

The Choreography and Production of "Sustainable Place"

by

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the production and the choreographed work, "Sustainable Place," was to bring awareness to the public about sustainability issues through the medium of dance. The piece was performed in Nelson Fine Arts Center's Dance Lab at Arizona State University on October 8th, 9th, and 10th of 2010. The work was layered with inspirations from sustainability issues, recycling processes, and resiliency concepts.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this body of work to my parents, Carolyn and Ted Newman. They have truly helped me become the woman I am today and I am forever grateful for this.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my committee members: Naomi Jackson, Mary Fitzgerald and David Pijawka for helping me along this journey. I appreciate the time they gave to me, their feedback, and their drive to make me really find the potential of “Sustainable Place.” I would also like to thank my cast, because certainly without them I would not have been able to create such a wonderful, intellectual, entertaining, exciting choreographed work. Finally, I would like to thank Arizona State University’s School of Dance for helping facilitate my growth as an artist and a choreographer.

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Sustainable places are one of the key hopes of our near and far future on planet earth. We need to be concerned with our waste and lack of care to discuss and change this problem. We simply cannot pass it on to the next generation; the problem is large enough today to take action. Dance is what I have been doing since I can remember. I believe dance can inspire, tell stories, communicate and educate people and communities about becoming sustainable. That is why I choreographed *Sustainable Place* for my thesis in Master of Fine Arts for the School of Dance. There were many elements I utilized to inspire my work: garbage, recycling materials, sustainability concepts, issues, and solutions.

The importance of these elements at a community level is the focus for this Master of Fine Arts choreographed work. Using dance as a vehicle to bring awareness to the public about recycling was one of the main themes of my thesis work. “In a democratic society, those whose livelihoods, environments and lives are at stake should be consulted and involved in the decisions that affect them” (Sarkissian et. al, 2009). This is one of the reasons why I believe a community should care and take action in their own environments. Right now landfills are filling up daily with unimaginable amounts of garbage. Recycling in our society is one of the keys to becoming more sustainable.

My choreographed work was presented with the intent to bring awareness to the public about the importance of being more sustainable. The work intended to show what can happen when we don't take care of environment and provide

steps to work in the right direction by bringing communities together. The choreographed piece, *Sustainable Place*, also encompassed the good that can come from implementing these steps to become more sustainable. An opportunity was presented to the audience to make a change in their lives. Even if it is as tiny as recycling objects they didn't before they saw this work, I consider the work successful in the field of dance.

“Recycling is another activity that contributes to a sustainable environment” (Smith, 2005). Smith goes on to explain, “Art that responds to social injustice is perhaps the largest category that might belong to a culture of sustainability” (Smith, 2005). Dance needs to voice itself about the social injustice of environmental negligence. The importance of art promoting awareness about being sustainable is crucial to promote change.

As part of my creative process, I conducted personal interviews with employees and directors of recycling and landfill centers around the greater area of Phoenix, Arizona. I was inspired to bring this information to dance and through it, to the community. I also collected research on other artists who have an interest in art and sustainability. For example, Elizabeth Johnson, Jane Palmer and Marianne Fairbanks also known as JAM, Charles Garoian, Free Soil and other artists who share my belief that art can bring awareness and inspire people about this topic.

The performance took place on October 8th, 9th, and 10th at Arizona State University in the Nelson Fine Arts Center's Dance Lab. I plan to use this project as a platform for how I would like to choreograph and teach dance in the future. I

intend to use dance as a means to educate, inspire and motivate others and make positive contributions to society as an artist and a teacher. I think that the arts have a responsibility to be creative and provide an artistic view on how to make positive changes in the world today. We can use dance as a means to show what has been, what is, and what will be. I utilize the art form of dance to educate, evoke emotions, change, and inspire.

Chapter 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

It is inherently true that sustainability is an important topic for the twenty first century. William Ruckelshaus, former head of the US Environmental Protection Agency stated:

Can we move nations in the direction of sustainability? Such a move would be a modification of society comparable in scale to only two other changes: the Agricultural Revolution of the late Neolithic, and the Industrial Revolution of the past two centuries. These revolutions were gradual, spontaneous, and largely unconscious. This one will have to be a fully conscious operation, guided by the best foresight that science can provide. If we actually do it, the undertaking will be absolutely unique in humanity's stay on earth (Toner, 2006).

Creating an awareness of sustainability and how the everyday person can help is essential to keeping a balance on earth. The World Commission on Environment and Development stated in 1987 that, "Humanity has the ability to make development sustainable to ensure that it meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (Toner, 2006). One of the ways to implement this plan of action for human kind is to start at home with learning to recycle.

Waiting to make a change will only perpetuate the degradation of the environment. "The wheel of fortune has accomplished her revolution, and the sacred ground is again disfigured with thorns and brambles" (Tietenberg, 2006).

The time for a green revolution is now. If we can educate and act at this moment we can rebuild the way we live our lives for a healthy planet and for the many generations to come. If we don't take action now and educate the public about recycling and the conservation of the Earth's resources, then we are only contributing to the "thorns and brambles" on our planet. Many factors contribute to our environmental issues in our world today, such as carbon emissions, overflowing landfills, energy issues and toxic chemicals that we put into the atmosphere. These problems are affecting our environment today and if not addressed will most certainly create a hazardous environment in the future.

Humans are the largest producers of waste in today's world. There are steps that can be taken at a community level to keep people informed about how they can contribute and clean up their waste. An awareness of recycling would be a great place to start at a community level. It will be important to educate the public on how, where, and what to recycle can help the environment in a positive way. The fact is, there is a problem and we as a species need to start doing our part.

Here are the facts from Recycling American Alliance:

In a lifetime, the average American will throw away 600 times his or her adult weight in garbage-leaving a legacy of 90,000 pounds of trash for his or her children. Americans throw away enough office paper annually to build a wall 12 feet high, stretching from Los Angeles to New York City. Americans throw away enough aluminum every three months to rebuild our entire commercial air fleet (Recycling American Alliance, 2010).

If more people knew about the American contributions toward this wall of garbage, then more people would contribute to recycling. “Just a little effort makes a huge difference to our environment” (Recycle America Alliance, 2010). Landfills are filling up and becoming more expensive to maintain. “Just as we contribute to our nation’s increasing garbage problem, we can all contribute to its solution by recycling” (Environmental Protection Agency, 1992).

Some Americans think, “Why recycle?” These are some reasons: “Recycling reduces our reliance on landfills and incinerators. Recycling protects our health and environment when harmful substances are removed from the waste stream, and recycling conserves our natural resources because it reduces the need for raw materials” (EPA, 1992). These values are important to educate Americans about, because we are one of the highest contributors to trash in the world. How can we educate the public about recycling? There are many ways to achieve this through seminars, lectures, and word of mouth. *Sustainable Place* was a vehicle to inform the public about recycling and sustainability issues.

There are so many other concerns for the environment like extreme weather record-breaking events that happen every year. For example, “Some damage is caused directly by the more extreme heat, as illustrated by the heat waves that resulted in thousands of deaths in Europe in the summer of 2003” (Tietenberg, 2006). Other recorded events in 2003 include, “Record temperatures in France; the hottest June in Switzerland for at least 250 years; and 562 tornadoes in the US during May, which resulted in 41 deaths” (Bals, published by World Meteorological Organization).

This extreme weather trend is only increasing. Many accredited scientists agree humans are causing more harmful pollutants to enter our atmosphere, which are a major contributor to Global Warming. “Since the Industrial Revolution, greenhouse gas emissions have increased considerably. These increases have enhanced the heat trapping capability of the earth’s atmosphere” (Tietenberg, 2006). Since global warming is such a large issue, it is our duty as citizens to start at home.

Specifically in Arizona, the collection of recyclable materials is done by private companies like Waste Management and also by the City (i.e. City of Phoenix, City of Tempe). In Arizona it has just recently become important to recycle, reuse, and reduce. There are now dozens of recycling centers all over the greater area of Phoenix, Arizona. The public just needs to know how to find them and what to recycle. Recycling plastic, glass, and paper can help Arizona by reducing the need to use our natural resources.

Recycle Arizona says,

By reducing the amount of mining and tree cutting we can reduce our energy consumption, which means less dependence on fossil fuels.

Effective recycling programs can easily reduce landfill space. Finally, with reductions in fossil fuel usage and smaller, more efficient landfills, we can help improve the quality of our air and water as well

(www.RecycleArizona.net, 2010).

This information is a fact. If we can learn to reduce, if we can inspire men and women to want to make our planet a healthier place for future generations while meeting our needs of today, then we will be successful. If every individual recycled just think of how many trees would be saved and how much less fossil fuels would be discharged into our atmosphere or how much more sustainable our lives would be.

Kitchen Table Sustainability is a book written about community involvement with an emphasis on creating a sustainable environment. The theory is that the kitchen table “Is a place where the world begins. No matter what, we must eat to live” (Harjo, 1994). This book explains how to involve the community with sustainability issues. It also argues how community-based initiatives are essential to having a sustainable environment. *Kitchen Table Sustainability* was “Written for educators and people everywhere who believe we need to share and communicate knowledge to uncover, develop, and implement sustainable solutions” (Sarkissian, & Hofer, & Shore, & Vajda, & Wilkinson, 2009).

This book has a direct correlation with community involvement and sustainability. The authors of this book understand how important it is for the community to become involved by, “Putting the power into the hands of the individuals and communities who will exercise their common sense” (Sarkissian et. al, 2009). This text is a useful tool to learn tactics about how to get the community involved with a main focus of making a change at home.

To be able to engage the community in sustainability, it is clear that a community must have a sense of belonging to the environment. This is difficult to

achieve for a place such as Phoenix, which is growing and very young, just as the city of Phoenix is relatively youthful and on the rise. Instilling behavioral habits like recycling and caring for the environment around us for future generations to come is important. Otherwise we are just continuing to allow the destruction of our earth. “It is not the environment that needs managing, but rather humans and our behavior” (Sarkissian et. al, 2009).

Buckminster Fuller was quoted in *The Kitchen Table* as saying, “You never change things by fighting the existing reality. To change something; build a new model that makes the existing model obsolete” (Sarkissian et. al, 2009).

Fuller is right about trying to change things using the same old models. This is why the arts and dance should play a significant role in shifting and educating the public about sustainability issues. Using the arts to educate rather than just be an entertainment source for the audience member is one viable way of trying to re-work a model in order to facilitate change.

Utilizing dance as a vehicle to educate about recycling poses some challenges. One is how to measure accurately whether the audience has been educated about recycling or inspired by the work to make a positive change in their lives. Another challenge that occurs is how to use dance movement in an intriguing way where the audience will understand why the movement is there. Using art to be green is happening around the country. The important aspect of this thesis work is to make sure it doesn't become merely an artistic stylistic trend but rather a behavior-changing event. “The widening of artistic possibilities in the last century has had a positive result for the future of art and particularly for art

that engages with issues of sustainability. Besides the production of objects, two new elements have been added to artistic practice: participation and action” (Smith, 2005).

There are many examples of artists and other members of society working together to create an awareness of sustainability through art. One of these groups is called Free Soil. This group was formed in 2004 and is a “collaborative group of artists, activists, researchers, and gardeners with a shared interest in projects that reveal social, political, cultural, and environmental relationships” (Smith, 2005).

This combination of professionals has brought “the interdisciplinary skill of its members to bear on multimedia projects that include sculpture, gallery installations, public projects, gardens, workshops, and Web-based new media technologies. Free Soil’s projects combine a friendly, even playful design sensibility with activist pedagogy; they believe art can be a catalyst for social awareness and change” (Smith, 2005). They are just one example of a group of people who also believe that art can facilitate change and educate the public about sustainability.

Another collection of artists working together to create awareness about sustainability is Jane Palmer and Marianne Fairbanks. These creators have been “Working together as JAM since 2000. JAM creates projects that offer poetic and practical ways of embedding sustainable habits within daily life; this approach extends to Palmer and Fairbanks’ work as artists, teachers, and citizens” (Smith, 2005). They have created a combination of “Art, design, and socially motivated

form of entrepreneurship. They have created a series of prototypes for garments and bags equipped with lightweight, flexible solar panels that power small-scale electric devices like cell phones” (Smith, 2005). JAM is an example of artists promoting sustainability issues through an artistic vessel.

Charles R. Garoian is a man who used to teach art at a public high school. He wanted to know how students would react to drawing the earth. Charles Garoian called them “Earth-drawings.” He asked the students to bring in a piece of the earth and then creatively transfer their knowledge from the earth into a piece of art. The artwork was displayed in an art gallery on the floor in a natural state rather than on the walls of the art gallery. Garoian was interested in, “What impact can an art lesson have on environmental consciousness today? The value of the earth-drawing lesson occurred through establishing relationships between art and the land and between culture and education” (Garoian, 1998).

Garoian explains,

The utopian dream of progress that evolved during modernism presented the hope of an improved world and a better quality of life. Ironically, to produce such a world required industry to fuel its cauldrons and to employ its assembly lines with human and natural resources that now, a mere century later, has resulted in a further degradation of human values and environmental conditions than before (Garoian, 1998).

To help solve this problem Garoian quotes Berleant who was concerned about the moral climate of society today and suggested, “We must learn to think about the human world in ways that include aesthetic values in our understanding of

environment. Our decisions and actions not only affect the conditions of life on this planet in a general way but determine the very character and quality of our personal lives” (Garoian, 1998).

Wendy Ross wrote an article called “The Greening of Art: Ecology, Community and the Public Domain.” This article is about the importance that art plays in the issues of today. More specifically, “Environmental degradation, pollution and poverty are said to be destroying most countries worldwide. This article responds to the need for the recognition of the role that ecologically-concerned art can play in environmental education” (Ross, 2008).

Ross explains, “Art is imaginative, visionary and multi-dimensional thus able to provide creative programs, that are educative, create environmental awareness and promote a paradigm shift that incorporates concepts of interconnectedness between people and the planet, and that of *living lightly* on the planet” (Ross, 2008). This author thereby establishes the importance of the connections between art, awareness, community involvement, and sustainability.

Using art as a catalyst for taking care of the environment is important because, as Ross argues in her article,

Intervention through the arts and creative pro-active collaborative programs that can become significant factors in addressing social issues and environmental concerns, and in changing the paradigm or world-view of society. Ecological artworks often represent a more socially-oriented approach, are based on the concept of biodiversity, place an even greater emphasis on natural processes and time sequences, sensitize the viewer to

the fragility of nature, and address environmental destruction and pollution created by contemporary society (Ross, 1998).

Ross continues to give examples of “land art” throughout the article and how the artists used sustainable practices to create the artwork that was discussed.

Thangavaloo Coopsamy Naick, a student at The University of South Africa, wrote his dissertation on sustainability’s importance in education for his Masters of Education, with specialization in environmental education. Naick stated the importance for “The need for sensitivity to the environment and the interconnectedness of the planet. One should examine one’s values and lifestyles and take action to live sustainably” (Naick, 2006).

Naick also explains,

The achievement of sustainable development calls for action by governments, business organizations, educational institutions and ordinary people around the world. Sustainable development cannot be realized without education for sustainable living. The need for environmental education for sustainability was identified and agreement was reached among scholars and researchers that environmental education for sustainability must re-orient itself towards improving the quality of life of all citizens (Naick, 2006).

When we think about sustainability we also need to address resiliency.

“Resilience in our own personal lives is about lasting, about making it through crises, about inner strength and strong physical constitution” (Newman, Beatley et. al.). To be sustainable we must be resilient. We must be able to last, make it

through crises and be strong. Hope can help instigate resilience and we need to pull away from fear, which empowers the destruction of being able to be resilient.

It is obvious that people are starting to care more about the environment, which brings hope to our communities. The arts need to play a role in bringing awareness to people about sustainability issues. This has been done here and there in the past and needs to be pressed more into the public so more and more people make changes in their life to better the environment. Using dance as a vehicle to educate the public about recycling and sustainable issues in a creative movement based format is the goal of this project.

Chapter 3

CREATIVE PROCESS

Sustainable Place

I have always been interested in the environment in which we live and survive. I am interested in the connections between humans and their commitment to the environment to keeping it sustainable. Sustainable, meaning, we meet the needs of today but also take care of future generation's needs, by taking care of our environment now. Place is the biological, physical, and social characteristics that belong to a specific location. Each place can differ and be unique from all other places; this is why it is important to find what each location needs to be sustainable. There is almost nowhere on Earth that is a sustainable place. How can we reach a sustainable position? What will inspire us to get to this state? Dance? Music? Factual information?

Phoenix has recently been pushing towards creating a more sustainable environment, due to the fact that it has one of the highest carbon footprints in America. It is a crucial time in this young city's life to promote a healthy environment. As an artist, I used the Ten Melbourne Principles for Sustainable Cities from the book, *Cities as Sustainable Ecosystems* as an inspirational tool to create the movement.

I also included many other layers to mold the work. I created the movement based on what I saw in the recycling and landfills that I visited. I also interpreted the information I have learned and digested about sustainability issues over the last two years. I brought to life through movement an environment of

what could be, what is, and what might be in all different aspects of not being sustainable, becoming more sustainable, and living in a sustainable place. I believe I used dance to inspire the audience to become more sustainable. Resiliency was an important concept as well while choreographing. I believe resilient movement is found more in the second half when the dancers come together to work as a community and become stronger as a unit, being able to withstand more together than they could apart in the first section of my thesis.

As I conducted my research on recycling in Phoenix and the cities around it like Scottsdale, Tempe and other locations, it became clear that there are issues with recycling. One major issue is the contamination problem. Through my research I observed this is simply because people do not know where, what and how to recycle. Therefore, this is one of the reasons I wanted to inspire people through dance and performance on, why, how, and what to recycle. After people see this work I hope for there to be an understanding of how important recycling is and how recycling, reducing and reusing tactics can help promote a positive environment.

Another reason sustainability and the arts is important to me is because this is a platform of how I want to work as a professional. I think for dance education to become an important area in academia, dancers must involve themselves in research-based work. I also believe choreographing in this manner brings more levels to the work and makes the dance more substantial. I want to use dance as a vessel to educate audiences about environmental issues, humanity subjects, and injustices in societies around the world. This performance will be a

jumping off point for the kind of choreography I want to produce as an educator and a choreographer in the dance world.

Research

Research for this project has been collected in many ways. One of the methods was through personal interviews with other community-based artists like Elizabeth Johnson, who works with the Liz Lerman Dance Exchange. Elizabeth Johnson created a piece for Arizona State University students and other community members in 2010 about global warming. Below is our conversation about creating work about sustainability:

1) What is your opinion of the importance of community involvement with issues like sustainability?

Wow. That's a big question. I guess my question back is, how can we not get involved? Not doing something is doing something. If you were sick, or a family member was sick, involvement would not be a choice, it would be imperative. The world is sick. It is inevitable that we are all involved because we are all part of the world, but how we choose to act in response to this is where art can play a part. It can raise awareness, and give people choice about ways to respond. It can educate and motivate. It can connect people for a cause. And I see "community" as not the other, but as we.

We are all community.

2) What was your experience with your sustainability project at ASU?

I had not set out to make a sustainability project. But Braden Kay, a grad student at SOS connected with me and was so fired up his passion was

contagious. “Phoenix is baking,” he said. Immediately I had an image of chef’s hats and cookies being served to the audience and mixing concrete instead of dough. This grew into a project that was not just about climate change, but also about change and how all of us “can step up to change.” There’s urgent need for change and each person needs to take action. Not just about environmental concerns, although this is incredibly important. This is one area where my understanding of sustainability grew.

“Sustainability” is not just about the natural environment. It is about society, and culture and economics.

Students in the creative practice course I taught have the challenge to connect with a community group and create site specific choreography from content about the idea of change. Over 80 people were involved from Nogales to a group of middle school students in Mesa and the child development center on campus, many of whom participated in the final performance. The finale was a dance performed by the ensemble on the grand staircase with a voiceover from people of all ages and experiences responding to the prompt “I can step up to change...”

Overall, my experience was incredibly positive predominately because of the youth leadership element, and the creating of a partnership with the SOS.

3) If you could explain via written document what are the fundamentals for the Liz Lerman's need and want to include the community in this

company's dance and art work?

The mission statement is housed in 4 questions:

1. Who gets to dance?
2. Where is it happening?
3. What is it about?
4. Why does it matter?

Dance is big, and should not be limited to an elite few on a stage. For all time and in cultures everywhere people have danced as a way to communicate, understand, reflect and connect. What theater company would only include young and fit 20 something's? The range of what can be produced expands in direct relationship to who is included. Each person contributes unique skills, talents and perspectives and the work created is a tapestry the choreographer weaves from each brilliant thread.

The work that Dance Exchange does is intrinsically linked to who is doing the dancing. Not every dance is for everyone, but everyone gets to dance.

Personal interviews were also conducted with Terry Gellenbeck, from the recycling center to learn more about recycling in Arizona. Finally, another personal interview was held with Robert R. Amaya, who is a Recycling Information Specialist in Phoenix, Arizona. I further investigated this subject by visiting The North Gateway Transfer Station in Phoenix, Arizona, where I went on a tour of the facility learning more important facts about recycling. At this

particular center there was “garbage artwork” all over the walls. There were photographs of piles of garbage or structures made out of recyclable materials. This kind of work gives me the image of rebirth from something that once was.

The collection of artwork was created in order to generate awareness in people about recycling, reusing and reducing. Other visits to more landfill and recycling centers in Arizona were also included in my research and have become a part of my choreographic process. These interviews inspired me because I know I can use dance to motivate all kinds of people from many different backgrounds to share a common goal: to become more sustainable and care more about the environment in which we live. I have done research on how to get the community involved by what is most important to educate the public about recycling issues and pushing some of the Melbourne Principles to inspire through dance. Below are The Ten Melbourne Principles I used as inspiration for movement:

1. Vision: Provide a long-term vision for cities based on sustainability; intergenerational, social, economic, and political equity; and their individuality.
2. Economy and Society: Achieve long-term economic and social security.
3. Biodiversity: Recognize the intrinsic value of biodiversity and natural ecosystems, and protect and restore them.
4. Ecological Footprints: Enable communities to minimize their ecological footprints.

5. Model Cities on Ecosystems: Build on characteristics of ecosystems in the development and nurturing of healthy and sustainable cities.
6. Sense of Place: Recognize and build on the distinctive characteristics of cities, including their human and cultural values, history, and natural systems.
7. Empowerment: Empower people and foster participation.
8. Partnerships: Expand and enable cooperative networks to work toward a common, sustainable future.
9. Sustainable Production and Consumption: Promote sustainable production and consumption through appropriate use of environmentally sound technologies and effective demand management.
10. Governance and Hope: Enable continual improvement based on accountability, transparency, and good governance (Newman & Jennings, pg. 4).

Choreographic Composition

My thesis concert took place on October 8th, 9th and 10th of 2010 in the Nelson Fine Arts Building Dance Lab. The performance was attended by at least 211 persons. I shared my concert with Randi Frost and Omilade Davis. The works had nothing to do with each other, we simply shared the space to premier our thesis work.

One of the challenges I had to deal with was the performance space. I decided to take the route of creating a certain kind of environment that was intimate yet covered the room from the floor, to the walls and the ceilings. I wanted the experience to be very three-dimensional, including the elements I created for the floor, walls and ceiling. The environment I created for the first section of my thesis was a recycled landfill space including: plastic bottles, paper, aluminum cans, old Christmas lights, broken hula-hoops, shredded paper and more trash. From the ceiling, hung three fourteen foot long plastic bottle chandeliers. Each chandelier was composed of recyclable plastics that hung from fishing string attached to an old broken hula-hoop at the top of the chandelier.

There was also a fourteen foot by sixteen foot picture frame constructed with the help of Mark Ammerman, the set designer, hoisted up on the wall to represent a large picture frame with all kinds of recyclable materials attached to the frame. The structure of the picture frame itself was also three-dimensional because it protruded from the wall that it was placed on. The performance started with a projection through the picture frame of video footage from the landfill I shot and edited myself, with the help of David Hauge for some final edits.

The dancers were in a dimly light clump of what appeared to represent a big pile of something. Since each one of the dancers for the first section of my work was wearing costumes made out of plastic bags, the pile looked much like a pile of plastic bags. The pile was an image that was most imperative to me because of the sheer mass amounts of garbage that sits in piles every day. I believe this was a great way to introduce the subject matter to the audience.

However, it wasn't originally the way I wanted to start the work. Initially, I had the dancers rolling out on stage like they were on a conveyor belt, as you would see at a recycling plant. After deeper reflection about how I wanted to introduce the piece and input from my thesis committee, I decided the pile would be a better way to launch into the concepts for my thesis.

I deemed this choreographic decision of starting with the dancers in a heap as a more successful way to get the audience involved with the work. I purposely set the pile up-stage to represent how we keep our garbage far away from our own personal spaces. There was a black out and then the dancers moved in the dark, the lights came up and the pile of garbage (the individual dancers) that used to be far away from the audience was now spread all over the stage, taking up much more room on the stage. I wanted to show how the problem can "creep up" on our communities if we do not address these issues.

From here the dancers continued to move in a mechanical way without support from each other. In this section the intention was to show how destructive we can be, how unsustainable we are and how we for the most part do not care where we leave our mess. A challenge for me as a choreographer was simply making movement that was more broken and aesthetically ugly to represent garbage and destruction. This is not the norm for me because as a dancer I have mostly had training in classical ballet, which greatly influences how I move as a modern dancer at this time in my life.

To choreograph the part of the dance that was more broken and mechanical in nature, I therefore decided to do a movement and then increase the

angle or the sharpness to more effectively move in a way that is less aesthetically pleasing to the eye and most certainly to the body. Furthermore, I would encourage my cast to move in ways that represent the concepts from the first section. For example, to jitter about as if they were trash that was being pushed about, crunch like aluminum that was being smashed, tumble or blow away in the wind. This assisted me to capitalize on their talents and tap into new ways of moving that I would usually consider unattractive, yet interesting to watch.

Images from the video and the movement included what will likely happen if we are not responsible for our environment. The video was projected in the picture frame throughout the work in asymmetrical ways so as not to distract the audience too much from the dancing that was happening.

It is worth noting, however, that while I worked hard with the dancers and the movement to make it seem broken and unpleasing to the eye in the first section, I also wanted to show just a bit of what some people would suggest as a 'pretty aesthetic.' I chose to do this because this is who I am as an artist, what I like to watch, what I like to dance and what I think most audience members can connect to. I do believe all movement is interesting, I just recognize as a choreographer that I find spiraling, circular and linear movement to be more aesthetically pleasing to my eye rather than spiky or jagged movement. I know this is due to my classical ballet up-bringing and I believe this was one of the reasons I feel as if I was tested as a choreographer in creating this work.

At one point it is noticed how much of a mess the stage environment has become from the dancers, who have flung large bunches of paper strips through

the air. The video projection then takes the full screen and projects images from landfills and the audience is faced with the sheer amount of garbage we produce every day and bury in our ground. At this point in the performance the dancers rush to try to clean up their disaster area; if they work as a team they can accomplish this mission.

The second half of the work begins with a solo by Anthony Gonzales. From there each dancer enters the stage and tacks on to what the dancer was doing right before they entered. I decided to have the tag-along transitions to represent strength in numbers, which can create resiliency in a community. The dancers then work in duets and trios supporting each other, sharing a common vision and hope for the future together. As this part of the piece progresses the dancers eventually are dancing the same movement at the same time creating strength and resiliency among the group. Eventually they are dancing as a community together, working toward a common goal of sustainability and resiliency against destruction. This represents to the audience the belief that, if we work together as a community, we can achieve great things. We can work together to be more resilient and in turn become more sustainable.

At the end of the work I passed out a survey each night asking the same questions. I wanted to know the following:

- 1) Overall, with everything being considered (costumes, music, choreography, etc.) how would you rate this performance? 1 poor, 5 moderate, and 10 excellent, please circle your response.
- 2) Has this piece brought awareness to you about sustainability issues?

1 no awareness, 5 moderate awareness, 10 very high awareness, please circle your response.

3) To what degree are you environmentally conscious? (Do you think about taking care of the environment?) 1 not at all, 5 moderately conscious, 10 very conscious, please circle your answer.

4) To what degree are you environmentally active? (Do you take action to take care of your environment?) 1 not at all, 5 moderately active, 10 very active, please circle your answer.

5) Did this performance inspire you to become more environmentally active and conscious? 1 not at all, 5 moderately inspirational, 10 very inspirational, please circle your answer.

For detailed responses see appendices.

Cast

Alyssa Brown, Kasey Fletcher, Anthony Gonzales, Mandi Karr, Laura Pellegrino, Chelsi Tryon, Emily Zakrzewski.

Music

To develop the music for this performance I worked with composer Robin Vining. We collected glass, plastic, aluminum and then recorded the sounds these materials make. From there, Robin created melodies, harmonies, and beats from these sounds. Eventually, the noises turned into the music used for the first section of the work. This music in this part reflected garbage being tumbled around a landfill. The music helped in inspiring me to create movement that I felt was fractured and cracked. Vining also composed the second section where the

dancers formed a community that worked together and became more resilient.

The music added a whole additional layer of complexity and helped set the mood and create the environment.

Budget

Office Max

Paper Edger Contemporary- (Fancy scissors) \$10.49

Board Black Foam- (Information Booth) \$14.99

Ace Hardware

3 Spring Snap (Hooks) \$9.87

Utrecht

Opaque Fabric ink (Anthony's Costume) \$17.47

Printing Specialists (PR Cards) \$76.51

Music \$300.00

Total \$429.33

Note, I was reimbursed \$200.00 by the School of Dance, Arizona State University

Chapter 4

REFLECTION

From where this idea began to where it has finished was certainly a journey. When I began considering what I wanted to be the subject of my thesis, I always knew I was passionate about the environment and how we need to take care of it. This has been a topic that has continually come up in my heart and mind; this is why I was so sure I wanted to create a piece about this theme. However, where I thought I was going to go with the dance was not what I ended up creating. I think I thought the piece would have to be literal for the audience to really get the message that I was trying to convey. Through the journey of creating the piece, I decided I wanted to be less literal than I have been as a choreographer in the past.

When I finalized the concrete ideas and inspiration for my work, it became clear to me that I didn't have to be literal. I used the Ten Melbourne Principles and concepts of resiliency, combined with physical reflections of recycling plants and landfills to inform and inspire the movement for the this performance. However, I allowed the piece to be more abstract and find its own identity. I could not be happier with the ending results of this work. I am very proud of where I began and where it has finished.

Of course, I had a few people and trusted colleagues to help me. My cast of dancers was one of the major influences on my work. Anything I asked of them to develop they did, and many times I was happier with the movement they created over the image I had given them to create the movement. There were only

a handful of times that the dancers did not understand my directions and we would scrap the idea and move on. This was challenging, but we cannot always describe the images in our head and expect another person to see it as clearly as we do. Nonetheless, this only happened a few times and so it was not too frustrating. One of my favorite images was a vision of bottles bouncing down the conveyor belt. We had great fun conveying this image. Working with my cast was quite easy.

At first my thoughts were a little all over the place, but once I narrowed down what we were trying to accomplish, my cast was right there with me; supportive, enthusiastic, and excited about the process. My cast also helped brainstorm to come up with movement options from different perspectives of what I would tell or show my cast, which I think made the material richer in essence.

Choreographically speaking, I believe my cast's biggest challenge was not the thrashing about or so-called destructive part of the performance and choreography. Instead, it was the resiliency idea that was most complicated for them to embody. I think this is because it is difficult to make a switch from one idea to its opposite as quickly as took place in the course of this piece. This change may also have been complicated to embody because I may not have given the dancers enough information about resiliency and the importance of this concept in being sustainable. However, I believe that this issue was simply a matter of time and that if we had more rehearsals to develop the transition it would have been less difficult for them to embody.

Other challenges for the dancers occurred when we were doing movement specifically to evoke a Melbourne Principle, just relaying an idea about sustainability or resiliency, or when they were portraying a piece of trash or a recyclable object. These issues were resolved either by my speaking to the dancer(s), or they were simply settled through time and figured out by the dancers themselves. Figuring these elements out as an audience member would obviously be a little more difficult because they did not have the inside 'scoop' from the dancer or choreographer. Therefore, I believe the audience saw the dance roughly as an environment we create and we, as humans, can control if we work as a community to become more sustainable.

One of the successes of this performance were the layers involved: music, costumes, set and choreography, each of which had its own meaning. The costumes from the first half were recycled plastic bags sewn together to make clothes. I also believe this performance was a success because this work was meant for a greater cause. I think deep down people care about our environment. Although they may not show it all the time, they need to be inspired to care, and as an artist I can help use my work to inspire them to be concerned and encourage others to think about their environment. I chose to construct a work that was ugly, exciting, thought provoking and beautiful in hopes that I could make the audience member think about their own lives, how the dance relates to them and finally hopefully inspire them to care about their environment.

I had many compliments following the show, which leads me to feel as if the performance was successful in that it inspired people in an enlightening

manner. I believe that the audience members may not have known I used the Ten Melbourne Principles or other sustainability concepts I learned while researching these issues to inform my work. However, I think the audience members understood the message of taking care of the environment we live in. I also believe the audience members took from the performance an understanding that it was about working together as a community that we can achieve our goals. The performance gave the audience a need to change gears from being so destructive.

Although the surveys were interesting for me as the choreographer to read and analyze, I think if I were to repeat this process over I would refrain from giving them to the audience members. There are too many variables to consider when asking these kinds of questions. For example, the first question on the survey states, “Overall, with everything being considered (costumes, music, choreography, etc.) how would you rate this performance?”

For the three nights Friday had an 8.45 average, Saturday had an 8.67 average and Sunday had an 8.82 average landing somewhere well above moderate and slightly under excellent. (Based on my scale; 1 poor, 5 moderate, and 10 excellent.) My issue with this question is, how can any of these questions have concrete answers? There are too many variables for the results of the surveys to be considered hard evidence to back up my thesis work. Examples of relevant questions, on the other hand, are found in questions such as the following: Is this their first dance concert? Are they here for class or for pleasure? Do they know the choreographer or cast members? Do they know anything about sustainability issues?

Overall, many of the other questions on the survey lead me to other “what if’s.” After reviewing them and taking some time to reflect, I think because there were too many “what if’s,” if I did this process over again I would not include the survey as part of my thesis. For my personal interest it was helpful to get some sort of feedback from an audience member regarding my choreography. I have never had the opportunity of receiving this kind of information from an audience watching my work, so that in itself was a fascinating part of the process for me as the choreographer.

As I reflect on this process, I think the different layers of this performance really made this thesis succeed as strong and meaningful in the fields of dance and sustainability. Since the performance I have entered the first section of the thesis work for nomination to be shown at California State University in Long Beach, California 2011, for the American College Dance Festival. The entire student body of The School of Dance at Arizona State University voted and chose *Sustainable Place* to be performed at the festival representing the work being made at ASU.

Chapter 5

CONCLUSION

Throughout this year-long process I have grown as an artist and a choreographer. I reached outside of my normal skill set as a dance maker and challenged myself in a new realm. This was, without question, the best choreography experience that I have had in my career so far. Working with composers, set designer and, last but not least, my cast of dancers, has truly been a successful and challenging experience for me as a choreographer. Refining this idea from something so large into a specific concrete idea was challenging at first. However, through time, research and dedication to the piece, I believe the performance was successful.

Sustainability is a huge subject being discussed in today's society. How are we going to preserve? How can we fix this? How much damage has been done already? If we keep going at the same rate, what will our environment be like in a few years? In a hundred years? These are important questions and we as a society, as a world, need to address them if we want a healthy environment. We are one species out of millions, yet we are the ones destroying everything around us. We need inspiration and creativity to keep our environment operating and as beautiful as it can be. This is why I took the initiative to make a piece using dance to inspire people to care about their community around them. If we start small at the community level I believe we can spread this message.

As a dancer for many years I have a connection to the floor, the earth, and the space around me. I believe this is one of the reasons why I deem it so

important to sustain our environment for many generations to come. As a choreographer, it has been both inspiring and invigorating to know that I am capable of producing work that has substance and is an important movement for the entire world to care and act on.

Sustainable Place is meant to inspire people to be active in taking care of their environment. To have the visual image of the sheer amount of trash dumped in landfills every day conveyed by dancing bodies in the forefront hopefully created a strong impression for the audience of humans living in their own filth. The dancers show us that we cannot just put it in a box and then “never” see it again. From that trash comes the second part of my thesis, portraying an environment where the community works together to become more resilient and reach a common goal that is more beautiful.

Sustainable Place was successful because the piece encompassed both the ugly and the bad that is happening around us and the good that can come from people working together for a common goal. The piece was inspiring, and this is the essence of dance. When a dance can filter into your personal life, make you think, and inspire you, then I feel that it was a successful piece of art.

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APPENDIX A

TABLES

Collected from Oct 8th, 9th and 10th

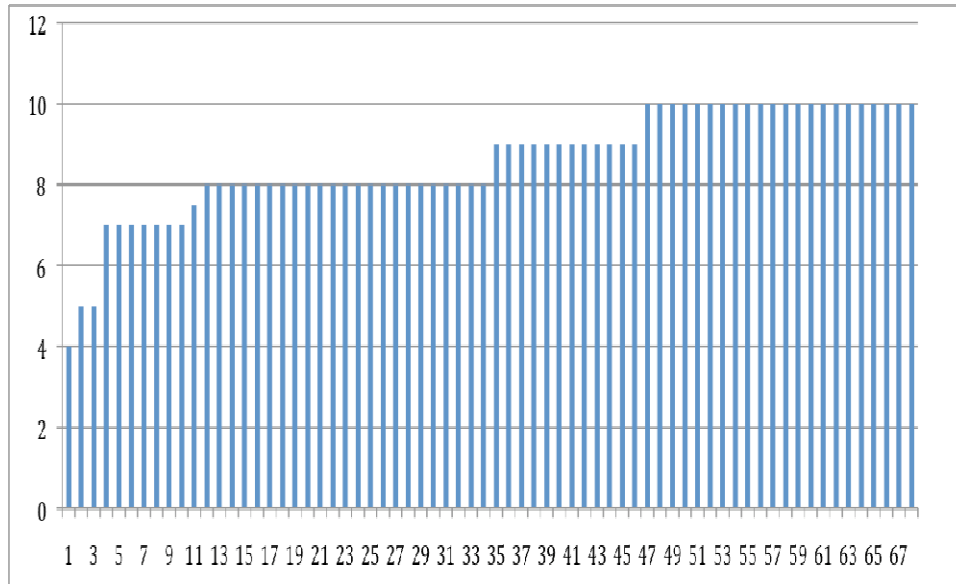


Figure 1 Friday Data

- 1) Overall, with everything being considered (costumes, music, choreography, etc.) how would you rate this performance? 1 poor, 5 moderate, and 10 excellent, please circle your response.

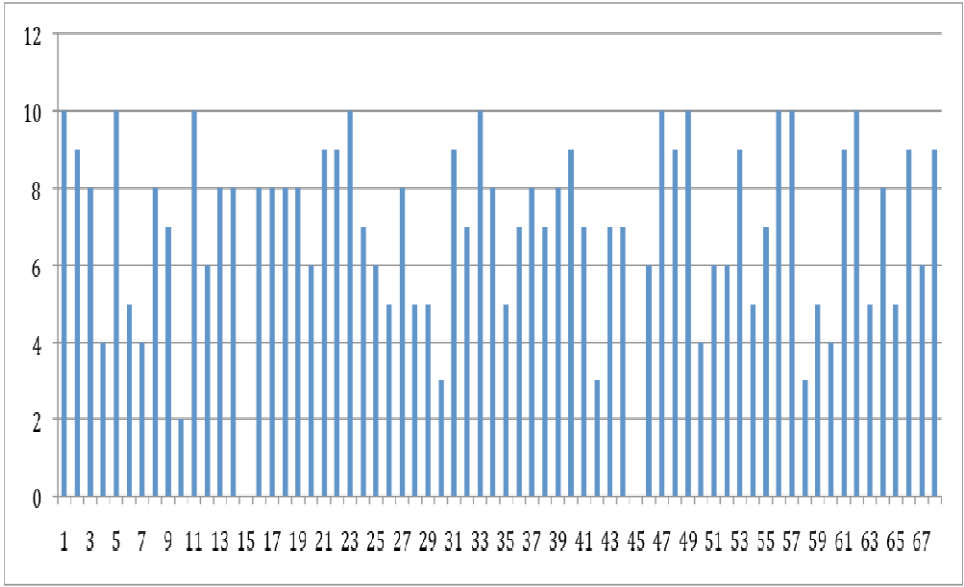


Figure 2 Friday Data

2) Has this piece brought awareness to you about sustainability issues?
 1 no awareness, 5 moderate awareness, 10 very high awareness, please circle your response.

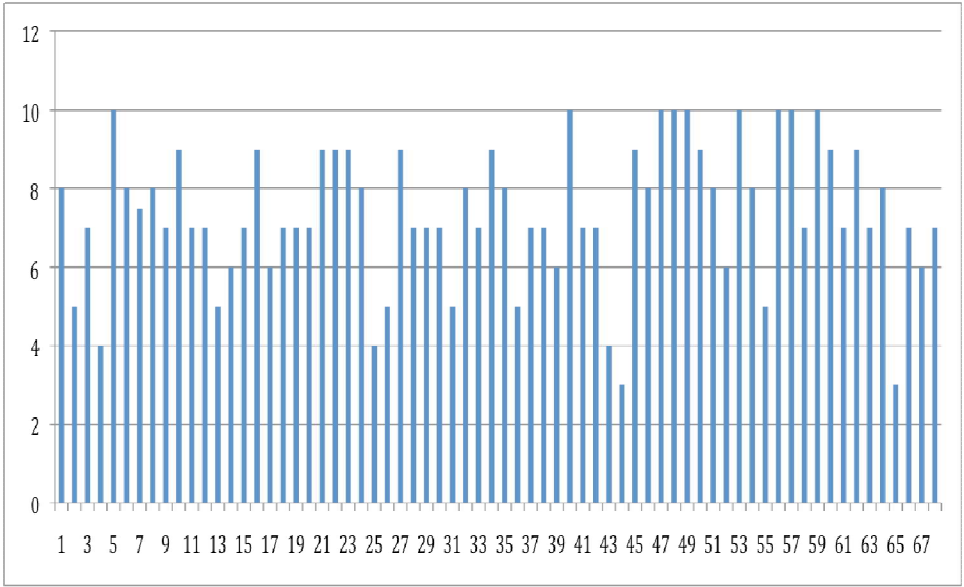


Figure 3 Friday Data

3) To what degree are you environmentally conscious? (Do you think about taking care of the environment?) 1 not at all, 5 moderately conscious, 10 very conscious, please circle your answer.

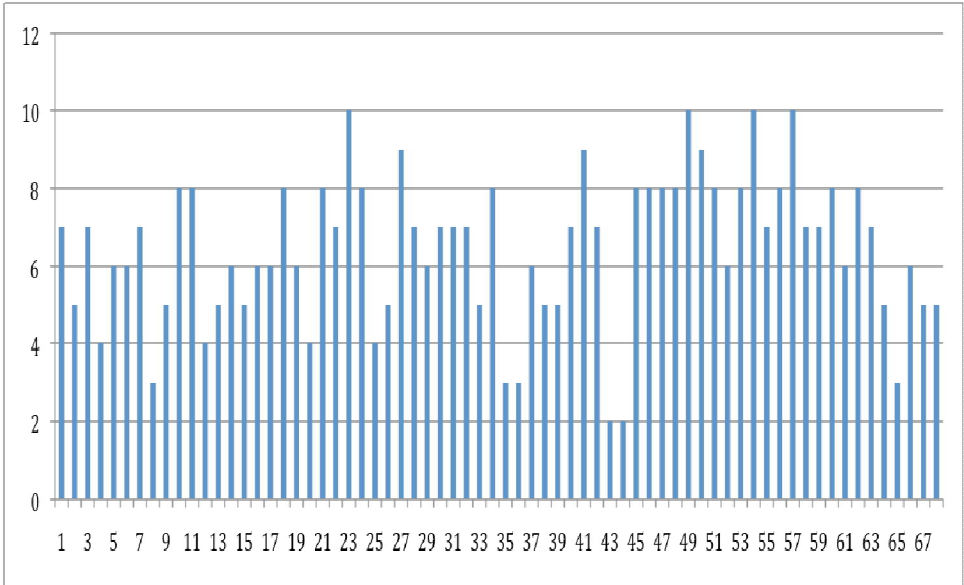


Figure 4 Friday Data

4) To what degree are you environmentally active? (Do you take action to take care of your environment?) 1 not at all, 5 moderately active, 10 very active, please circle your answer.

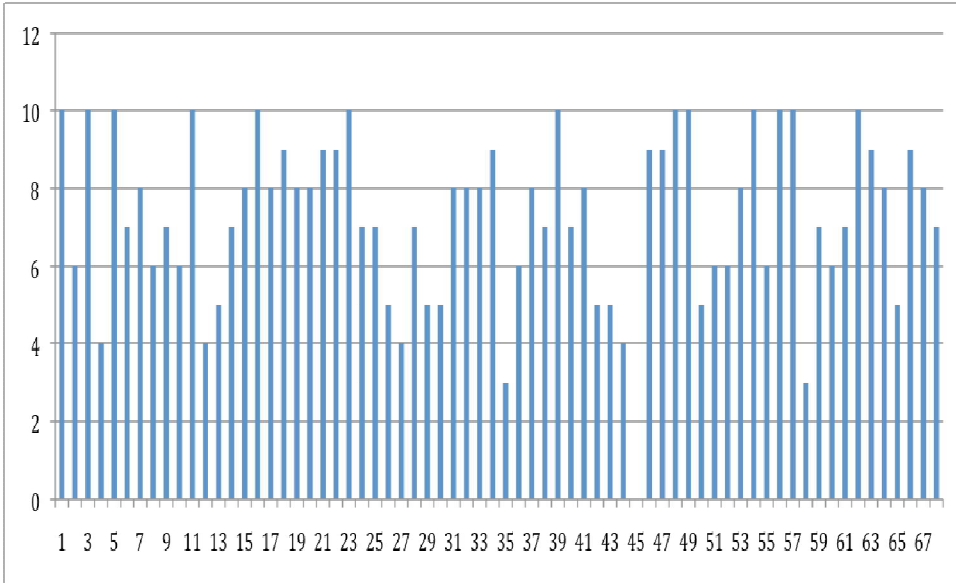


Figure 5 Friday Data

5) Did this performance inspire you to become more environmentally active and conscious? 1 not at all, 5 moderately inspirational, 10 very inspirational, please circle your answer.

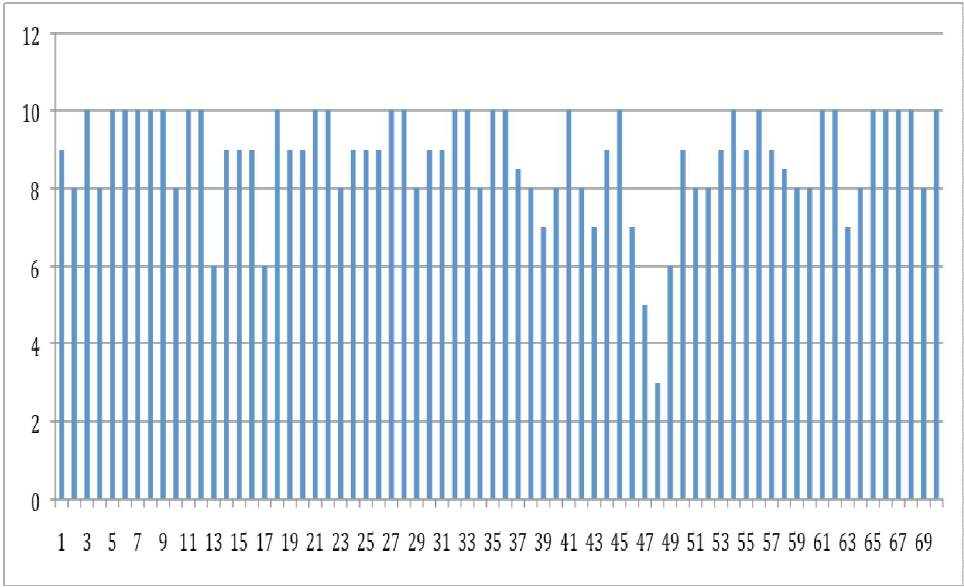


Figure 1 Saturday Data

1) Overall, with everything being considered (costumes, music, choreography, etc.) how would you rate this performance? 1 poor, 5 moderate, and 10 excellent, please circle your response.

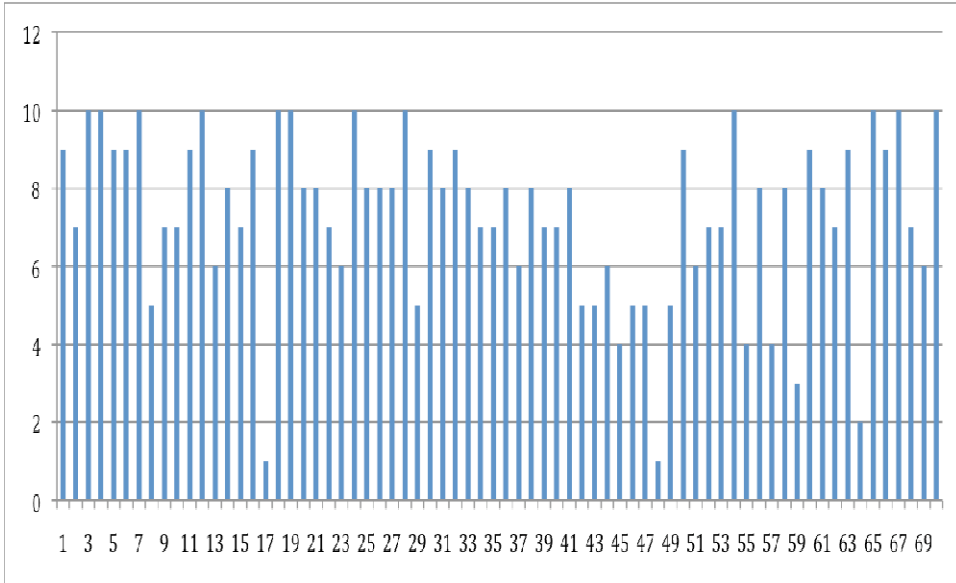


Figure 2 Saturday Data

2) Has this piece brought awareness to you about sustainability issues? 1 no awareness, 5 moderate awareness, 10 very high awareness, please circle your response.

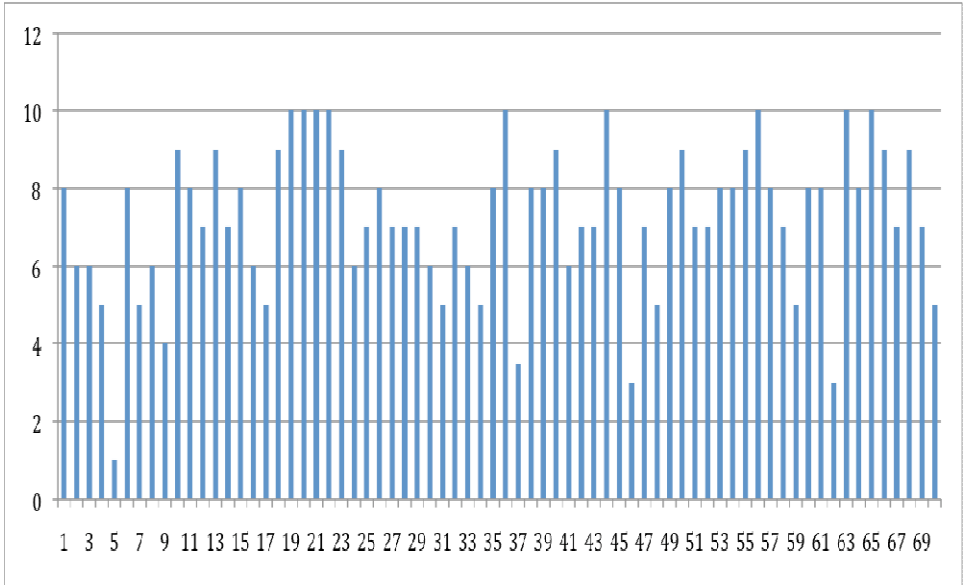


Figure 3 Saturday Data

3) To what degree are you environmentally conscious? (Do you think about taking care of the environment?) 1 not at all, 5 moderately conscious, 10 very conscious, please circle your answer.

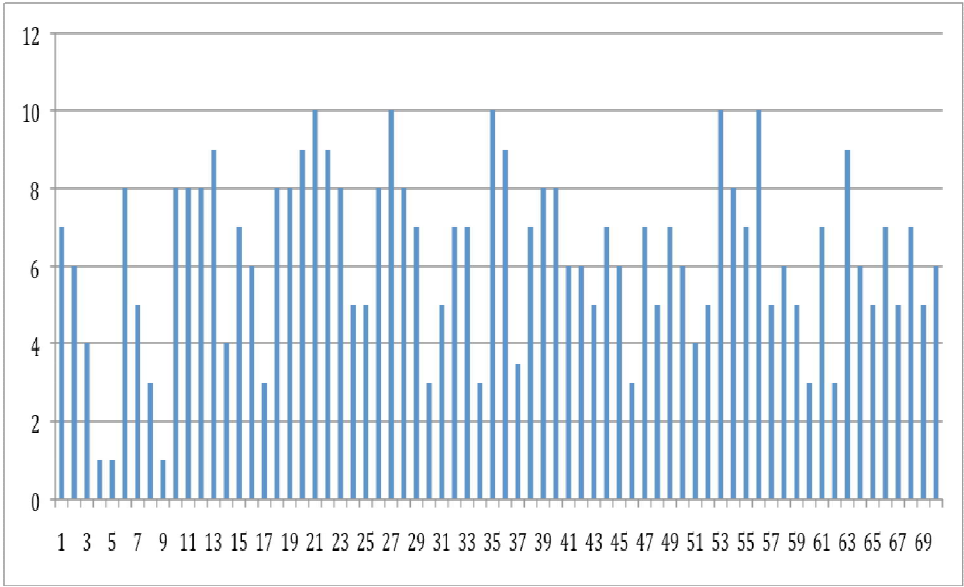


Figure 4 Saturday Data

4) To what degree are you environmentally active? (Do you take action to take care of your environment?) 1 not at all, 5 moderately active, 10 very active, please circle your answer.

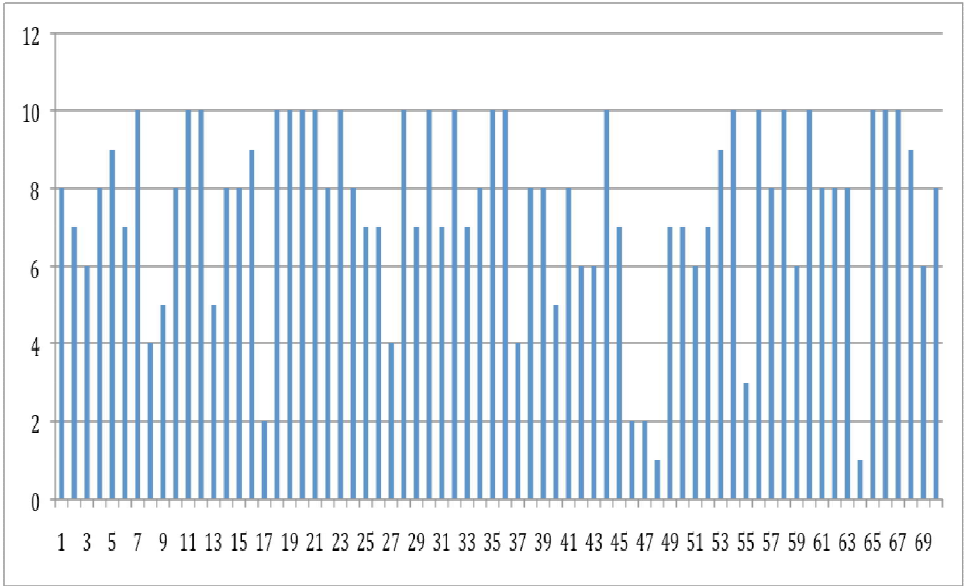


Figure 5 Saturday Data

5) Did this performance inspire you to become more environmentally active and conscious? 1 not at all, 5 moderately inspirational, 10 very inspirational, please circle your answer.

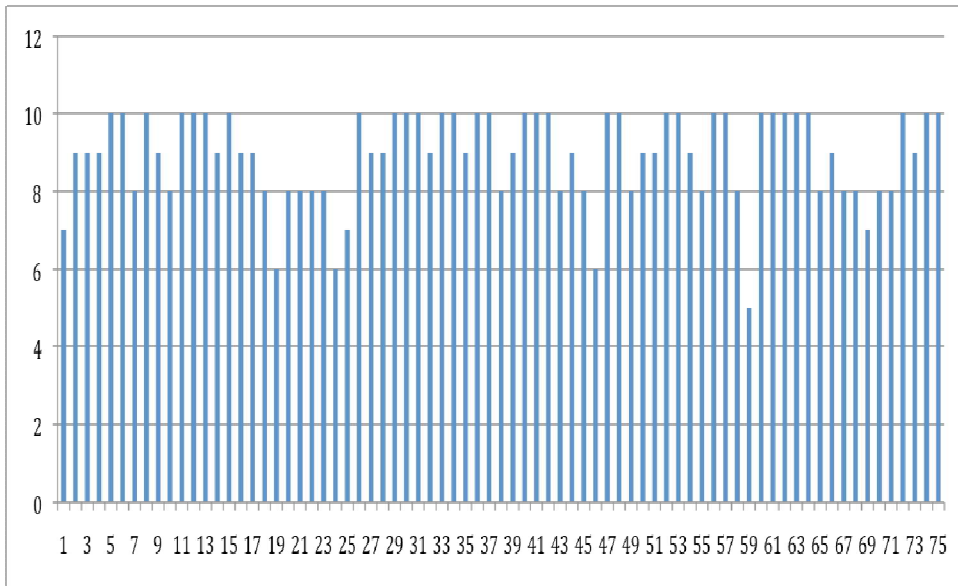


Figure 1 Sunday Data

1) Overall, with everything being considered (costumes, music, choreography, etc.) how would you rate this performance? 1 poor, 5 moderate, and 10 excellent, please circle your response.

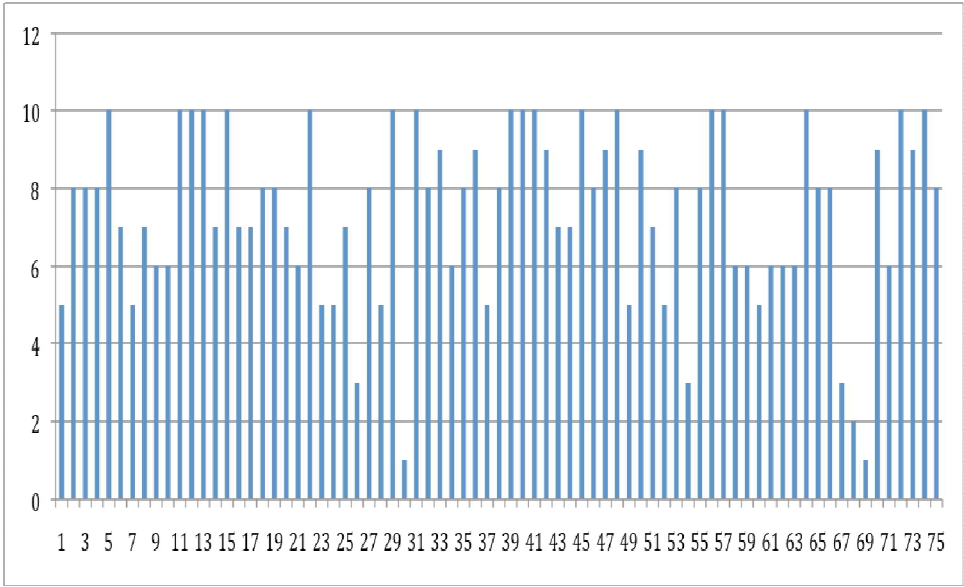


Figure 2 Sunday Data

2) Has this piece brought awareness to you about sustainability issues? 1 no awareness, 5 moderate awareness, 10 very high awareness, please circle your response.

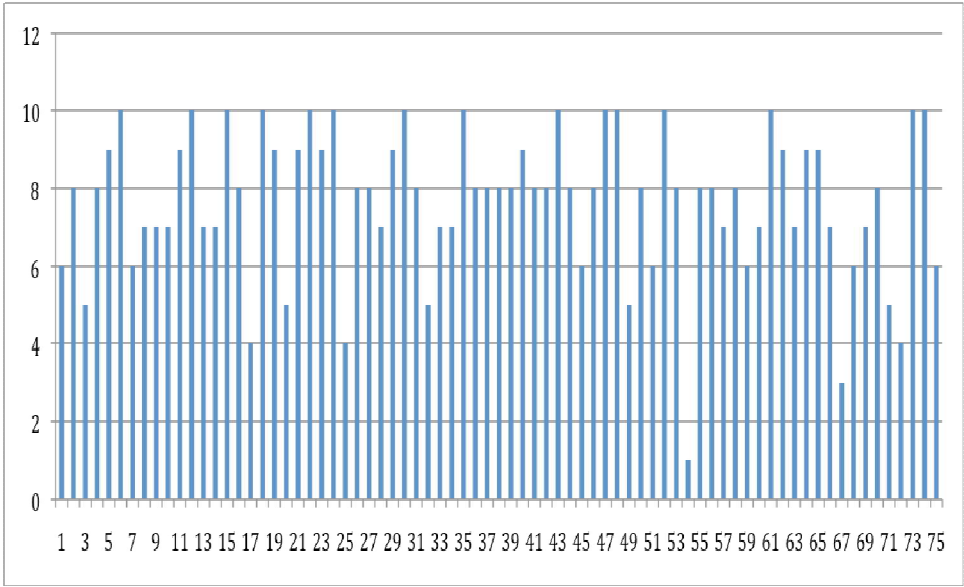


Figure 3 Sunday Data

3) To what degree are you environmentally conscious? (Do you think about taking care of the environment?) 1 not at all, 5 moderately conscious, 10 very conscious, please circle your answer.

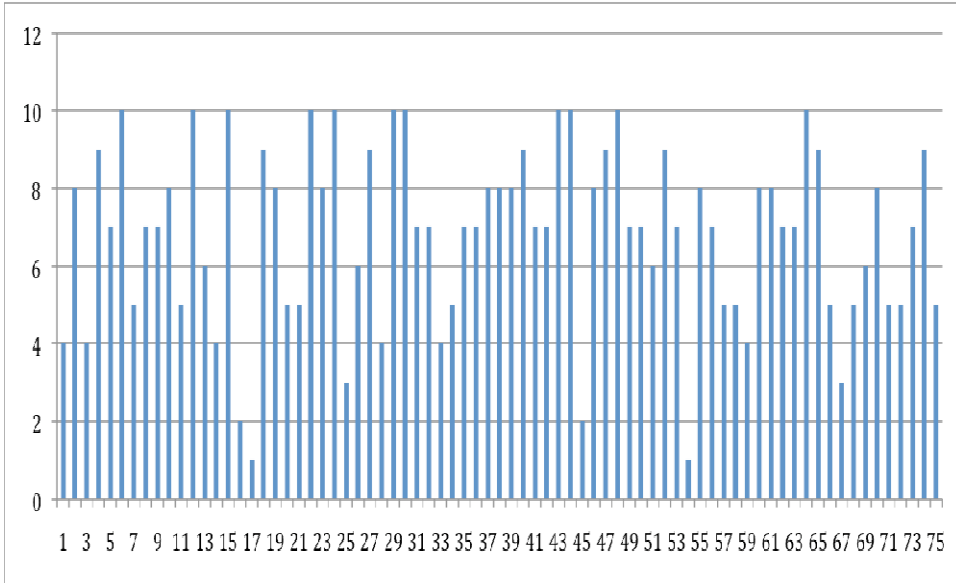


Figure 4 Sunday Data

4) To what degree are you environmentally active? (Do you take action to take care of your environment?) 1 not at all, 5 moderately active, 10 very active, please circle your answer.

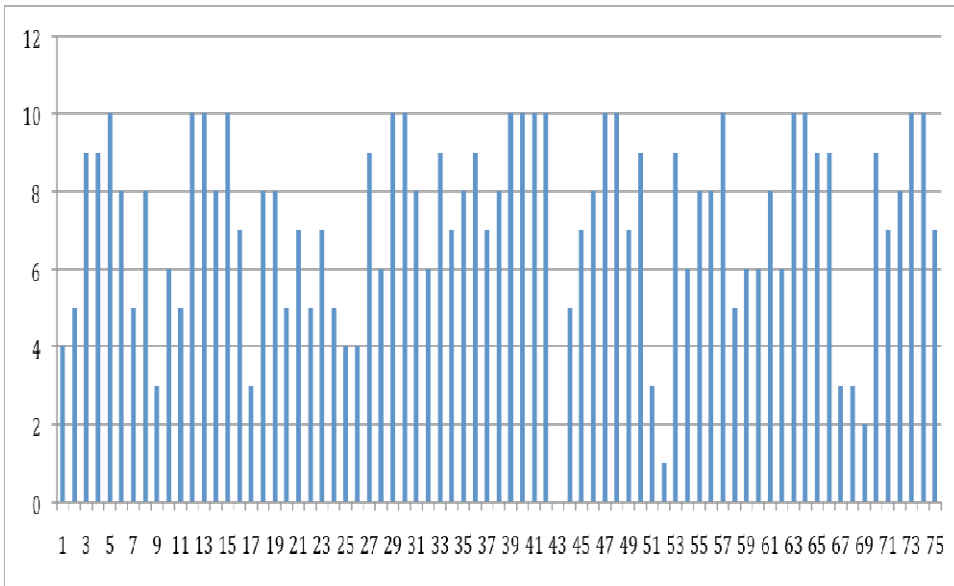


Figure 5 Sunday Data

5) Did this performance inspire you to become more environmentally active and conscious? 1 not at all, 5 moderately inspirational, 10 very inspirational, please circle your answer.

These charts are a collection of the numerical data collected post performance.

