex and death. For example, in the salacious *Scheherazade,* which takes place in the harem of an Oriental Shah, the favorite wife initiates a tremendous orgy with all the other wives and the male slaves in attendance. Upon being discovered by the suspicious Shah, she kills herself. The sultry movements, exotic costumes, and ripe sexuality combined for “overwhelming” effect. The audience, used to the prim civility of Sleeping Beauty, roared its approval (Reynolds, 2003, p. 51). Though he used the mask and the glamour of the theater to tell his stories, his ability to reach the public's imagination was based on his willingness to defy

theatrical conventions of his time. Although his dances took place in conventional venues, his work is inspiring to me because of his unwavering commitment to unconventional principles. He always strove to create a three-dimensional, unique world for each dance, uniting music, movement, costumes and sets to fulfill his singular vision.

Modern Dance Pioneers

According to theatre historian Peter Brook, the “empty space” of the stage has been filled with the holiness of crafted illusion during the times when our society was hungry for an escape from a painful world. This stage magic, created by light, set, costume, and action, provides comfort and entertainment for those who need it. During the decades after Fokine's work with the Ballet Russes, the world entered into an unprecedented period of global warfare and systematic genocide. Although some elements of the art world were driven towards escapist spectacle, modern artists were answering some of art's most difficult 20th century questions. What is art? What is dance? Why do we need to follow convention when there are so many other options out there?

According to dance historian Susan Au, early modern dance pioneers like Isadora Duncan and Martha Graham, though revolutionary in their treatment of dance technique and choreographic subject matter, primarily retained the “formalistic values” of ballet. For example, the craft of choreography followed basic principles, music and design complemented the singular artistic vision of the work, and the dancers performed with a high level of technical skill. These conventions were deconstructed by the choreographers of the mid-20th century.

Merce Cunningham

Notably, Merce Cunningham (1919-2009) questioned the idea that dance must tell a story, that the music and the dance must work together to present an idea, that dance must have logical arcs or progressions. In essence, he translated the aims of Modernist visual artists into the language of dance, a few decades after Picasso and Matisse had rejected linear perspective and traditional realism in their work. He also began to make crucial advances in the use of performance space. No longer did the soloist or the main attraction need to stand front and center on the stage. No part of the stage was deemed any more or less important than any other. In fact, when showing his work in the studio, Cunningham often placed audience members in a L- shaped configuration. His work asks more of the audience in that "the viewer's focus is never directed to a particular spot; he must often decide among many centers of activity" (p. 156).

The idea that the viewer must decide where to look is just one example of the way that Cunningham exposed the "indeterminacy" of his choreography, which means that the performance has unpredictable elements. In Cunningham's case, he relied on chance to make many of the decisions regarding the composition of his pieces. The choreography itself was worked out beforehand, but the order, the costumes, the music, who was dancing, and the spatial arrangements were decided arbitrarily, sometimes just before the curtain rose. According to Au, Cunningham saw "randomness and arbitrariness as positive qualities because they are conditions of real life...(and) he relishes the challenges of the work in hand, with all its risks and unpredictability" (p. 157).

Cunningham also took his company into alternative performance venues. In 1964, a series of performances entitled "Cunningham's Events" allowed his company to

perform outside, in public places. The dances were unidentified medleys of past and present work, and audience members were permitted to watch, to walk around, and simply to "enjoy the dancing" (p. 157). These unrepeatable performances were a surprising success, given the risk associated with presenting an unrehearsed series of unrelated movement chunks to an unpredictable, fluid audience. According to dance historian Nancy Reynolds, these events were "one of Cunningham's ways of demonstrating his belief that...a theater experience should reflect the multiplicity of modern life" (2003, p. 366).

Cunningham is one of the first contemporary choreographers who truly challenged the audience to have an individual experience. In any art experience, the viewer may choose his or her own impressions, of course. However, Cunningham seemed particularly reticent to give his audience members any hints about what kind of experience they were "supposed" to be having. He was equally satisfied by spectators who "could impose a unifying logic whereby everything might seem interrelated, or they could relish uncertainty and...delight in discord" (p. 361). Pleasure, confusion, boredom or anger were all valid responses.

I feel that this commitment, along with the aforementioned intentions, shows Cunningham's deep trust in his own process, as well in the free will and individualism of his audience members. This ethos inspired my work more than the work of any other choreographer. Acknowledging that no audience member would react in the same way to his work, Cunningham allowed each performance to be as unique and unpredictable as the mind of an individual. Even he had no idea what to expect. Upon his death in 2009, Joan Acocella looked back over her years of reviewing his dancers, and reflected that "for

years, I felt that Cunningham's use of chance weakened his dances. If Mother Nature gave us brains, shouldn't we use them, instead of rolling dice?" (Acocella, 2012, p. 79). She eventually realized that it was Cunningham's use of chance that allowed the merciless arbitrariness of life to shine through his dances, and for his dancers to appear before us, in Cunningham's words, "naked, powerful, and unashamed" (p. 79). I have never seen his dances live, but when I read her words, I imagine that it was he, and not only his dancers, that held that power.

Transformations

Although I have focused my analysis on the groundbreaking work of Merce Cunningham, there have been many others that have furthered his work, and made advances of their own.

The choreographer Alwin Nikolais (1910-93) focused on the deconstruction of the conventional human form in his work. Using props and lighting, he disguised the body, creating plastic shapes and alien forms on stage. His intention was to elevate our concerns to a "cosmic level." According to Susan Au, Nikolais "wanted man to be able to identify with things other than himself." He believed that "we must give up our navel contemplations long enough to take our place in space" (p. 159). In his work, which began in the early 1950s, he attempted to provide this opportunity for his audience by transforming the stage space into a surreal, extraterrestrial landscape. Though he primarily worked with the traditional stage, his belief that art can transcend time and space was inspiring to me as I created a cosmic landscape in my piece.

During the same time, the French director Antonin Artaud was working with the

idea of the Theatre of Cruelty, “a ritualistic, nonliterary” form of theater that sought to elicit passion and emotion from audiences by ripping away the false truths that lull us into complacency (Reynolds, 2003, p. 395). In New York, in the very same building in which Cunningham's studio was located, a group of actors founded the Living Theater based on Artaud's principles. This troupe's “hyperphysical communal celebrations,” or performances, sought to “unite the spectator with the actors” using any means possible, “including direct physical contact” (p. 395). Although physical touch can have a profound bonding effect, as seen in the intimate touch between family members and loved ones, it can be frightening in an unfamiliar setting, such as a performance experience. This group was one of the first to come up in my theoretical research into the idea of three-dimensional performance, and although they are not specifically dance artists, their methods had a profound effect on my creative process.

Choreographer Robert Dunn organized the first of weekly showings at the Judson Memorial Church in New York in 1962, thus catalyzing a period of artistic innovation and collaboration among a group of choreographers, performers, composers, writers and filmmakers. This group of “postmodern” artists included Trisha Brown, Douglas Dunn, Simone Forti, Meredith Monk, Steve Paxton, Yvonne Rainer, and Twyla Tharp. In many cases, they were students of Cunningham and Dunn, and although they had different styles and priorities, they were unified in their desire to deconstruct and reinvent the art of dance. Focusing on composition rather than the “role-playing or purely decorative theatrical trappings” of traditional concert dance, these artists sought to find the dance that existed beneath the “aura of glamour” that often came with stage work (p. 165).

Many of the Judson choreographers went on to have influential and innovative

careers. Trisha Brown experimented with performance spaces that questioned gravity itself. Her work on rooftops and the sides of tall buildings won her instant acclaim. Deborah Hay's work evoked the ritual folk dance, in that the choreography itself was simple enough for anyone to do, and the dancers performed mainly for their own enjoyment, rather than the visual effect (Au, p. 168). Meredith Monk took her audience members on physical and sonic journeys through time and space. In *Vessel* (1971), the audience travelled from the artist's loft, to a performance space, and finally to a large parking lot. Monk created an imaginary landscape for the story of Joan of Arc, using visual, aural, and physical elements. At the finale, she moved away from the audience into the vast, shadowy parking lot, out of sight, under the metallic spray of a welder's torch.

Though I could not have been present for the live works of any of these post-modern masters, the images, as they are described, have been burned into my mind as clearly as memories. Their imagination and daring changed the way that dance was seen as an art form, and challenged conventional notions of the performance experience. They paved the way for further experimentation, and American audiences were soon taken with Pina Bausch's dramatic theatrical spectacles, and William Forsythe's high-voltage physical and sonic bombardment (Reynolds, p. 457). While many of the Judson choreographers dealt with the absurd and the pedestrian, the work of the European choreographers used extreme movement, desperate repetitions, and high-decibel vocalizations to evoke existential pain, seemingly from dancers and audience members alike.

In my work, I often include pain or uncertainty as prevalent themes. As will be

evident in the following chapter, I originally planned to include such a section in my thesis work. I took it out, 3 days before the performance. Even now, somewhat ironically, I still feel a painful regret and uncertainty about the motivation of my decision to exclude this emotional tone from the choreographic arc I created. I feel that pain is an important aspect of the human condition, but one that is often explored and exploited by choreographers who hope to create emotional impact with their work. If it is not performed convincingly, it will appear contrived, and cause a break in the reality of the audience's experience. Although in the end I was unable to commit to the censored section of my thesis work, I still find myself in awe of the choreographers that have captured the dark side of humanity as well as the light.

THE CREATIVE PROCESS

> "The almost imperceptible transition between the inside and the outside, an incredible sense of place, an unbelievable feeling of concentration when we suddenly become aware of being enclosed, of something enveloping us, keeping us together."
>
> --Peter Zumthor, architect, on the power of constructed spaces

Introduction

This project has been a 3 year journey, beginning with a spark of inspiration and uncertainty, followed by 2 years of theoretical and creative play, and then one final year filled with focused choreography and writing. I consider both the dance-making and the writing to be crucial to my creative process. When speaking of art, and the creative journey, I do not distinguish between word and action, image and emotion. Every sense, every resource, and every dimension of our lives has a place in the artistic landscape. This chapter provides a reflection of my journey through this landscape, and the challenges inherent in designing a performance experience that mirrors the three-dimensional experience of our lives.

I began my choreographic project in the spring of 2011. I was inspired to make a piece which was three-dimensional, interactive, and unpredictable. Although I was unsure how to facilitate the audience members' experiences, I wanted to provide space for them to have a unique, self-directed experience. Letting go of the control of the choreographed

experience would be a challenge, but it was important to me, in order to honor multiple perspectives and unique artistic interpretations. In this work, there is no way that I can control the experience for audience members, and that forces me to confront my limits as a “director” in their lives. Audience members know that they have the freedom to interact as they choose, and that forces them to confront their fears about participation and engagement with a group. The tension between these dynamics is the springboard for my choreographic journey. Ultimately, it is rewarding to me that audience members often have a strong emotional response to the demands of this work, and that they are moved, not by what I have done, but what they do. The experience is driven by the part they play in the journey of the group.

A Note on Audience Participation

Although my primary focus was to create a three-dimensional performance experience, it seemed natural to me that once the audience members were inside the dance, they would be acknowledged by the dancers. Interaction between the audience and the performer in a performance setting is traditionally referred to as audience participation.

Previously, the only works that I had seen that utilized audience participation were very clumsy, awkward events. Being asked to sing, dance, or interact with the performers has made me uncomfortable. In Neta Pulvermacher's 2011 work *2280 Pints!*, however, I had a completely different emotional response. In the beginning of the piece, the dancers are scattered around the stage, dressed in white, holding buckets. They moved sometimes, and sometimes not. The audience was invited to come down to the stage and

put pennies in the buckets. There were pennies on the stage, because sometimes the dancers dumped their pennies out of their buckets onto the ground. I walked around on stage quite a bit, picking up pennies and putting them in buckets, to see what the dancers would do. I couldn't tell if there was a connection between the pennies and the movement. Sometimes it seemed like the pennies initiated movement, as if the dancers were dancing machines in a penny arcade. The idea that my actions could be affecting their choices was very appealing to me, because I felt that I, an audience member, was important to the progress of the piece. Although I noticed some audience members, dancers and non dancers alike, were intimidated or uninterested in participating in this section, I felt very comfortable and welcomed on to the stage.

I became interested in the challenge of audience participation as an element of three-dimensional choreography. I loved that feeling of ease that I experienced while taking part in a performance that I wouldn't have considered to be “mine.” As a dancer, I am well aware of the feeling of ease and ownership that comes from participating in “my own” performances, in which I am a trained participant. As an audience member, this sense of ownership is much harder to attain, but I think it is necessary in order to feel comfortable entering into the “performer's” space.

The Performance

In the next few sections, I will describe some of the most important moments in the performance experience that I designed. Although I provide few intentions behind the choices that I made for this work, I did not choose randomly. I was often simply guided by intuition in developing the structure of this piece. Though I had clear narrative themes,

space, the cosmos, creation stories and constellations, the evolution of civilization and community, I did not seek to present them within a literal arc. Rather, I found that it was the audience's experience of the action of the event, and the escalating rhythm of the audience's participation, that held the most interest for me.

I participated in the performance in a variety of ways. I introduced the project, acted as stage manager, ran the sound and assisted the cuing of the light changes, I performed live text, and I danced a solo. My experience of the piece was molded by the psychological demands and rewards of these different roles. I also experienced the piece in a unique way because of my physical location in the space during different sections. I was the last person to enter, and so I entered into a space that was full of people and lights. I sat behind the sound board, and so I participated as an invisible outside observer. I walked to the center of the space twice, and in both cases I was observed, and I performed in very visible ways for the rest of the participants. No one else experienced the piece in the same way that I did, and the same is true for the experience of every single participant. My description of the event is colored by this unique experience, but I have attempted to describe the activities in an impartial way, in order to honor the participants' ability to perceive each moment individually.

Walking into the dark

Peter Zumthor, an internationally-known architect and writer, conceives of spaces as both temporal and human environments. He often uses the metaphor of structure as body, with anatomy, and with the capacity to move, touch and create. As I began my creative project for this thesis, I had the idea that in order to really begin at the beginning,

I needed to introduce my audience to space as if they were newly born, transitioning from the dark womb to the welcoming world. I wanted to create an environment that would feel human from the very beginning, almost as if the entire piece were happening inside the mind of one dreamer, or the womb of one myth-sized woman. I was inspired by Zumthor's description of the moment of entering a space, “when we suddenly become aware of being enclosed, of something enveloping us, keeping us together” (2006, p. 47). I decided to present my work in the darkest, blackest room that I could find, in order to instigate a shared journey into the unknown for my audience members.

In the first moment of the piece, the audience walks into a large, dark space. They are following an entreaty from the choreographer that they enter bravely, acknowledging and releasing their fear of the unknown. Some are visibly excited, others reluctant. They hold penlights, and there is the sound of humming and rhythmic stomping in the distance. They may come into contact with a large group of dancers who are lying on the floor, eyes closed, in a softly undulating mass. They may come across a duo of dancers who are dancing and calling out to one another in the dark, counting steps, and breathing loudly in their exertions. They may be taken with an exploration of the space, using their light as a guide or following the play of the many lights dancing across the walls.

Bare light bulbs, suspended by wire from the ceiling, come into soft focus as the pile of dancers begins to separate. The dancers crawl out into the space like cats, rubbing against one another, and against audience members and scattered living room furniture, chatting quietly as they go by. Orchestral music can be heard, seemingly in the background.

One by one, the dancers squeeze between the legs of randomly selected audience

members, explaining that they need to be born into people, because the music is getting louder. The orchestral tune morphs into the theme from the popular television series, *Star Trek; The Next Generation*, as the dancers are encouraged by a sequined member of the cast to jump and twirl according to a very specific, but inaccurately counted musical beat. After they have warmed up in this way, the group splits apart and each individual dancer travels around the space, performing for and with small groups of audience members. These "private solos" are made of material inspired by an imaginary journey taken by each individual dancer during a meditative rehearsal. During this period of the dance, the performers encourage individual audience members to join them on an abstract journey into the landscape of the imagination. The atmosphere of the performance environment is casual and conversational.

The Voice

In my piece, the dancers talk, chat, hum, groan, sing, yell, and howl. Of all of these, the practice of howling was the most transformative. In one rehearsal, we all howled and screamed as loudly as possible for several minutes. The noise was deafening. After that, no matter what I asked them to do for me, they were never scared.

Dance has often been considered the silent art (Felciano, 2011). Although we train our bodies rigorously, the vocal cords have been noticeably neglected as a bodily instrument. Over time, choreographers have become interested in exploring this untapped resource, but the request can be terrifying for dancers. Having long been trained that "art is about expressions of the human spirit, and such expressions are better communicated in images, symbols, and metaphors" (Denhardt, 2006, p. 81), the idea that one could chat

while dancing could be startling. Even after vocalizations began to become more common in the post-modern era, this melding of dance and speech was often underwhelming due to poorly trained dancer/talkers.

In my work, talking dancers are a necessity, because "language references reality, a sense of the everyday to which dance alone can rarely aspire" (Feliciano, p. 24). It is this ordinariness that seemed extraordinary, at first, in the rehearsal process. There were no audience members, and so I was continually reminding the dancers that they needed to practice chatting with imaginary people, so that when real people surrounded them, they would remember how to do it. I wanted them to instigate casual conversation with every audience member with whom they came into contact, especially at the beginning of the piece. I imagined them to be like the guides, or stewards, of the opening experience. If audience members had questions, they could ask. If the dancers were thinking something, I wanted them to share it, in order to provide courageous role modeling for audience members.

After the intimately casual solo section, the dancers initiate a shift into a section in which they warm up their vocal instrument, making sounds that resemble an orchestra that is warming up before the concert has begun. Eventually, these seemingly random noises coalesce into a clear melody. They are trumpeting the opening bars of *Also Sprach Zarathustra*, a recognizable piece from the film *2001; A Space Odyssey*. The audience often laughs when they recognize this dramatic piece, and many are moved to sing along. The vocal range is quite extreme, and so the dancers and some audience members are loudly shrieking by the end of this short section. This unabashed enthusiasm seems to allow for a drop of inhibition and a wildly playful sense of "Anything is possible!"

After a section of romping and dancing throughout the space, the dancers are suddenly sucked back into the silence of the inception of time. They begin an exploration of what it would be like to be a baby planet, just after the Big Bang, as it is first learning how to orbit. The dancers whisper *"turn around"* to each other, and rest when they come in physical contact with each other or audience members. Their circular paths become more dispersed, leaving a large empty space in the middle of the space. Under dim light, two dancers enter into a duet, accompanied by text read by the choreographer from a composition notebook. For the first time, everyone's eyes fall upon a single event, and she reads:

In the beginning,
God created the doggy style.
Your mom loved it.
The Joys of Sex are
1. Fucking.
2. I believe in outer space.
In the beginning, God created the doggy style,
sewing needles, the motor car, venereal diseases, your
hair gets messed up, the big bang, static electricity and
dildos.
This is when dinosaurs ruled the world.
In the beginning, God created the joys of sex,
and they were:
1. Fucking
2. The infinite expansion of space.
3. The Magna Carta, boy scouts, journalism, the breakfast table, and math.
Where did this baby come from?

The poem continues as the two female dancers inhabit the open pool of light in the center of the room. At times, they slink around the space and snap their limbs in frustration like primitive creatures exploring an unfriendly environment. At other moments they become cautiously human, reaching out to each other and to the world. Though their bodies move together, describing the intimate space between them, they

often seem unaware of their shared journey. They seem both determined to continue, but also lonely and exhausted. With hunched backs, splayed fingers, and bent knees, they may remind us of our primal beginnings, at the onset of our pre-human civilization. Or perhaps their awkward hops and desperate leaps remind us of the halting and stumbling that occurs at the beginning of a relationship, as we learn how to connect with other people in our world.

At the end of the poem, both the civilization and the relationship grow old. The dancers take part in an unapologetic ritual of birth, evolution, sex, decay, and death. The ugly parts and the beautiful parts of life are celebrated together, because the same world that gave us life and love also gave us STDs, math, car crashes, impulse purchases, and marital strife. As the dance winds down, the poem finishes:

7. No one was watching, I swear!
And then...
Cruise ships, highways, murders, rapings, biscuits and tea.
I wonder where we were when we didn't exist yet?
Car crashes, sickness, deterioration, and death.
I didn't know it would be so empty out here.
Being an organ donor.
Being older, wiser, more comfortable, more patient, and just generally getting better at doing it.
Will it be hospitals or hospice?
Wishing you had more children,
gusty winds,
picking dandelions from the yard.

Plaid slippers,

electricity,

friction.

wringing out the dishcloth.

fucking,

listening to the clock.

the joys of sex.

Although the duet ends with a note of somber self-reflection, the casual, jovial mood returns quickly. The rest of the dancers inform the audience members that it's time to propagate the species, and that we can all be reborn by crawling through the legs of the dancers finishing their duet. I took this idea from the Kenneth Branagh film adaptation of Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing*. In a moment of comedic reflection of his reluctance to leave a bachelor's life, Branagh has a sudden epiphany. "The world must be peopled!" (Branagh, 1993).

In the duet, as well as in this next section about birthing, the audience is forced to contemplate unspoken realities. In order to survive, we must have sex. We must be born out of a woman's vagina. In many communities of adults, sexual acts and reproductive organs are not considered to be appropriate public conversations, although sexuality is a part of all of us. It is an experience that highlights our similarities as humans, although we may express our sexuality in unique ways. However inappropriate it may seem to focus on sexuality in a participatory dance concert, I chose to take the risk of addressing a topic that could potentially bring diverse audience members together. There were children present, as well as conservative religious people. I knew that the word “fucking,” and the opportunity for audience members to be “born” by crawling through a dancer's legs could make people uncomfortable. Ultimately, I had to trust the dancers and the audience to connect with these sensitive topics in their own way. I hoped that by presenting sexual themes in a matter-of-fact way, the casual ordinariness of human sexuality would prevail.

At the same time, I was aware that creating such an open channel for interaction

between audience members and performers could have its challenges. In 2010, Marina Abramovic, a well-known Serbian performance artist, was receiving attention in the mainstream media for her treatment of dancers in rehearsal and performance. She had asked them to perform silently, and nude, for the benefit of a Museum of Modern Art retrospective of her work, as well as for a dinner for wealthy donors. Another noted choreographer, Yvonne Rainer, and a Los Angeles artist, Sara Wookey, came forward to question the “implications of transposing (Abramovic's) own powerful performances to the bodies of others” (Halperin, 2011). There is always the possibility that choreographers, who use other people as the raw material of their art, will go too far in their demands. Perhaps they will ask dancers to do something that the choreographer would be comfortable doing, but the dancer would be uncomfortable. There were many times, early in the rehearsal process, that my dancers felt vulnerable about some of the subjects that I was asking them to address. I also had a concern about safety, which was brought to light by Rainer and Wookey's hesitations about Abramovic's work. It seems that especially when there is nudity or sexuality involved, the question of exploitation or indecency is raised.

I knew that I didn't want to put limits on dancer or audience behavior in my piece, but there could be a possibility of dangerous or inappropriate interaction. In fact, I witnessed examples of both, in rehearsal and in showings. However, unlike Abramovic, who required silence from her dancers, I trusted my dancers to speak the truth in any situation. I always reminded them to adapt to situations in the way that felt the best to them in the moment. They were free to make their own decisions in any section of the piece. I would never force them to be dishonest, or to stay in a situation that felt wrong in

some way. I coached them on different ways that they could extricate themselves, excuse themselves, or diffuse tension. I encouraged them to admit to audience members if there was a part of the dance that they didn't like, or didn't want to do. At the same time, I saw many dancers and audience members joyfully embrace the “inappropriate” on their journey through the piece.

Closing the Space

Near to the end of the piece, according to the original plan, the dancers would be involved in a community-wide ritual of brutality. Violence would continue to escalate, each dancer would enter into a physical contest with another dancer, and either “kill” them or be “killed” by them, until every dancer had “died.” Death is an important part of the life cycle, and it is sometimes dealt with quite brutally by human and animal communities alike. I love the expression that “nature is red in tooth and claw,” and I often use both the beauty and the violence of the natural world as inspiration in my choreography. Eventually, I took this section out because my dancers did not feel comfortable with it, and I was unsure how the audience would react. I wish that I had trusted both groups more. I think that this section provided an important counterbalance to the emotional arc of the whole.

Instead, we needed some other climax for the end section of the piece. The dancers trumpet another melody, ushering in the David Bowie song *Let's Dance.* The dancers move into full-bodied action, dancing, and calling out for dance partners around the space. Audience members, seduced by the absurdity of the evening, begin to join in. Although this section was designed to slow to a halt, often the audience becomes so

excited by the action that they will not stop dancing. The dancers follow their lead, only calling the dance to a halt when the audience members are ready.

As everyone sits in a circle, the choreographer reluctantly comes out of hiding to close the show. A set of solos, including both movement and text, inform the audience of the choreographer's inner landscape: An expression of thanks for both audience-participants and dancers, a regret for wearing an uncomfortable shirt, and gratitude for a never-ending love for dance. Then everyone walks to the edge of the space, to look back at the empty place where the dance is no longer happening. The choreographer instructs everyone to count to three, after which the dance will be truly over. We do, and then it is. The dancers run around in order to bow and say thank you to every individual audience-participant.

Reflections on the Creative Process

I found that welcoming an audience into the space of my work was the most challenging aspect of this project. A landscape of choice, in which the audience members were surrounded by unfamiliar activities, was understandably unnerving. It was the very idea of being alone, having a solitary experience, in the midst of such unpredictability, that caused my audience members to pause. The very elements of the performance experience that I was hoping to enhance: its three-dimensionality, uniqueness, and unpredictability, were unappealing to many viewers. Many iterations of this work were completely rejected by audience members who could not enter comfortably. Designing a welcoming experience was my only intention for the first three months of rehearsal during the preliminary creative research process.

As I began rehearsals, and participated in a series of works-in-progress showings for preliminary thesis research, my dancers performed the work in several informal studio settings. Almost all showings were, in comparison with my expectations of how they would go, a complete disaster. In every case, I would encourage the audience to participate in whatever way they wished, and I promised them that I had no expectations for what they should or should not do. Every time, my unconscious expectations would be revealed, as the audience members chose to act in ways that I did not anticipate. Excerpts from my research journals at this point in the process illustrate my frustration:

February 15th, 2011. Every showing is different from what I expected. First, the audience is scared. No one wanted to sit in a chair. Nothing happened, because I designed the score so that audience members sitting in chairs would be the catalyst for action. I told the audience that they could do whatever they wanted, but I guess I really just wanted them to sit in a chair.

February 27th, 2011. This time, everyone sat in a chair right away, and then never moved. There were more people present than I thought, and so all the chairs were immediately taken. They said afterwards that they felt trapped, and put on the spot. They felt that they were missing the "real dance" because they could only see what was happening right in front of them. In rehearsal it is hard to get a sense of what it will be like with an audience. The room seems empty without them. The illusion of control is disorienting.

April 19th, 2011. I showed my work in class again, and the audience said that they were always uncomfortable with my work, they felt like outsiders, and due to their past experiences, they were becoming more and more resistant to participating. I decided that

I needed a new audience. Another teacher allowed me to bring my work into her class, for her students to experience. It was a wild ride, with lots of audience members dancing with the dancers, giggling and chatting all around, and tons of people improvising. Afterward, the majority of the students said that it didn't feel like a "performance," and that the attention seemed really dispersed, not collected as you would expect in a performance. It is becoming clear to me that when a piece is designed to challenge expectations of the performance experience, audience members may only be able to evaluate the experience based on those original expectations.

This was a difficult time for me in my creative research. The dancers and I were experiencing Zumthor's "unbelievable feeling of concentration when we suddenly become aware of being enclosed" (2006, p. 47), but this sense of ownership and engagement with the space was not reaching the audience members. I was on an unknown path, knowing that there were hidden expectations and a desire for control that I needed to shed, but I wasn't sure how to do so. It was at this moment when I felt that we were entering the black room, without any light to guide us.

David Abram, director of the consortium *Alliance for Wild Ethics*, writes on his website that "there is a lot of fearfulness that comes from inhabiting this world. To really identify with one's own, animal body, is to know that we are really vulnerable. To know that the world is bigger than us, and it can eat us...mortality is still the name of the game" (1997). I must admit that I am vulnerable to the fear of the unknown, that I often hesitate to speak to strangers, and I have never really enjoyed having dancers talking to me. I have inhibitions, just like any audience member. There is some part of me, however, that wants to shed that fear, to identify with my animal body, and to run free with my pack. I

decided that I would embrace this animal physicality as I wrestled with the problem of creating a welcoming space for the dance and audience to collide.

I designed the performance experience so that after entering a dark space, with only a tiny penlight in hand, the audience encounters the sound of faraway humming and stomping. As their eyes grow accustomed to the wavering light, a herd of dancers, crawling like cats, meanders through the space. When we found this beginning, during the rehearsal process, it felt like a magical moment. Suddenly, audience members connected with the absurdity, and the sense of animalistic serenity of the environment. I watch audience members relax, and many reached out to touch the warm bodies as they nuzzled by. Perhaps “cats” are not as scary as “people.” Perhaps, as David Abram suggests, we react to our world with animal instincts. We experience fear when we are surrounded by dangerous strangers, but comfort when we are the tallest thing in the room. I gave my audience members the gift of instinctual authority, by placing the dancers on a lower plane. As the lights came up in the performance space, illuminating the sky like so many dangling stars, the dance space and the audience space had become one world.

Audience Feedback

Collecting audience feedback was an important part of my research, given my focus on audience experience of the work. I found that written documentation, as well as video documentation, allowed me to come back to that feedback during a more reflective moment of the process. As the director, light/sound crew, and emcee for the show, the brief weekend-long run felt like a very hectic time for me. I was a part of the piece, in multiple ways, but I wasn't sure that I would be able to glean enough information about

the audience's experience by simply watching them and interacting with them.

I received anonymous, written responses from 24 audience participants. Overall, the comments had an ecstatic tone; many participants used dramatic language, multiple exclamation points, and positive emotional adjectives. I was pleased that several audience members mentioned that they enjoyed the feeling of “risk-taking” and “letting go.” Some felt inspired by the bravery of the performers, and were moved to show courage in their own actions within the piece. Many people mentioned how they felt uncertain at first, but then realized that being involved was “exhilarating.” I enjoyed reading the comments that admitted fear or confusion, but then described how “the casualness of the performance made me comfortable...I was surprised at how easy I felt participating in the dance.” Others echoed the sentiment that “diving into the uncomfortable is where I grow!” One card simply stated, “We R all a part of this.” Another said, “I felt like a piece of the whole universe!” Still another expressed that the piece “made me happy and excited about life and all its randomness.” I was touched by a participant that wrote to me: “I didn't believe in the idea when I first heard it. My expectations were blown away. You have a lot of faith in the audience.”

Perhaps there were also participants that did not enjoy the piece. Although one participant noted that “it seemed like everyone was really excited and joyful,” there were times when audience members looked like they were feeling awkward or uncomfortable. Although several comment cards addressed this, as stated above, there were not many comments that focused on the elements of the dance that might have felt uncomfortable. There was one comment which specifically stated that the participant “felt discomfort when limbs flew close my body and the “f” word was used.” It is possible that those

audience members who felt uncomfortable for the duration of the piece did not write comment cards. It is also possible that throughout the journey of the piece, everyone, in their own way, decided to come along on the journey.

At the end of the evening, as my dancers and I travelled throughout the room, bowing and thanking each and every audience for coming and participating in the show, everyone was smiling.

Conclusion

Toward the end of my creative process I came across a striking work by William Forsythe entitled *I don't believe in outer space* (premiered in 2008). Shamelessly, I borrowed his title, and altered it to read *I believe in outer space.* Where his work is a study on alienation and performance art pastiche (Macaulay, 2011), mine is a study of inclusion and hope. He had his dancers talk nonsense “at” the audience, creating an absurd “anti-world” in which sly humor, mockery, and brutality abound. I loved his piece, but my work sought to create the opposite effect. My intention was to provoke a more difficult response: playful, earnest humor, balanced with unapologetic pain.

Although I faced challenges while making this piece, I came to see these hurdles as necessary components of my three-dimensional work. I tackled my own uncertainty about audience participation as I struggled to design an environment that would welcome audience members into an active relationship with the work. This process was about so much more than the choreography itself. As the project comes to a close, I am grateful to have shared in the joys that came with the building of a community of fearless dancers, as well as the shaping of a roughly-hewn but magical performance experience.

CONCLUSION

> "*Sensory perception is the glue that binds our separate nervous systems into the larger, encompassing ecosystem."*
>
> *--David Abram, Alliance for Wild Ethics*

I began this research because I have never liked watching dance performances. Even as a child, I would dread going to see my sister perform in the *Nutcracker*, although I loved the story. The action all felt very faraway, the people seemed very unreal, and I was never able to make the psychological jump out of my seat and into the world of the stage. I loved to read, to create imaginary worlds of my own, and I always loved to dance. Until I received formal dance training, and learned to see dance with an eye for technique and choreographic craft, I was not engaged by the act of watching.

Even now, it is rare for me to become swept up in the experience of spectatorship. I often find myself critiquing the dancers or the choreographer, wondering whether I would do better or worse with the movement or the subject material, and then distracted by my own choreographic impulses. When there is unpredictability, improvisation, or audience participation, I find myself fearful of what will happen, or what I will be asked to do.

I admit these feelings not to criticize dance performances, but rather to betray my own failings and fears regarding the performing experience. Although my work demands bravery and engagement from the audience, I was inspired to make this work because I

did not see these things in myself. I began this project because I think that it is valuable to notice what makes me uncomfortable. This feeling can tell me so much about myself, my insecurities, and my fears. Once I notice these things, and practice overcoming them, I can be the change that I would like to see in the world.

This project has provided me with an opportunity for self-research, which has been challenging as well as fulfilling. It also reminded me, through continual theoretical discovery, that the questions that I ask have been asked by many others before me. Though I may have come to different solutions at times, I gladly give credit to the many artists whose research provided a foundation for my experimentation.

Sensual Landscapes

Contemporary Landscape Photography, in the style of Ansel Adams, is one of the great American art forms. Over time, the uncomplicated sincerity of this genre of photography has been replaced by different priorities. In the postmodern era, artists have been drawn to the political, the mundane, the ugly, and the dark elements of the human psyche (Till 1998). There are those that embrace the simple beauty of a pristine landscape, finding subtle complexity in the relationship between light and form, but this art form may be disappearing as quickly as the pristine wilderness itself is disappearing. My choreographic landscapes seek to preserve wildness in the same way.

As an artist, I am always interested in what is already there. In this way, I feel much like a landscape photographer, looking for those things that are buried, those mysteries that we used to know. A photographer looks for the rocks, the trees, the water—those physical elements of our earth that can be overlooked because we are now so intent

on making, doing, and destroying. In my work, I am looking for the stories we used to know, the community we used to have, the sense of unfettered joy that we felt as children.

Steve Mulligan refers to his photographic work as a journey into “terra incognita,” a land full of possibility and mystery, and he plumbs the depths with intuition and instinct as his only guides (Mulligan, 1998, p. xi). My work is a three-dimensional, physical manifestation of that neglected landscape. My imagination, and the imaginations of my dancers are fertile with possibility, laden with cultural knowledge. We are full of questions, desires, fears, relationships, and experiences. These interior landscapes are writ large in my piece, as large as the fabric of the universe. I believe that we are constantly surrounded by what Mulligan refers to as “rich and diverse landscapes,” whether they are imaginary, physical, manmade, emotional, historical, or theoretical. We are constantly surrounded, but we do not always pay attention. We have perfected the art of tuning our environments out. It is my hope to use this thesis work to encourage people to experience, to notice, to interact with, and to honor the wild landscapes that surround them. I hope that my work reminds them to pay attention, and encourages them to step out bravely into the wild unknown.

Preserving Communities

This research has allowed me to investigate my own insecurities and fears, not just in art but in life. I have felt the powerful connections of community, but I have also run from the unpredictability inherent in acts of group trust. As a teenager, coming to age in the concrete jungles of the East Coast, I learned to trust no one but myself. It took me

five years of therapeutic living in the bosom of my newfound family in Montana to learn about the responsibilities and rewards of community. I find it to be incredibly fortuitous that it was at the end of those years, as I was preparing to move to Utah for my graduate work, that I was inspired to make three-dimensional choreography. At the time, I had no idea that this project would allow me to investigate and experience art-making that would support the building of a new community. My time here has been rich with connection and relationship, and this project has catalyzed an important aspect of my life's work. Deepening community connection through interactive art-making is a lifelong priority that matches my artistic goals.

Through full-bodied sensory perception, we come to know the world that we inhabit. Our senses are a bridge between internal consciousness and community bonds. Anthropologists have long been aware that “society is never a disembodied spectacle. We engage in social interaction from the very start on the basis of sensory and aesthetic impression” (O'Neill, 1985, p. 22). In my life, community movement rituals (e.g., dance classes, ensemble performances, improvisation events) play an important role in fulfilling my need for physical sensation and my search for aesthetic inspiration. Being part of a community of movers has grounded me and connected me to the world.

As I often come into contact with those who have not had an opportunity to experience an embodied community, I have come to believe that it is my responsibility to pass along what I have gained from my experiences. As a teacher, I strive to engage my students in an active, three-dimensional classroom, encouraging individual perspectives and rigorous spontaneity. I always try to set an example of playful curiosity, in order to remind myself and others that it can be rewarding to investigate the unpredictable

complexities of life. It is important for me to share this outlook. As a choreographer, I feel that the interactive, three-dimensional performance experience is one way to invite others to join me.

In my creative process, I experienced moments that felt like a rejection of this invitation. It is difficult for audience members to relinquish control of their bodies into the all-encompassing space of the performance experience, and it is equally difficult for them to take control of their experience in that space. They are free to find their own perspective, but also responsible for guiding their own journey, just as we are in the rest of our lives. In order to encourage their active participation, I developed the following mantras for my own process:

►Be an active participant in every rehearsal. Be with the dancers, modeling playful experimentation, brave interactions, and vulnerable acceptance of fears and uncertainties.

►Be honest with the audience. Let them know right away that their resistance to the unpredictability of the performance is normal, and humbly ask them to consider releasing their fear in order to walk in and enjoy.

►Let go of your expectations. You designed this experience for them, so let them own it. Nothing needs to happen. Trust the dancers and the audience to connect with their needs and their community.

►Keep making art! Sometimes things will not work out the way you thought. This experience is larger than your choreographic goals, so don't lose sight of the metaphor of community experience. Communities are three-dimensional, unique, and unpredictable, and this work only begins to plumb the mysteries and complexities that they contain.

In this work, I have learned to follow my intuition and my passion for

transformative group experiences. Although I feel that the experience of the group was the most important element in this production, I also feel rewarded by the historical research that I have done in preparation for this artistic challenge. In order to reach my goals, I needed to understand the way that the performance experience has evolved over time. I am glad to take my place among dance-makers interested in the embodied spectacle, an experience that fuses the magical illusion of the stage with the casual intimacy of a three-dimensional physical interaction.

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