

2015

Moving Onward: The Delicate Interplay Amid Nature and its Inhabitants

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MOVING ONWARD:
THE DELICATE INTERPLAY AMID NATURE AND ITS INHABITANTS

by
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Honors Thesis in Dance
Connecticut College
2015

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Acknowledgements

I would like to express my deepest appreciation to those who have provided support and guidance throughout this process. Thank you Lisa Race, my advisor, for your support for these past four years, and especially in these last couple of months for your devoted guidance. To Heidi Henderson, thank you for your assistance and motivation throughout the writing process. Thank you Shawn Hove for your technical support and instruction. I would also like to thank my dancers and collaborators, Christophe Desorbay, Emily Chin, Mauri Connors, Maia Draper-Reich, Olivia Wilcox, Meg Robbins. Thank you Amanda Kloth and Shawn Hove for documenting the performance through film. Finally, thank you, Peter Tresnan, for helping to create the materials for this work.

Introduction

My honors thesis is about the ongoing competition between humans and nature. Herman Hesse's *The City* acts as a loose narrative and large inspiration for my research. *The City* is a fairy tale about the development of a human civilization and its relationship with nature. Hesse tells the story in a cyclical manner. He highlights the common theme of human success versus natural success, a give-and-take that has existed in the world since the beginning of human existence. The story has three major periods: initial human establishment within virginal untouched land, prosperous amounts of successful human development (golden age), and rebirth of nature from the downfall of civilization. The cyclical essence of these periods as described by Hesse acts as a major inspiration for my work. I found his fairy tale to be not only outstandingly relatable to my personal interests in environmentalism, but also relevant in the context of our world's current and controversial global climate change, which has profound anthropocentric factors.

The human experience of moving away from, into, or through different spaces, is what I believe to be an important practice of dance. As a dancer, I have experienced the impulse to move in certain ways solely based on the space in which I occupied. The expression of these three major periods about human-nature competition in Hesse's story through dance brings forth questions about how humans affect the space in which they reside, and how the space in which humans reside affects them.

I aim to explore these questions through a site-specific dance work that views the site, the Connecticut College Arboretum, through a historical, sociological, environmental, and artistic point of view. This interdisciplinary approach to this site-specific work reveals the interconnectedness involved in the complex relationship between humans and nature,

and this work has enabled me to combine my interests in dance and environmental studies.

I intend for my work to shed light on my interests by pulling inspiration from Hermann

Hesse's short fairy tale, *The City*, through the exploration of site-specific dance.

Hermann Hesse

The City

The short story of *The City* by Hermann Hesse is a fictional tale that was written in 1910 and is a part of a 22 story collection that was composed between 1904 and 1918. *The City* recounts the realistic tale of human development in a naturally established area and the constant shift in competitive success between humans and nature throughout the process of inhabitation. Hesse tells the tale in three parts: period one; initial human establishment in untouched land, period two; golden age of human development, and period three; decline of human intervention and the rebirth of nature.

The first period is when the initial establishment of human presence in an untouched natural area takes place. In this period, the beginnings of institutions are founded, culture starts to emerge, and political power thrives out of a transformed natural area. Hesse describes some of the “firsts” as the story begins: “the first airplane shrieked through the horrified land. The first rifle shot thundered and echoed in the mountains. The first anvil sounded, with a high pitch from the quick pounding of the hammer” (Hesse 43). Hesse highlights the spread of new establishments increasingly occurring everyday, “cutting through wilderness” (Hesse 44) and causing wild species to move away.

The second period of Hesse’s tale describes its journey from its beginnings of success to its dominating period of prosperity, which I think can be better described as the golden age, a time period featuring prosperous amounts of successful human development in an already inhabited area. During this period, major institutions like universities, government buildings, theaters, churches, railroad lines, and culture were all not only established, but triumphant. In the midst of these establishments, an unexpected

earthquake “shattered and devastated the city”, causing the citizens to rebuild bigger and stronger than before: “the quickly growing city became a brazen and appealing work of wonder” (Hesse 46). Within this classic golden age, the city was filled with glory and riches, but often paired along with this success are events that disrupt the invented utopia during its centuries of prosperity. With its riches, Hesse explains, the city faced “a bloody revolution of the lower classes that set a limit to [the city’s] splendor.” (Hesse 46).

The accumulation of these events gradually led to the third period, which is the deterioration of the city, and the rebirth of nature in the same land where the environment was once prosperous before human encroachment. The city’s gradual deterioration lead its population to search for opportunity: “The new country was tremendously attractive to people of the old world, whose talents were not being adequately used, and it appealed to their wishes and goals. Cities bloomed there overnight. The woods disappeared. Waterfalls were brought under control” (Hesse 47). The old city was left behind as the people were moving onward leaving only “decayed infrastructure” and “silent heaps of ruin” (Hesse 48). Geologic changes, like the shift of a river’s pathway, from the earthquake also allowed nature to conquer what was once a populated countryside. Hesse personifies the reawakening of nature: “In the mountains, where the remains of ancient quarries and summer homes crumbled away, the forest climbed up-the old forest. It saw the vast region lying bare, and it began to envelop this land piece by piece, so that everything became part of its green circle.” (Hesse 48). Gradually, the environment seized the entire country and wildlife inhabited the area, growing steadily while cities in countries far away were continuing the cycle elsewhere.

Critical Investigation

Hermann Hesse's short story has been my main inspiration behind this piece from its conception because of its universality, timelessness, and relevance. I wanted to critically examine Hesse's work as a whole in order to see the significance of *The City* in the greater context of his writings. Although specific analysis of *The City* was difficult to come by, I discovered that many of the common themes in his writing carry over throughout the story of *The City*.

Literary analysts note that Hesse's work is often biographical. Hesse grew up in a "picturesque" city, which he has described as "the most beautiful city [he has] known" (Tusken 1998). "Nestled in a valley of the Black Forest with the Nagold River flowing through its center" in southwestern Germany (Tusken 1998), his upbringing is significantly present in personal letters as well as the landscape described in the setting of *The City*: "the river, streets, houses, fields and forests that were 'with deep nostalgia'" (Tusken 1998). Hesse's experience, a "cruel awakening" (Roberts 2009), living through the first World War affected his writing in which "questions of social structure are addressed only implicitly...in none of these cases, however, does Hesse make social systems or structures his principal concern. Rather, the focus is more on the individual and how he or she responds to the challenges thrown up by life" (Roberts 2009). Human response to challenge and change in life can be seen throughout *The City*, especially during the transitions from one period to the next. I have noticed this response to change in my own work, specifically when I had to adapt to nature's challenges like unpredictable weather.

Critical analysis of Hesse's *Die Morgenlandfahrt* (The Journey to the East), a fairy tale written in 1932, reveals motifs about concepts of periods and the absence of time,

which are congruent with themes in *The City*. While Hesse's writing may be "showing occasional signs of the disintegration of chronological time, [it] is still rooted in a narrative continuity...time no longer serves primarily as a framework, but rather as a cyclic subconscious force, a subjective indicator of the tides of personality and emotion" (Crenshaw 1972). Crenshaw's analysis describes Hesse's thoughts on cause and effect to be "free of the tyranny of chronological time" (Crenshaw 1972). In this case, "a so-called future event, or even a fictional event may bring about a present result...events happen one after another; previous events have logical consequences. The plot can be told, and the clear sequence of events requires a reliance on time as an absolute" (Crenshaw 1972). The use of cyclic forces of cause and effect as well as time periods, where date and time have no significance, weaves through Hesse's writings so considerably that his work is "...considerably more than a Period Piece" (Bloom 2002). In my own work, I wanted to continue the distortion of time by creating a physically cyclical piece that appears as though it continues forever. The circular path that connects the three locations of performance mimics the essence of a cycle, and the repetitive nature of each performance gives the impression of an absence of time.

Hesse views humans as "evolving, struggling, [and] ever-changing" (Cornils 2009), and compares the similarities of the nature of humans with the nature of the universe itself: "The world represents a union of spirit and matter, the absolute and the contingent, the infinite and the finite, light and darkness, good and evil, and many other polar extremes. More frequently however, the unity is destroyed by the preponderance of one over the other, and this condition is at the basis of human concepts of good and evil" (Pachmuss 2008). The theme of "preponderance" is common thread in *The City*, where

humans and nature contend with each other to be the dominant force throughout different periods within the story. Hesse's concepts of human experience have been compared with writers like Dostoevsky, in that Hesse's novels "depict the tragedy of intellect—man's problematic existence taking place amidst the silent loneliness and disharmony characteristic of a diseased city, of modern culture, civilization, philosophy, and industrialization". Hesse hopes to "bridge the gap which exists between spirit and nature, to reconcile them, and to make them equally desirable in man's life" (Pachmuss 2008). Redemption from the tragedies of man's reality "is possible only if the individual accepts suffering, discovers his own self, and relinquishes his painful isolation by merging into communion with others" (Pachmuss 2008). Creating community by merging with others is relevant in the story of *The City* especially when people left the deteriorated city in search for better opportunities elsewhere. In both the second and third periods of my performance, the union of people and dissemblance of community is portrayed, which will be better explained in my product and process.

I have noticed that the most common thread that most literary analysts had in common to note about Hermann Hesse's collective work is that the meaning behind his words are not affected by man-made ideas like time and date, but rather these thoughts can be applied in whatever realm of events involving human-nature interaction. I aim to align my piece with Hermann Hesse's *The City* by showing that time has no beginning and end, but rather these concepts are cyclical, constant, and transcendent of time throughout my work and performance.

Product/Performance

The performance begins in the Connecticut College Arboretum. Upon entering the arboretum, the audience will notice a basket filled with small wooden blocks at the bottom of the large entrance hill atop of the short stonewall. I will be at the bottom of the hill, and after introducing myself to the audience, I instruct them to take the materials next to me—referring to the blocks and a pile of small papers with directions written on them:

Take a wood block from the basket, and do what you'd like with it.

This performance takes place in three locations.

The path to these locations begins to your left—follow the wood blocks.

Feel free to stay in each of the three locations for as short or long as you'd like.

You may move throughout the performance spaces freely.

In case audience members are unsure of where to go or if they should actually take one, faux audience members, who are simply other students who have had experience viewing this piece in past showings, guide others throughout the performance by being highly interactive and fearless with their exchanges. To the left of the bottom of the hill where the basket is located, wooden blocks are scattered randomly along the pathway leading to the first performance area. Although the blocks are made from wood, the scene reveals that they are not completely of the same world. The blocks' juxtaposition to the natural setting reveals truths about what is "supposed" to be in this natural place. The blocks, which appear to be out of place in the surroundings, can be noted as striking for a few reasons. The ordered wooden blocks are the product of created structure from the unbound composition of trees, and the methodical paths we create as humans intervene this natural

randomness of the space. The concept of the “thing” or the material object is supportive of the journey or path of which the material intends to create. Since the visible aspect of a human moving through space constantly transforms or vanishes, the blocks act as placeholders or markers that exhibit the paths of movement patterns that are anticipated or encouraged.

The first area, the Conifer Collection patio garden, and soloist, Mauri Connors, both represent one stage of the human-nature interactions from Hesse’s story. This first stage is the transition from pure, virginal nature to initial human establishment. The landscape of this area features wild, untamed grasses mixed among a variety of tree species. As the audience embarks deeper within this area, the first vision of the dancer, who is barefoot and dressed completely in white, is utilizing the architectural concept of “denial and reward”, which is visualizing an area the audience wants to embark in, and having to change the audience’s position or move to be in that place. Mauri is first revealed, but the audience must travel deeper into the site and closer to her, the subject, in order to see more of what she is doing. Mauri’s disappearance leads the audience to the patio garden, where hundreds of small wooden blocks are randomly dispersed on top of six large rocks throughout the space. Mauri’s task is to create order from the disarray. She must take what is within her means, the wooden blocks available, and create ordered structures that represent different settings or places on top of the rocks. Her decisions within the task are completely in the moment, and her disposition is quiet, concentrated, and unaware of the audience’s presence. Mauri has the option to recreate, add, or preserve the formations she has created throughout the entirety of the performance. She constructs and reconstructs continuously until the performance is over, which is about one hour.

The audience may choose to leave or stay in this performance location for as long or short as they would like. I hope the audience continues walking the path, possibly guided by the planted audience members. Along the path are structures made of wooden blocks that are arranged in groupings similar to Mauri's constructions. Throughout the pathways, there are different sizes of blocks. The change in sizes represents our desire as humans to grow and develop, but also comments on how civilizations have grown and shrunk over time from initially modest foundations, to extensive networks of metropolises, to forgotten ruins. I hope the audience might be encouraged to add their own block to these structures on the pathways, or rearrange the blocks as Mauri had been.

The second area visited is Buck Lodge, where Christophe Desorbay along with three other dancers embodies the second stage of Hesse's story, *The Golden Age*, which is one of many human-nature interactions or conflicts. In this section, Christophe, dressed in formal business attire, is reciting passages from *The City* while the rest of the dancers are standing atop large black cubes and using their arms and legs to hang from angled support beams of the lodge's stone wall. The dancers hanging from the beams are quiet, and resemble sleeping bats or gargoyles. Christophe's task is to walk, increasing in speed over time to a run, along the lines of the floorboards of the deck in a grid-like manner while reciting excerpts of text from Hesse's *The City*. He is also less aware of the audience's presence like Mauri, but rather more focused, determined, theatrical, and somewhat maddened while performing his task. While Christophe goes about his task, the dancers hanging from the support beams gradually move through a sequence of increasing intensity and interaction with each other and Christophe. They start with experimenting with their own position on the beam. Then, they transition to switching beam locations. Next, they move away from

the stonewall and beams on a grid structure, like Christophe's, while placing the smallest cubes in front of Christophe's path, to confuse or trip him. Finally, they push the largest cubes directing into Christophe while he is running. The interruption of the cubes leaves Christophe in a state of disarray, causing him to reset and restart his text from the beginning of the sentence. Over time, Christophe's appearance is visually deteriorated, his clothing falling apart and hair a mess and dirty from the blows of the cubes and the exhaustion of running and speaking simultaneously. When Christophe completes his text, the piece will reset, and start again from the beginning.

The third performance location is the large field adjacent to the trellises by the pond. The performance in this area represents the stage of nature's rebirth after the downfall of civilization. In this section, Maia, wearing layers of neutral tones, walks alone amid three large towers made of cardboard boxes, mimicking the smaller wood block structures that lay along the path, now larger in scale. Her task is to gradually deconstruct all of the towers by removing one box at a time, unfolding each box, and placing each flattened box on the ground. Eventually, all of the boxes will be flattened; creating a random patchwork of cardboard that covers large areas of the field. While most of the work in this transformation will be accomplished by Maia, I hope the audience feels inclined to assist her in the task. Faux audience members may roam throughout the field during Maia's performance in order to encourage other audience members to move around the space freely. As Maia continues her task for a few minutes, she will randomly bring boxes over to audience members and hand the boxes to them. I hope that the audience members feel inclined to unfold the boxes and place them within the patchwork of the flattened boxes. I would like for the audience to possibly be persuaded to touch the

cardboard, walk on the cardboard, or even independently break the cardboard boxes down without Maia having to give them a box. Once all of the boxes are broken down, Maia will remove her shoes, walk on the flattened surface, lay on the surface, and rest for about a minute. Once this is complete, she will put on her shoes, and begin folding the boxes, stacking them as she goes. I hope the audience might feel inclined to join Maia in taking off her shoes and resting as well. Eventually, the entire process will repeat, just as the other periods had. Because the audience has the option to proceed at their own will throughout the arboretum, they might continue on the circular path, still following the wooden block structures, which would eventually lead them back to Mauri's stage, the transition from pure, virginal nature to initial human establishment. Ultimately, the cyclical, repetitious, and recurring nature of the performance is revealed.

Additional Research Sources

I would like to acknowledge the influential figures and artists that have paved the path of the historical performance style of environmental site-specific work.

Lawrence Halprin and Anna Halprin

Born in 1916 in Brooklyn, Lawrence Halprin was a leading landscape architect in the 20th century who completed studies in both horticulture and design. He had a wide range of work including urban spaces, concert venues, and National parks. His marriage with Anna Halprin fueled both of their efforts as artists, and often times their work was very interwoven and connected. Anna Halprin was born in in 1920 in Illinois. She was devoted to her experimental work as a dance artist, which helped pioneer the postmodern and expressive arts healing movement. Her revolutionary work is known for adaptation, exploration of the unknown, such as compositional improvisation, and redefining the meaning of dance.

Lawrence and Anna Halprin share combined interests of landscape architecture as well as site-specific work and the body in relation to nature. Lawrence's views on gardens, cities, roads, and most other architectural structures within landscapes are designed with high consideration of "the moving person in mind" in that space in order to attribute to the "landscape's performance" (Merriman, 101). His sense of kinesthetic design considers the environment as something, which can be experienced primarily through movement, and any architectural approach, specifically regarding cities, "must be approached as a 'complex series of events'" (Merriman, 102). He encourages the comprehension of surroundings in terms of movement, choreography, and performance, just as automobile drivers must



comprehend their surroundings in similar ways when on the road. Lawrence Halprin's strong focus on mentally grasping the environment in the realm of development and construction is recognized with the dance deck that was built for Anna Halprin's choreographic work and research.

The deck was designed specifically for movement, and was attached to the Halprin home so that Anna could split her time with her children while creating work. The deck is made of redwood, and is a non rectangular shape that is built around and through the trees that was "responding to the environment itself...the shape of the deck had a lot to do with the trees themselves, because we had to build around the trees, and that was more important than making it a special shape..." (Halprin 2008). Although there is no proscenium arch, the space is useful for both performance and workshops. The architecture highlights the kinetic and changeable qualities of the space, such as natural light, weather, and seasons.

Paula Kramer

Paula Kramer, a Berlin based PhD candidate, is a dance researcher and performer at Coventry University. Her studies in contemporary outdoor dance and materialist thought are influenced by practices such as site-specific work, awareness based improvisation, somatic practices, and political science. Paula is a performer and also creates work in dance, writing, video, and photography.

Paula Kramer's research in dance looks into the importance of attentiveness and awareness when considering the co-presence of inhabitants and nature when both creating and performing site-specific work. She focuses on allowing the environment and humans

to inform one-another rather than glorifying either humans or nature separately. She regards both presences to be equals: “...consider the human body in the natural environment from a simple but strong angle—as a vibrant matter among vibrant matter, as lively things among lively things.” (Kramer 2014). She also highlights the importance of physical engagement with the materials of the environment through “trust[ing] and practic[ing] direct touch, physical effort, an engagement with the textured and manifest aspects of the human body and the natural environment alike” (Kramer 2011). She questions the artistic decisions of humans within nature during performance deriving from two root factors: a search or journey to “become part of a purer world, moving like rivers or trees, in order to shed the burdens of daily life distortions in success-driven and human-controlled structures...or...simply ‘use’ nature as a picturesque or spectacular backdrop for performance” (Kramer 2014).

Stephan Koplowitz

Stephan Koplowitz is best known for creating work in public, site-specific sites. A great deal of his repertory is large in scale and focuses primarily on public art, the human condition, community, and diverse audiences. Koplowitz has created 56 works since 1984, and has been commissioned for 40 works. He has a great deal of involvement teaching at universities across the country.

In the first few months of my research, I was able to take part in an online course taught by Stephan Koplowitz entitled “Creating Site-Specific Dance and Performance Works”. The class encouraged me throughout my own creative process and made me continuously question my decisions as a choreographer and researcher from the

conception of my ideas, through the production of my work, and to the final performance. He gives reason to creating site-specific work by highlighting reasons an artist might choose this option: the transformative quality of a space, creation of new perspective and a sense of ownership for the space once the work has been created and performed, creating real world context by delving into the history, dynamics, use, and politics of the space, and defying a site's limitations, changing expectations, and surprising the public.

Koplowitz also defines four categories of site specificity: site-specific; a one-of-a-kind work that can not be replicated anywhere else, site-adaptive; a wholly site-specific work that can be easily adapted to the site, reframing from studio to site; taking existing work and putting it in a specific location, and reframing the known; placing a work of art in a site. Works can also shift between each of these categories, for he states that the categories are for the artist and not so much for the viewer. Among these categories, he highlights examples of each in a historical context by reviewing his own work as well as work done by artists such as Isadora Duncan, Ted Shawn, Anna and Lawrence Halprin, Merce Cunningham and John Cage, Trisha Brown, Meredith Monk, and Twyla Tharp.

The class also focused on the creative process and design of making site-specific work, which includes selecting a site, location of the audience, getting permission, and budgeting both time and money. Koplowitz notes that researching the site's history, current use, and community are important aspects when a site-specific work is considered, researched, and staged. He also differentiates between two different types of material that can be performed: material that is site-inspired, which is working from what inspires the artist about the site, or material that is site-specific; which is work that physically engages the site. Overall, Koplowitz demonstrates the importance of completely dissecting a work

that is site-specific in order to fully comprehend the dance and performance work to its full extent.

Influence on my work

The research I conducted made me feel and think differently about how I approached my own work. Both Lawrence and Anna Halprin made me question if the movement the dancers and I experimented with was based solely on my own thoughts, free of the site, or if the movement was a reflection of the architecture of the arboretum sites I had put the dancers in. The work of Lawrence Halprin in particular encouraged me to analyze the architectural design of locations within the arboretum. I began to notice the spaces that are, according to my interpretations, most definitely made for obvious routes and movement patterns, such as the pathways, the amphitheater, and the arboretum entrance. I chose sites like the amphitheater because of its clearly defined anthropogenic uses. These observations were based on the spaces seating arrangements, openness, and kept landscaping. I noticed areas within these locations that appeared to be not as sculpted and thought out for human use, and I chose to explore those especially in Mauri's section with the use of the natural rock as a surface for building, and in Christophe's section with the use of the support beams for the Buck Lodge's roof. I will go into detail later about my process with these spaces, but I wanted to point out that none of these specific items within the spaces were "designed" for movement, but I am trying to explore ways in which movement can be incorporated within these not-so-obvious areas.

Once I decided to use the Arboretum as the site of my performance, Paula Kramer's ideas on physical engagement with nature were extremely influential on my work. I tried

to keep in mind the importance of letting human presence and natural presence inform each other, rather than work against one another. The ability to trust the use of materials within a site, a practice Kramer utilizes, was also encouraging in my work. The more I trusted myself to use the materials and the more I trusted the materials to speak for themselves, the more my piece developed for the better.

The process of taking Stephan Koplowitz's class while I was simultaneously beginning my progression of creating this work was extremely beneficial. It felt as though I had an extra guide to the necessary steps I had to follow while pursuing a site-specific work. His lessons helped me consider ideas and necessary actions that I may have overlooked, such as considering how the performance will be viewed to the public audience, asking permission to use the public space, and paying attention to uncontrollable factors like weather and time of day.

Process

Choosing a Site

In the year of research leading up to the performance, I first began by choosing the ideal location for this performance where my research would be presented in a format that highlighted the ideas I wished to present in a productive and effective way. My first inclination was to use the studio, which is where I began to create choreography and process some of my ideas. In some of the short phrase work I created in the studio, I wanted to include concepts of interconnectedness, cause and effect, and action/reaction in my choreographic language. As I began to review some of the film I had collected over the summer of New York City streets, beach scenery, and passing landscapes from my train window, I began to question my initial decision to use the studio as my site. If my research was about the conflicted relationship between human and natural development, I realized it was necessary to literally develop my own work in a natural setting, which is why I began to experiment in the Connecticut College Arboretum.

Moving into the arboretum space created a real world context for my work rather than using a studio, which felt more fictional and physically boxed in. The transition to the arboretum as the performance site enabled me to delve into the historical, sociological, and environmental aspects of the space in order to better negotiate the subject matter of my work. My choice to use the arboretum was intended to mimic the three major periods of Hesse's story. The three major spaces for the installments are the Conifer Collection patio garden, the Buck Lodge, and the open field adjacent to the pond and trellises. These locations are representative of not only the three stages of human and nature interplay, but

also represent ways in which the historical landscape design of the arboretum was considered in terms of movement and use for those who spend time in the arboretum. The spaces feature areas that range from heavily designed structures that are apparent for human use and movement, to areas that seem completely untouched, wild, and free from human influence. While these areas may appear to be natural, it is important to note that the arboretum as a whole is a site that has been mediated by humans for centuries, and there is no true, untouched, virgin land in this chosen site. In its early beginnings, the arboretum was used for agricultural purposes for about 200 years, and traces of what was once practiced in this site remain as stone walls that slice through the 64 acres of land.

Unpredictability

Uncertainties with weather, time of day, and lighting were all major factors to the development of this dance. Also, the fact that the Arboretum is a public facility added another level of uncertainty to the work. In all three sections of the dance, adaptations were made in order to accompany working with, on, or by nature. Often times, nature is a stronger force than human power, like when the earthquake destroys the city in Hermann Hesse's story. The imbalance in power between humans and nature is also true in the context of my own work. Adaptations to this imbalance to the surroundings can be seen in the first phase when these establishments are built on the natural curves of the rocks. I also did not anticipate the weather having such a strong impact as it had throughout the process. During the months of January through February, it was extremely difficult to even get to the arboretum. Due to multiple snowstorms, including a blizzard, extremely low temperatures, and high-speed winds, the conditions repeatedly made it too harsh to

rehearse outside. Throughout the months of April and March, I continued to struggle against the power of nature, specifically intense rainfall. In order to continue my research without the site, I resorted to using the dance studio spaces for experiments. Some of these investigations included using the studio as a safe place to practice Christophe being tackled by the other dancers, as well as a large area for the (de)construction of a cardboard box city with Maia and Mauri, which will be described later.

(Re)Creating the Three Periods

The process of creating the three periods within the arboretum began with an initial site inventory of the space. I spent time within the arboretum looking for areas that inspired me by walking around the paths as well as searching for areas that were not-so-often explored. I took particular notice of places that were heavily anthropogenically influenced as well as areas that were the opposite and appeared to be overgrown and untamed. After contemplating these areas, I reached a tentative decision to use three areas that stood out to me the most: the conifer forest patio garden, the Buck Lodge, and the large grassy field adjacent to the pond.

Period 1

The Conifer Collection patio garden, which from this point on I will refer to as the patio garden, would be the setting of the first period of the cycle, initial human establishment in untouched land. The path leading to this area featured wild tall grasses, large and old trees, and a grassy path leading to the patio garden area. The patio is circular and is made of dozens of unique pieces of slate.



Surrounding the patio are trees, large rocks, bushes, flowers, mulch, and short to medium length thick grasses. In the first few rehearsals in this area, I gave Mauri the task of adapting the phrase work assembled in the studio to the patio garden. As beautiful as she looked while dancing, I noticed that it seemed unnatural to try and connect these two entities. It felt as if they were two puzzle pieces from two separate puzzles. At this point, I decided to have Mauri explore the space in a series of improvisations. Her varying levels of



input and movement choices using the natural and manmade architectures in the space enabled me to further interpret the ways in which her movement relates to initial human establishment in unreclaimed land while constantly questioning the role of bodies, materials, and sound in the space. The slates of the patio began to fit the definition of a landscape, a patchwork of different habitats or ecosystems. This patchwork reminded me of boundaries that the earth creates naturally:

continents, islands, mountain ranges, rivers, volcanoes, seas, lakes, and oceans. These natural boundaries also translate to human-created ideal boundaries like countries, towns, counties, and other manifestations of formal or informal territories.

The concept of (in)formal boundaries lead me to reflect on my own experiences in different parts of the world ranging from developing nations of the Global South (Kenya and Tanzania), turmoil-filled nations in the Middle East (Israel), and industrialized countries of the Global North (United States, France, and The Netherlands). Although they



may differ in westernized developmental phase, they have all come into being from the simplest of origins of nature's intrinsic gifts: natural resources. I then desired to give Mauri the task of replicating the creation of these premature civilizations using the most basic raw materials: small wood blocks. As soon as I imagined and quickly incorporated these



blocks, the piece rapidly developed. I gave Mauri instructions to simply incorporate them into her improvisation with the task of building one or many structures. As we continued exploring this task, what became most important to me was the process of creating these structures on the surfaces of different objects within the patio garden. From this point on, Mauri's task was

solely to create miniature societies using only the wooden blocks atop of the surfaces in the space. Within this task, Mauri did not manipulate the surfaces she built upon, and a peaceful coexistence between human establishment and the environment in which these sustainable developments were being established was present similarly to Hesse's first period of the story of *The City*. While Mauri performed this task, she reflected on her thought process, and while building, she created basic narratives for what she was building: her own neighborhood, college campus, town center, cookie cutter homes, and European hillsides to name a few.



Period 2

Buck Lodge was chosen as the site for the second period of the cycle, the golden age of human development. Although a great deal of the landscape in the arboretum has been

altered by humans, Buck Lodge stood out to me as an appropriate site for this period

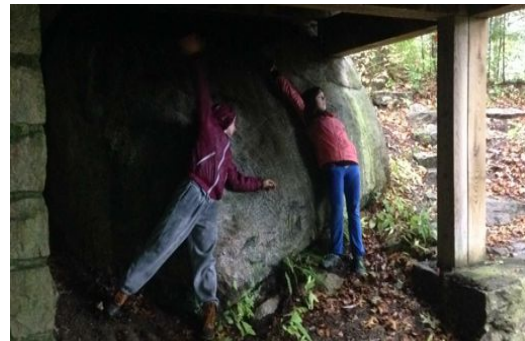


because it is one of the only major and large-scale pieces of architecture for strictly human use within the arboretum. Beginning the process of creating the second period, I had established that this location was where I wanted to have the greatest

amount of performers because I wanted to evoke the sense of population and civilization.

In the first few rehearsals, I taught Christophe and Mauri a phrase I had created in the studio. Again we adapted it to the space by using different levels of the lodge including the deck and the space below it. Similarly to the experiences I had while developing the first period, I could not see a successful way of combining studio choreography within the site I had chosen. The unnatural feeling of merging these two entities simply did not work as I had hoped. I utilized my past methods again by having Christophe and Mauri

improvise in and around Buck Lodge. The way the dancers simultaneously used the space was an insightful experience. I noticed that this improvisation was much more reliant on the architecture of the buildings. Buck Lodge has a



strong foundation and was designed with the intent to withstand a great deal of pressure (i.e. weather, human use, etc.). Because of the secure nature of the space, the dancers were more apt to give their weight to the structure, noting there was less worry about damaging this structure in comparison to the fragility of growing species like grass, bushes, and trees.

While observing improvisations, I began to reflect on my time living in New York City, a place I would consider to be in an extended golden age. I watched short film clips of different areas of the city that I had recorded a few months prior while living there. I paid close attention to the movement patterns of the people on the grid of streets, and was struck by the presence of unnatural sound in the city.

Keeping these images in mind, I decided to use the deck of the Lodge as the main performance space. I wanted to use the hard lines of the deck's floorboards as a guide for Christophe to follow in a grid-like walking pattern. At this early point in the process, I instructed Christophe to continue the improvisation, while incorporating ways to use the grid in an obvious, almost theatrical, way. I also decided to include a sound score of a National Public Radio podcast entitled "Is Civilization Natural?", which discusses the increasing global population in urban areas while understanding the factors causing this trend and discussing the potential future of cities as a result of this progression (Frank 2014). I chose to introduce sound, specifically voice, in the space because it acts as another intervention within nature. The sound score in this natural environment is not shaped, constructed, or formed into words, but rather these sounds are arrhythmic, reserved, and free flowing. The speaker's voice is cutting when listening to the podcast in the arboretum. Hearing sound constructed into words ordered into formulated and rhythmic sentences highly contrasts the natural site, just as the lodge itself, with its hard lines and permanence, appears to permeate into the natural space.

At first, I was unsure of how to incorporate other bodies into this section of the performance. While



developing the golden age, I thought about how within this period there are points at which humans are challenged by nature's unexpected surprises, like natural disasters. Nature's ability to destroy life just as easily as it can support life often causes major damage to the flow of human lifestyle. This destruction causes societies to assess their damages, reset, and rebuild stronger against nature in order to mitigate future disaster and loss. I decided to express this by using other dancers as the unexpected obstacles humans face when in their most successful state of being. I gave Emily, Meg, and Olivia the task to hang in any form from the lodge's support beams adjacent to the deck where Christophe would be walking, and now reciting passages from Hesse's *The City*. While he is walking up and down the grid of the deck's floorboards, the other three performers will randomly fall from the beam, timing their descent so that they can run to Christophe and choose to either tackle him to the ground or embrace/hug him, and then return back to a position hanging



from the beam. The tackles to the ground will gradually deteriorate Christophe's appearance, ability to continue on his pathway, and capability to recite the text fluidly. Every time he is tackled, he must reset, which means he must walk back to the back of the deck, start his walking pattern again, and recite the text from the beginning of the sentence he was reciting when tackled. Gradually, his costume, perhaps a suit and bowtie, and ability to recite the text will become disordered and less comprehensible.

Emily, Meg, and Olivia represent outside forces that are stronger than human's capacity to control, which have rare but outstanding effects on human success. Looking at the three dancers as if they are figures of nature, the tackles personify natural disasters like

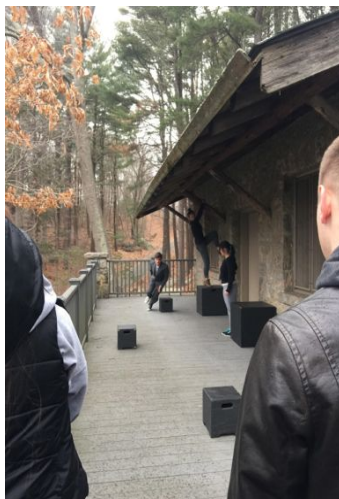
earthquakes, tornadoes, hurricanes, or tsunamis. The three performers also embody societal pressures that developed cities face, which includes political turmoil and revolutions or rebellions from underrepresented minorities or lower class. The act of embracing or hugging Christophe illustrates societal encouragement to keep developing and striving for success.

After weeks of compromised rehearsals due to heavy rainfall preventing the cast from rehearsing outdoors, we were finally able to try out these concepts, finding that some

of what I had envisioned was not entirely what I had hoped for. The dancers who were assigned the task to hang from the beams found this task to be more of a burden than anticipated. After some brainstorming, we decided to incorporate the use of various-sized



black cubes that the dancers could stand on, which would not only help them reach the beams, but also opened up more opportunities for what they were able to do with and around the beams.



The integration of the cubes inspired experimentation with regard to how the dancers would now interact with Christophe. We played with using the cubes as obstacles that alter Christophe's grid pattern. Meg, Olivia, and Emily tried moving the boxes on the grid and placing or pushing them in his way to throw Christophe off or even trip him. I decided to use this new level of interaction rather than the hugging and tackling

idea. With the physical contact aspect out of the picture, I decided to let the interaction

with the boxes grow as Christophe recited the text. With his increasing speed, Meg, Olivia, and Emily would increase their level of interaction simultaneously. First, they would shift around on their own beam, finding new positions to hang in using the different sized boxes for support. Second, they would change which beam they decided to hang on, while completely disregarding the original person hanging on the beam they have decided to switch with. Third, they would begin moving along the grid structure away from the beams with the smallest cubes, placing them directly in front of Christophe to alter his path, or trip him. Fourth and finally, they would push the largest cubes deliberately into Christophe while he would run.

Adding the large cubes felt like the final piece of the puzzle that had now connected all periods of the piece, including the path that connects these periods, which I will discuss later. The cubes look like enlarged versions of Mauri's small wood blocks, except the manipulators are now focused on what they are capable of doing with these cubes, like pushing limits and representing unexpected and dominant outside forces, rather than simply establishing a sense of place, as Mauri had been doing in the previous period.



Period 3

The large field adjacent to the pond and trellises is the home of the third period, decline of human intervention and the rebirth of nature, in the cycle. The creative development of this period was much slower than that of the other periods. Since their conception, I was compelled by the wooden blocks to maintain the presence of the blocks throughout the entire cycle. I decided if I did not use the small wooden blocks specifically,

then I would use another physical material that echoed their symbolic yet simple nature. I hoped to find a way to use the entire amphitheater and only one dancer in order to show the smallness of human presence in a very large natural setting.

I began experimenting with the use of cardboard boxes ranging in all sizes. I imagined creating one gigantic structure in the middle of this vast field that was constructed of only hundreds of cardboard boxes. As I began collecting and breaking down the boxes to store them, I started to notice their physical variability: a material with the potential to hold volume, a puzzle, a 3-dimensional cube, and a flat 2-dimensional plane. From the large structure, I wanted to see the transition of this massive edifice being deconstructed and broken down box by box into one large cardboard surface that potentially covered the entire field.



In the beginning of December, Mauri, Christophe and I experimented with about a dozen boxes in the field. We created a mini-structure, unfolded the boxes, and placed the flattened boxes together on the field. I constantly questioned how the transition would progress: how many people should be involved? Do some people encourage the disassembly and do other discourage it? Is the process careful? Rushed?

After a few weeks of pondering these questions and collecting more boxes, the first signs of winter were apparent with a fresh coat of snow on the ground. The snow may have hindered our ability to experiment outdoors, but it sparked new ideas for my work in the process. I envisioned the entire field covered in brown cardboard. This image reminded me of the beginnings of seasonal change, climate's own form of rebirth, that were

happening right before my eyes. The cardboard layer would resemble the first snowfall of the season where everything is covered in a thin sheet of snow, only leaving the outlines of whatever the snowflakes touch to be comprehensible. The cardboard layer also reminded me of the classic New England Fall scenery: a thick blanket of leaves completely covering the ground below it. I also pictured the image of a vast field after a controlled, or uncontrolled, burning, which provides the environment with ideal conditions for regeneration and regrowth of species that were suppressed or dormant.

As I started to make these connections between the boxes and the rebirth of nature, I began to look forward to creating a first draft of the structure now that I had obtained a few dozen boxes to experiment with.

Because the half-dozen snowstorms in February restricted access to the field, Maia and Mauri practiced the process of folding the boxes, building the structure, and breaking down the boxes in the studio.



After working with the boxes in the studio, I was able to come to some conclusions about the symbolism of the boxes themselves, the large structure that was created, the process of deconstruction, and the flattened cardboard. The large structure could represent cities that once contained so



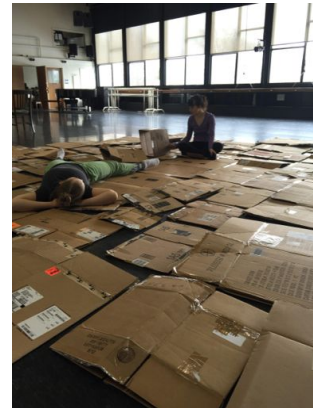
many people, homes, items, government, and other things and are now vacant. These cities are still present and have the potential to hold things within them, but

the transition from cubic box to flattened box reveals that all that is left is a history and traces of the past that once existed. The flattened cardboard is a physical representation of what was once human achievement, but is now transformed by the reclamation of the

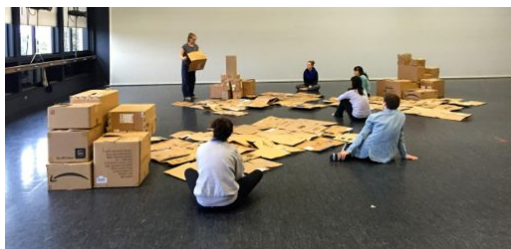
environment. It mimics the false stability of human success in comparison to the unpredictable capabilities of human nature. The cardboard boxes display the concept of literally moving onward from one place to another. They also can be viewed as a home, and their transportability highlights the semi-permanence of what humans may call home.

Experimenting with the larger quantity of boxes also gave me the means to envision what is practical in terms of the final performance.

Realistically, I would not be able to gather enough cardboard boxes to cover the entirety of the field in the time I had left to present this work. I decided that I would create multiple, medium-large sized box-cities that are placed throughout the field so that the flattened cardboard creates a patchwork



similar to the slate patio in the first period. These patches of cardboard create a landscape, a patchwork of different habitats and ecosystems. Aesthetically, a beautiful sound score is created when the process of transitioning from structure to floor covering occurs. Maia and Mauri pointed out the sensation of walking all over the cardboard once it has been flattened as being comforting, sensorily interesting, protective, gentle, supportive, and



giving the ability to feel their weight because of the indent of stepping caused. In order to involve the audience, I would have Maia hand an audience member a box after Maia had been breaking the

boxes down for a few minutes, in hope that the audience member would be inclined to break down the box, and place it with the rest of the flattened boxes.

Completing the Cycle

Throughout my own process, I wanted to maintain the cyclical structure of Hesse's story. Even though each period's location is positioned around the pond so that when traveling among the three locations the pathway created is naturally a circle, I constantly questioned my ability to make these connections from the perspective of the audience. When trying to put myself in the audience's shoes, I attempted to imagine what it would be like to enter the site hoping to see the entire performance. Some solutions I thought about incorporating included creating individual maps for each audience member that highlighted the three locations, using a performer as a guide that would lead the audience to the locations, or having the performers leave a trail of the small wood blocks for the audience to follow. My greatest challenge was the fact that because this is a site-specific work in a public space, it is nearly impossible to predict how the audience will observe, engage, and react to the performance. It is very different than a performance on a proscenium stage where you can be very direct about what you would like the audience to focus on and see specifically.

After a few showings and receiving feedback from faculty and classmates, I realized the importance of incorporating the audience in the performance. I wanted the audience to feel as if they can look closely, interact, and feel free to roam from location to location throughout the performance. I recognized that this may not be an easy feat to accomplish, so my first thought was to leave a basket of the small wood blocks at the bottom of the hill of the arboretum entrance with basic instructions, which were mentioned previously, to take a block and follow its pathway, whatever it may be.

After more conversation post-showing, it became clear that I would need one or more “plants” in the audience. Their role would be to interact as much as possible throughout the entire performance without their role being obvious. For example, I would like to set up small structures, similar to those built by Mauri, randomly along the pathways that connect each period. Based on the involvement of the faux audience members, people



might be obliged to place their own block atop of the structure, adding to its design. I realized that the sensations in a lot of the periods might be important to share with the audience. I wanted to include random piles of these blocks throughout the areas between periods, so perhaps people would be inclined to create their own unique structures. I hope to encourage the audience to stand as close to the performers as they'd like, especially in the first and the last periods. I encouraged the faux audience members to observe Mauri's task closely. The same goes for the third period, where audience members could be engaged by participating in the decomposition of the cities by assisting Maia in her deconstruction. I wanted to have Maia do the majority of the deconstruction herself, but I would also like to see if the faux audience members could encourage others to help Maia by walking on the flattened cardboard while also taking down and unfolding the boxes, whether or not they are given to the audience directly from Maia, or even laying down with Maia on the cardboard to feel the same ambiances she senses.

In terms of the pathway and decision making that could occur on part of the audience, I hoped to encourage them to stay at each period of the cycle for as long as they

personally desire, like a promenade performance. I thought this could be accomplished best by using the faux audience to come and go for extremely short amounts of time, and some staying at the periods and watching for longer amounts of time. I also highlight this desire in the direction cards that were given at the beginning of the performance. After the final showing before the final performance, I realized that I would need a bit more direction in order for the audience to feel more comfortable making independent decisions about when and where they could move. I chose to create direction cards that the audience would take along with a small wood block at the beginning/entrance of the performance. With regard to all audience members seeing the performance no matter when they leave each period, the performers will carry on with their tasks continuously for one hour, which takes about two full runs for each period. Although there may be times in which the performers are not witnessed, the idea was that the performance is cyclical, always continuing, and constant—just as Hesse’s cycle is with the establishments, developments, and downfalls of societies.

Reflections and Discoveries

Looking back to where I was with regard to this project one year ago, it is very clear that this work has evolved tremendously throughout the entire process. The development and final performance of my work has made me reflect on this past year of research and the discoveries I have made. Completing the final performance has given me even more perspective to the transparency, relevance, and importance of my work than I had prior to starting the process.

With feedback from the of the audience, I was able to not only reaffirm my personal beliefs about the piece, but also develop my feelings and thoughts about how the performance could be perceived in a different light.

Some overall perceptions of the piece circled around the concept of development and stages. The beauty of the images of each period was described as striking for most people. For example, one audience



member reflected on her focus in the first period and on the pathways. Because the delicacy of the blocks forced her to zoom into the details of the space overall, there was constant encouragement for the viewer to observe spatial features they might not have



once noticed. Within the first period, some audience members had other thoughts: “she was animal-like and was tending to her nest”, she was a “god-like figure”, or she was “building homes for tiny people to live in”. In the second period, one audience member referred to the dancers

hanging from the beams as “corporate gargoyles”, which I thought to be the perfect title for their role in the performance. The final section, which lasted the longest amount of time, seemed to have the biggest impact on the audience. There was a great deal of audience interaction, and people seemed to be more willing and open to taking risks, which in the end enhanced the overall performance. The concept of interconnectedness really came into fruition in this section where people were interacting and making strong connections without instruction from anyone. People were very inclined to deconstruct the boxes, lay

or sit with Maia when the deconstruction was complete, or even build their own structures from the flattened boxes. Perhaps it was due to their less delicate nature when compared with the small wooden blocks, people were more inclined to interact. I genuinely



enjoyed hearing about the different interpretations of my work. Although they were not always the exact meaning I had put behind each choice, all of the analyses seemed to have a common thread, which was the process of development, the checks and balances that come along with development, and the process of moving onward once it is time to development elsewhere.

My personal experience viewing the final performance brought up some noteworthy reflections about site-specific work. I want to reflect about the audience’s reactions within



the performance. My perspective about the audience’s role has shifted dramatically,

especially after seeing the progression of the audience's feelings of comfort during the final performance go from hesitant to fully willing to partake. Many people said they wanted to interact from the start of the first period, but were unsure of what time would be most appropriate. Many audience members seemed to feel the most comfortable when altering and adding to the block structures along the path in a similar way that Mauri had been doing. After seeing the major role the audience played in the final period, I now feel as though the audience's role is not always just to witness a work, but often times, the input of the audience is actually a crucial aspect of the overall work.

Another remarkable finding I confronted throughout the process was the nature of unpredictability in site-specific work. Unpredictability ended up being a more impactful factor for the rehearsal process than I had ever anticipated. Interestingly enough, these random weather patterns had a surprising amount of relevance to my work



as well as Hermann Hesse's story. Due to the abnormally cold and snowy winter as well as a rainy spring, nature was successful on many occasions in hindering my ability to hold rehearsals. Often times, these extremes made me feel as though I was fighting a losing



battle against the environment. Rather than simply giving up, I learned to adapt to these challenges or move onward, similar to how the people of *The City* were forced to adapt to the aftermath of an earthquake or the deterioration of their city. Fortunately, luck was on my side for the final

performance, and the work was performed on a beautiful sunny afternoon.

Although Hesse's model for development within the context of nature is specific to *The City*, I would like to note that the statement I have made about the universality of the three periods is more of a general statement regarding our world's developmental history. Consequently, there may be several case studies or real-life-examples of developed civilizations that dispute my cyclical stage theory. The ability to adapt to change is a concept that both the environment and humans have been taking part in all throughout history.

With this project, I have been able to participate in an important period of environmental awareness within the field of art. The world is currently transitioning from the geologic epoch of Holocene, an era of early civilization development through modern day, to Anthropocene. This new epoch, Anthropocene, is the present-day geological era in which humans hold responsibility for being the dominant influence on climate and the environment. Now that we, as humans, can be held responsible for this new geologic era, I think it is important to observe the interconnectedness between nature and its inhabitants, or humans specifically. I believe it is imperative to focus on how we can change our perspectives and practices for development in order to keep both humans' and nature's future sustainable and successful. I am thankful that I have been able to express my thoughts, research, and findings through a multidisciplinary approach, which has included dance, environmental studies, and fictional short stories.

Film

Two films were created in order to document the performance. One film was shot during the dress rehearsal on Sunday, April 19th, 2015 the entire performance ran for 53 minutes, but the film has been condensed. Another film features clips of footage from the final performance on Tuesday, April 21st, 2015, which features two full walk-throughs of the piece. The footage of the performances can be found in the back of this book and online at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DxpLffwmyDM> and https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Duc9bhQ_2QA.

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