

DEADicated Eye:

A Movement Exploration into Community and Self-Awareness

by

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this project was to foster non-inhibited movement exploration such as the movement of untrained dancers in a setting of a music festival (specifically in this case the Grateful Dead community), into the more ritual performance-based ideals and perspectives that tend to occur in a dance studio setting. The external visual perceptions of what an ideal dancer ‘should look like’ lends itself to unrealistic expectations and unattainable goals as an artist. Body image and the lack of individualized self-expression is a problem in studio settings and the goal of this research was to use the perspective of untrained and trained dancers to dig deep into movement qualities that are not contrived or performed from ritual or preconceived notions of movement that tend to occur in trained dancers. Through exploratory improvisational somatic experiences helping the dancer access a more embodied and authentic self, the choreography was shaped through delving into the dancers lived experiences. This study culminated in a performance dance project that was filmed at Arcosanti, an experimental Artist community in Northern Arizona that integrates the design of architecture with a respect to the ecology. The goal is to limit the environmental footprint that is left by the community.

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“Once in a while you get shown the light
in the strangest of places if you look at it right.”

The Grateful Dead

Development of the Research Idea

At the tender age of 3 this wonderful journey of dance began. I never thought that it would turn into a lifelong passion and career. Walking into class I enjoyed the open space, comradery, and fun that was dance. In retrospect, there are many memories of laughter, tears, and hard work. I recollect some of the values that my teachers instilled in me. Those of self-respect, discipline, consistency, and above all, love and appreciation for the art of dance. What sticks out most in my mind is the environment that revolved around this space. The long hallway to the three studios seemed endless when I was little. I recollect the nervousness that was involved heading into a class getting ready to ‘perform’ and wondering if I was going to do well and accomplish what the teacher was asking of me for the day. There was always the smell of coffee coming from the office, which I would find out later in life, is essential to running a business! Dance bags were always piled everywhere, filled with snacks, bobby pins, warm-ups, and stinky dance shoes that were rotated throughout the night depending on the type of dance that was next. I could not stand wearing tights, and I remember this vividly! As I got older and began participating in the Nutcracker, rehearsals would last 7 to 8 hours on the weekends in addition to the 15 plus hours a week that were spent in regular classes. The days were long, blisters and bruises were a normal accessory on my body, but I wouldn’t have changed it for the world. The exhaustion and sore muscles didn’t stop me from quitting, even though there were days that I wanted to. What was it that made me keep coming

through all of that? Why did I want to come day after day? At that point, dance was just steps that the teacher gave for me to execute. I thought it was 'just dance'. Looking back now, it was way more than that. Laughter abounded and lifetime friendships were formed here. I didn't understand how impactful teachers were in your life at that point, and I didn't fully comprehend the immense possibilities, both mentally and physically, that dance could encapsulate. These memories and experiences are priceless, and they have framed and molded who I am as a person today.

At around age 16 I started losing interest in being at the dance studio, there was something lacking for me. The sense of connection with what was happening in the space was changing. As we went to competitions, I was starting to drift from what I loved to do. This conscious ritual that had become such a part of my life had me mentally shutting down. I was technically a good dancer, but since I was not the 'best', less attention was given to me and I didn't feel like I was needed in that environment anymore. I also was just superficially copying movement that the instructor presented in class, and I don't recall a lot of room for personal exploration. Ballet was one of my first loves, but this routine even started becoming dull drum to me. I began to assist a teacher in a little ones class, but was thrown into a situation that I was not prepared for. I was thrown into teaching because I knew the terminology and was good with kids, although in retrospect, I had no business being in charge of these little minds and bodies. I was just going through the motions and copying how I was taught. Wasn't I losing interest because of that exact same reason? The ritual that I was losing interest in was the same that I was now teaching. The ability to be an individual and be an embodied dancer is lost in this cookie cutter kind of setting. I had no background in any type of theories or

strategies to deal with this situation I was immersed in. I felt overwhelmed and lost. There was no depth here. I found a different community to belong to that offered inclusivity, diversity, and a sense of belonging that I was lacking at that time.

This is when the Grateful Dead became an enormous part of my personal journey. I kind of stumbled upon this community by accident. I had always loved and frequented live music, so I was just heading to another concert. I immediately knew this was different, and I had a need to go back again. There was a sense of belonging here and the aspect of realness was palpable. No matter where you go around the country you run into the same people who are always willing to help each other, whatever you need. Just the same amazing culture that relishes community, dancing, music, and the freeing feeling that all of those elements combined together create. There was no judging by anyone of how you dressed, what you looked like, or how you moved to the music. This created a wonderful community of inclusiveness that I had lost in the studio world. People moved to the music from a very raw place. The people were the music, and it was a wonderful moving organism. This was my first exposure to true embodiment, even though I didn't know that then. One other aspect that drew me to this music was the improvisational aspect of the Grateful Dead. Every show is different because of the amount of 'play' that was involved in their musicality. This became a place of connection where I could move because I 'felt' the music and felt the energy of others around me who fully engaged in doing the same. Anna Halprin stated, "When enough people move together with a common purpose, an amazing force, an ecstatic rhythm, eventually takes over. In these fundamental moments, people seem to be tracing out the forms and patterns of a larger organism, communicating as one being moved by a

group mind and spirit” (2019). Although these were not trained dancers they were dancing, and they moved from a vulnerable, unfabricated and authentic place. I felt at home. This aspect of my life is where I started to dig deeper into who I really was and it still remains a huge part of my journey.

As I started my undergraduate degree in 1994, Modern dance was introduced to me for the first time and my love of dance was reinvigorated. Being in a classroom setting again for dance I initially felt extremely uncomfortable having to express myself in front of an instructor. I was confused thinking, “Why isn’t the teacher telling me what to do?” I had come from such a structured and hierarchical type of dance environment that I resisted this change the first year. It was new and the ‘in-between’ is a difficult place to be. I had found a genre that gave me the same feeling as the Dead community gave to me, although I didn’t feel as free as I did at the festivals I went to. Why was this? Was it the way traditional dance classes are structured? This was an explorative space, but I was still so naïve to the aspects of dance that truly encapsulates full embodiment and the exploration of your authentic self. At that time, the educational curriculum I was introduced to didn’t involve as many somatic concepts as it does now. I still was not taught theories to fully articulate what was happening in that dance style. The ‘performance’ aspect in a class setting was still so ingrained in my psyche that I did what I thought the instructor wanted me to do. There still was a barrier put up between myself and the instructors that I didn’t know how to articulate or communicate to improve my class experience.

Becoming a studio owner 20 years ago, I wanted to change lives. I wanted to create a space that allowed kids to express themselves in a way that I felt was lacking in my dance education when I was young. The problem was I knew the dance styles well, but didn't have the knowledge and theories under my belt to truly get students to this place. So, the cycle continues and I started teaching the way I was taught. Teaching is my passion, and I know I have affected hundreds of children in a positive way, but I started questioning what I was doing again. I still felt like something was missing, was I doing enough? Is a dance studio space set up superficially due to the ritual and routines that happen in that type of environment? Are students blinded by the perceptions of what a dancer 'should be'? Carlson states, "What makes performing arts performative, I imagine the answer would somehow suggest that these arts require the physical presence of trained or skilled human beings whose demonstration of their skill is the performance" (1996). For so long I thought this is what dance was all about, just a culmination of practicing in a studio to then showcase this 'ritual' in a performance for others. I spoke to the kids about dancing 'full-out', but did I fully understand what that meant? I did not have the knowledge or the tools to guide the students on that path. The mind-body connection is lost in this unconsciously ritualistic studio space which then lends itself to becoming a superficial display of movement as we organize and reorganize our behavior into set patterns. Does the monotony of a ballet barre produce dancers that just "go through the moves" instead of incorporating body awareness and a sense of self? As I would head to dance competitions with these dancer's I began to feel like the same environment that I had grown up in was inevitably happening in the space that I had created. I felt like I had to take students to these events because that's what studios

do'. Why did I take children to these events when I did not believe in that kind of event wholeheartedly? I knew these kids loved dance as they came in and out of the studio every week, and there was no question in my mind about that. The smiles that I was lucky enough to see every week as they walked in the door gave me validity that this was indeed true. Visits I would receive from old students telling me what an impact the studio had in their lives are so meaningful to me. No one ever showed up and said, "Thank you for teaching me a pirouette, it changed my life." It was always the feeling and the memories that went along with the experience of coming into the space that impacted their psyche, and there is something to that experience that by far transcends any step or combination I have ever created. Was there room for personal growth and exploration for these children in these classes while also getting strong technical training? I knew as an educator that I was constantly aware of making sure that anatomically the dancers were not injuring themselves, but I felt I wasn't doing enough to foster the development of their minds and how the movement is created and developed within themselves and what meaning that presents. The potential that students could reach if this concept was implemented more into a studio setting would be exponential! I knew that I no longer wanted to just present movement and have it robotically regurgitated back at me in a class setting. The body and mind are one and should not be treated as separate entities. My perception of the space I had created for these kids was changing, and I began soul searching for my next step. Change is difficult and uncomfortable sometimes, but it was something I desperately needed as a dancer, educator and an artist.

I started my MFA at Arizona State with a Teaching Artist Praxis Certification to begin this soul searching. As I began this post-secondary educational part of my journey, I was certain that I was exactly where I needed to be. The void that I have always felt as an educator was starting to fill. The different Somatics and Theory courses solidified the need to change my pedagogy, and my curriculum was helping me to articulate the love of dance through different frameworks that I didn't even know existed due to primarily growing up in a studio setting. I know as an educator I will never be done learning, but to finally feel that I can start to conceptualize what I have always felt dancing but haven't been able to articulate and express through words is invigorating.

My first year in graduate school I was at a Grateful Dead show in California, and I started looking at these events through a different performative lens that I hadn't before. These people were fully enveloped in the moment and were dancing from an honest and liminal space. They were 'dancing' not just to the music, but as one with it. There was a 'performative' aspect involved here that I could learn from also. Whether they were trained dancers or not had no bearing on the expressiveness that oozed out of their pores, they just moved. I started asking myself how I can help instill this kind of vulnerability and uninhibited nature into the students that I teach. The thought of trying to combine some aspects of these dual worlds that I have always kept separated began to immerge and blossom. Wouldn't combining these two worlds that are such a huge part of my lived experience and journey make me a better educator and artist? The seed was planted for my project. Movement is foundational to who we are as human beings, whether trained or untrained, and it helps to integrate the mind, body, and soul. Movement changes people and thanks to the education I received at ASU the past

few years, I am even more motivated and inspired to implement and foster these changes into my practice and the dance education that I continue to share with my students. “Why not let our soles become the place where our soul breathes? Let’s take off shoes, boots, high heels and place our worn feet on the earth and let our feet tell us where to go, what to research, where to write the next sentences” (Snowber 2011).

Description of Study

The purpose of this study was to foster non-inhibited movement exploration such as the movement of untrained dancers in a setting of a music festival, into the more ritual, performance-based ideals and perspectives that tend to occur in a dance studio setting. The goal was to help students access a more embodied and ‘authentic self’ when they move, and to be free to move to their own personal style and uniqueness. Embodying knowledge and engaging our whole selves would create a more united kinesthetic front where the sky is the limit. The main focus question for this study was:

What can be learned from the uninhibited tendencies that ‘non-trained’ dancers have in an environment such as a music festival, that can be applied to ‘trained’ dancers in a more regimented dance studio setting to help attain ‘authentic expression’?

The external visual perceptions of what an ideal dancer ‘should look like’ lends itself to unrealistic expectations and unattainable goals as an artist. Body image and the lack of individualized self-expression is a problem I have identified in studio settings. The goal is to use the perspective of non-trained dancers to dig deep into movement qualities that are not contrived or performed from ritual or preconceived notions of movement that tend to occur in trained dancers. The concept of ritual in dance, whether conscious or unconscious, reaches an obsessive-compulsive point with the need to attain the idealized expectation and superficial perspective of how a dancer should move and what aesthetic qualities they should have. Dancers typically ‘perform’ based on what movement the instructor has demonstrated or required of their bodies, as opposed to

dancers discovering and embodying the movement themselves and finding their own individualized movement tendencies with the material that is presented. The mind-body connection tends to be deemphasized or not understood in a more competitive dance studio environment. In this unconsciously ritualistic studio space dancing is often a superficial display of movement as we organize and reorganize behavior into set patterns. Some of these are healthy for the body and mind, some are not. The need for expansion of learning perspectives and new pedagogical frameworks at a dance studio is monumental. By incorporating more embodied, constructivist pedagogical methods into a studio classroom, the divide between a dance studio education and a post-secondary education, wouldn't be such a drastic one.

My goal with this project was to develop philosophies and teaching strategies that develop self-aware dancers that are not so focused only on the aesthetics of movement, but more on the reason behind the movement. Students should be encouraged to find a deeper meaning to their movement through their lived experiences and celebrate the body they are given instead of trying to fit a 'dance' mold. One of my concerns as an educator is that children, and adults, naively adapt their learning into the environment they enter and sometimes change their ways of working to fix the expectations of the teacher or learning environment. Taking on what is expected in a situation instead of being authentic to oneself then creates the facade of a performer, instead of an embodied, self-aware individual who performs. In a class setting, the dancers know they are being watched and evaluated by an instructor. As humans we tend to put on the 'persona' that is needed in each situation to adapt to that scenario in our daily lives. Hence, we are always performing in some way. As Schrechner states, "Performing in everyday life

involved people in a wide range of activities from solo or intimate performances behind closed doors to small group activities to interacting as part of a crowd” (2002). Taking the performative aspects of everyday life and applying them to a classroom setting works on the idea of ‘flow’ and ‘play’ and allows for room to grow in such a structured environment. The anti-structure aspect that allows for exploration and innovation in these spaces is where change can occur. The setting of a music festival could be looked at as an anti-structure where festival participants set the forward pace and energy, and this is in contrast to classroom settings where the teacher sets the structure and pace in most instances. There would be no dance, in any setting, without the form and structure that makes it what it is, the question then becomes, how do we play in that ‘in-between’ space and the confines of the structure that is presented in each of these situations? A sense of flow begins to happen when there is space for play. In the book *Deadhead Social Science*, “flow” is defined as, “the state in which people are so involved in an activity that nothing else seems to matter”(1991). Herndon and Mcleod mention that, “where group performance is involved and all are competent, the concept of oneness in the entire performing group or ‘communitas’ takes over” (1979). This concept not only applies dance studio settings, but also to music festivals.

The performative aspects are always there in a classroom setting, whether it is conscious or not, and the dancer acclimates to what that instructor is asking of them for that day whether it be aesthetic, kinetic, anatomical, or empathetic cues. Schechner states, “Across this very wide spectrum of performing are varying degrees of self-consciousness and consciousness of the others with whom and for whom we play. The more self-conscious a person is the more one constructs behavior for those watching

and/or listening the more such behavior is performing” (2002). Ideally, the goal here is to have students not worry as much about ‘performing’ for the teacher in a studio space, but to try and find their ‘authentic selves’ by digging deep into their lived experiences that lend to the uniqueness of their movement qualities. The structure provides the form, the anti-structure then in contrast is the catalyst for the play and exploratory aspects that develops unique movement qualities and allows room for personal artistic choices.

By watching and learning from untrained dancers in festival communities and applying those findings within a dance studio setting, my objective was to bridge this gap and merge the best of both worlds. Using this knowledge to enhance my pedagogy I created a learning environment that produced a space that made room for failure, feelings, exploration, and vulnerability through a more kinesthetically aware dancer who had the ability to be autonomous. This study rooted itself in a constructivist pedagogical approach that will help trained dancers be more embodied in their work, while still incorporating the technical aspects that dance encompasses. As the next quote specifies, we all have a unique body language that has something to say, we just need to be able to listen close enough to hear it. As an educator, I wanted this study to dig deeper into finding different approaches to help students find that voice by breaking some of the rituals and habits that has made studio dance what it has become. Ideally, a space where dancers can embody the movement and the ‘performing’ aspect is no longer in the forefront of their minds walking into a classroom setting. “Dance studies have much to offer...precisely because the object of study is the body, that crucial site where culture and nature intersect. The dancing body provides a kind of living laboratory for

examining the production of the body: its training, its image, its story, and its ways of creating the world around it” (Daly 1992).

Initial Project Intent and Vision

From the start I knew that I wanted to design an event that incorporated and created a community and festival vibe, but my initial idea was squashed due to Covid. In addition to the live event that I had completely envisioned down to the lighting that would occur in each section, I was going to have a Grateful Dead cover band play in the Secret Garden after the performative aspect of the show so all of the audience members could join together with the performers and move together to the music to cover the social dance aspect of my research. Poet Wendell Berry wrote, “It may be that when we no longer know what to do we have come to our real work and then when we no longer know which way to go we have begun our real journey. The mind that is not baffled is not employed. The impeded stream is the one that sings” (Nachmanovitch 1990). In essence, without this road block that I encountered I would not have created a dance film or a project in this manner. Without change there is no growth, and without growth there is no change.

In hindsight, going down my original project path would have been the easy way out for me and that route would not have pushed me to progress as an artist, or educator for that matter. These challenges led me down a creative path where I learned so much about myself and my dancers. Due to not being able to hold a live show in a theatre or hold an event that would draw a lot of people in the park, I had to reconfigure and reconceptualize a piece that could still bring different people together with one main

purpose: to explore dance and the potential that it has to change lives and the meaning behind it. With Covid now at the forefront of all of our lives, the challenges for creating a piece and the new hurdles would be how to implement the togetherness and journey that I wanted to include as the catalyst of my work with now having to socially distance ourselves from each other. I also specialize and enjoy working with dancers incorporating partnering work, but that was now thrown out the window as well. How could I demonstrate this collective consciousness and embodiment with these restrictions I was facing in these strange times? This was something I struggled with at the beginning of this journey.

Dance is such a socially driven art form, and for dancers, that aspect has been stripped from us this year. As Judith Lynn Hanna states, “Dance is *social behavior*. Social life is necessary for human mastery of the environment; dance reflects and influences patterns of social organization (relationships between individuals in groups and among groups). Dance is a physical instrument or symbol for feeling and or thought and is sometimes a more effective medium than verbal language in revealing needs and desires or masking true intent” (1979). Hence, any movement or gesture relays so much rich texture and meaning. I wanted to delve into that meaning with this performance by using groups from numerous backgrounds, experience levels, and ideas of what dance truly is. This change in course led me to base most of the choreography on the gestures and movement qualities that arose during our conversations. These motifs were catapulted from questions I asked the dancers and the stories they very openly and graciously shared of their experiences in both the festival and dance studio worlds. A

plethora of feelings and emotions were sprouted from those interactions and conversations and I am so grateful for their willingness to share their stories.

I think I was so worried about a ‘product’ in the early stages of this project that I was initially glazing over the richness that could be gained from the process. I didn’t want this process to be ephemeral, but something that the dancers would have lasting memories from. Dance affects the dancers and observers far beyond the actual event that is created, and there is far more to the experience than the visual aspect of the movement. Turner points out, “the kind of *communitas* desired by tribesmen in their rites and hippies in their “happenings” is not the pleasurable and effortless comradeship that can arise between friends, co-workers, or professional colleagues any day. What they seek is a transformative experience that goes to the root of each person’s being and finds in that root something profoundly communal and shared” (Adams 1987). My need and want for this project was not to objectify the dancers or put them on display as they had felt they were so many times before during performances. I truly wanted to delve into their human experience and preserve their stories through their own improvisational impulses that revealed themselves in the minimal time we had together to explore.

Project Process and Methodologies

“Since space is socially constructed, specific spaces (such as dance clubs and event sites) acquire social meanings through the discourses that surround them and the ways in which they are accessed and developed” (Jaimangal-Jones, Pritchard, Morgan 2010). Hence, we have very clear expectations when we come into a space of how we will feel in that space from the previous interactions that we have experienced there.

Taking on what is expected in a situation instead of being authentic to oneself then creates the facade of a performer, instead of an embodied, self-aware individual who performs. In a class setting, the dancers know they are being watched and evaluated by an instructor. A feeling of “performance” is always there, whether it be conscious or not, and the dancer acclimates to what that instructor is asking of them for that day. These can be aesthetic, kinetic, anatomical, or empathetic cues. Schechner says, “Across this very wide spectrum of performing are varying degrees of self-consciousness and consciousness of the others with whom and for whom we play. The more self-conscious a person is the more one constructs behavior for those watching and/or listening, the more such behavior is performing” (2002).

I wanted to set this space of openness and community starting from day one. Our very first in-person meeting was on October 15th and I immediately set the stage for the culture I was going to create for our rehearsal environment. During our initial Zoom meeting I emphasized that this work was not going to be about just placing movement on the dancers superficially, but I wanted this project to be about them. Due to Covid restrictions and my dancers’ being uncomfortable with meeting inside all together we met at the Secret Garden at Arizona State University. This is a hidden gem on the campus that feels ethereal and inviting. This inevitably worked out well since most of the filming would be done outside once we arrived at Arcosanti in December. Arcosanti is an Artist Community up in Northern Arizona where 67 artists currently live. It was built by Paolo Soleri in the 70’s as an experimental community. Arcosanti’s intent was to be a place that integrates the design of architecture with a respect to the ecology. The idea was to limit the environmental footprint that is left by the community.

I picked this location to film not only because of the beautiful architecture, but also the openness of the community for innovation and anything educational or arts related.

I arrived early so I could put tie dye blankets on the ground and I brought snacks for everyone so it would feel more like a picnic than a rehearsal to establish community and an ease within our group. Pedagogically I wanted to learn the dancers' own movement tendencies and build off of that. Robert Sardiello states as teachers, "We want to emphasize that teaching should be an open and free exchange of ideas that helps to enhance students' ability to understand their worlds and perhaps even teach teachers something new" (2000). On this day we began to build material for the project and get to know each other's stories growing up in the dance world.

My methodology was mainly Participant Observation, but the movement vocabulary also stemmed from questions that I presented to the participants. I would watch and analyze gestures through a Laban Movement Analysis lens, which is grounded in the idea of authentic movement. The gestures would naturally happen when I asked some of the inquisitive questions about their experiences. The mannerisms were so exquisitely different depending on their liking, or disliking, of the questions I posed. These gestures were all very pedestrian and natural responses entwined into their being, and of course, there is no training necessary for this kind of movement. It stemmed from the movers' unique selves being expressed through their lived experiences. This quite simply was just observation and analysis. "Dance is a physical instrument or symbol for feeling and/or thought and is sometimes a more effective medium than verbal language in revealing needs and desires or masking true intent. Non-verbal behavior, including dance, is a part of the calculus of meaning" (Hanna

1979). Our bodies constantly are exuding data about our personalities and backgrounds. These gestures were something as simple as looking to the right every time someone would think about the answer before they spoke, or constantly rubbing one shoulder when they were uncomfortable. I watched these motifs very closely. The dancers would also create their own gestures dealing with their lived experiences and memories that arose during our conversations and movement explorations.

As I started to collect data, I used the same questions for each group that I would meet with: ASU dancers, Arcosanti Residents, and the Festival/Rave community. Data collection was done through Zoom meetings, written responses from participants, and recording rehearsal sessions. I was curious if the same overall theme would arise no matter what background in dance the participants had. The experiences ranged from a music festival or rave to a very strict dance studio setting. I was curious in the ethnology and cultural anthropological influences of how the structure of these different settings and experiences affected their opinions of themselves and where the play and flow aspect situated itself within that structure. How these patterns shaped their lives had many distinct through lines, even though the exact situations and stories were so different. I will explain in more depth about these specific findings in the following sections. “Movement styles, structures, and purposes reflect patterns of group interaction: an individual’s dance is shaped both by cultural involvement and a unique set of experiences within the patterns of group behavior” (Hanna 1979). How did these different situations lead them to the opinion they have of themselves today, and as an educator, how can learning from these stories change how we teach in these different settings to promote more self-worth and confidence?

Material Building and Rehearsal Content

The first time that I met with each group of people the rehearsal's content dealt with the need for belonging in a ritual space, which could be unconscious or consciously occurring. We also dealt with self-worth and what happens when you don't feel like you are part of the community that you came to engage with. Ritual is a monumental part of the dance world and incorporated mindless repetition which leads to a robotic effect. This ritual can be the daily exercises and warm ups performed in each genre, the routines that are demonstrated and rehearsed in class, or the annual events, such as recitals, that are produced to display the years showcase of what the "rituals" have accomplished. This ritual aspect could also be applied to going to the same festival over and over again, and moving for hours on end with a sea of people which lends itself to a more reflexive ritualistic environment. What happens with your movement characteristics when you don't feel like you belong?

I was interested in the individual experiences that the dancers had dealing with this topic and what memories they had about these specific questions: Was there a time in your life that you were self-conscious and had doubt about dancing in a space? Was there a situation in a dancing environment where you didn't feel embodied or comfortable in your own skin and what was the circumstances surrounding this memory?

These questions brought up instances of self-doubt, contemplation, and memories where the dancers retreated and were not able to show their true colors or express themselves as they would have liked to. I asked the participants to give me specific

words that described their story and some of the words were: results, struggle, doubt, perseverance, discomfort, disconnect, frustration, and comparison. The movers then created gestures to go with these words from their stories. In all of these instances the dancers based the proprioception of their space on how they thought others saw them in said space, instead of being at one with their mind/body connection and fully embracing what they had to offer the situation. The gestures that occurred during our conversations through Zoom and rehearsals in our outdoor spaces started to mold the movement vocabulary that was building for the film. The improvisational structure through the exploration of the questions led the movers to tell their story through their movement choices. This process ended up very in the moment because of the structure and the choices that I was making for the project content. Snowber states, “Improvisation can be the pilgrimage to reach the imaginative possibilities through our whole being and access the body narratives and stories waiting to be found” (2002).

Participant’s Personal Stories

A few of the stories revolving around self-consciousness and comparison made the participants very emotional as they shared them. One very interesting aspect through all of the questioning was that coming up with negative words for themselves was very easy, but thinking of positive words for themselves took way more contemplation and thought in most instances. I would like to begin with a story from one of the ‘untrained’ festival goers perspective and the experiences with dance that she had, then one of a highly trained and seasoned competitive dancer, and finally a story from someone that has been in both worlds.

My first example is from one of the residents of Arcosanti. She called herself a ‘recovering dancer’ and described herself as ‘resistant to structure’ and a very expressive person, but she felt that the three years that she grew up dancing at a studio when she was young ruined her love for it for the rest of her youth and that she had no support to explore movement. She is a very unique individual and felt that quality was not celebrated but was made fun of and that she did not ‘fit the mold’ of what her teacher considered as a ‘good dancer’ and ballet was never her strong suite. She said she was always put in the back and really wasn’t paid any attention to and it made her feel worthless. This quote by Jane Desmond encapsulates this kind of thought process in some studio settings, “From the teacher’s unchallenged authority, students assimilate the system of values and internalize the impulse to evaluate and rank their own and other’ performances. Competition, although quiet, is fierce—in part because standards for perfection are so clearly defined. The aesthetic rationale based on the pursuit of classical beauty offers dancers no alternative conceptions of dance, and inability to succeed at ballet implies failure at all dance” (Foster 1997). She loved movement, but not the surroundings that went along with it.

It is a shame that someone who loves to move so much considered dance for a long time only to be about a certain perceived body type and image instead of how the movement led her to express herself freely and openly. In the movement workshop that I held up at Arcosanti she was actually an amazing improvisational dancer and moved so expressively. As she became an adult, she found the festival scene and inevitably, a self-proclaimed ‘spinner’. These are dancers at shows that literally spin and dance for hours on end into a trance like and meditative state. A spinner stated, “Sometimes if the show

is really high, your soul just leaves your body, and you leave this physical world. I feel that when we're all dancing, and that happens, we all connect, and our souls are all together as one" (Adams 2000). This kind of statement reiterates the fact that dance is so much more than following and copying steps, but it has a much deeper meaning. Once she found this community and the freedom to be expressive and move from her soul, she again found her love for movement, and now considers dance a 'gateway to her soul'. As a dance educator in a studio setting, a more somatic approach towards class instruction needs to be implemented. Maybe someone like the 'spinner' would not have quit, but could have been inspired to be herself and continue dancing just the way she was without questioning her quirks, but embracing them. She has now found community in both the Festival Scene and her Arcosanti family where she can dance and truly be herself.

The second person's story is one of a classically trained competitive dancer from the studio world. She shared that she had never really been to any kind of festival event and her experiences with dancing were only in a classroom setting, which was what she considered was 'real dancing' before she participated in this project. Her class time always involved someone telling her what to do and then copying what she was told. She also stated in our first rehearsal that she had no experience with improvisation and the thought of it for this project made her very nervous and uncomfortable because she wouldn't know what to do. She grew up from the age of 5 in a studio and was on the competitive team at her studio from 11 to 17 years of age. When I asked her the aforementioned questions, clear memories brought her back to when she constantly compared herself to 'the others' and that she didn't feel like she was ever good

enough. She remembered going to dance conventions all the time and would hide behind other dancers because she couldn't learn the choreography as fast as 'the others'. In her words she stated, "I always felt as though the movement I created had to follow certain unspoken 'guidelines'. That if it wasn't intricate or didn't show off my technical skills I shouldn't be doing it." She never felt like her body was right, that she could have been skinnier, and a lot shorter so she could be in the front of more dances (her spacial placement in dances she also equated with her self-worth in a piece). "The perceived body, never sufficiently thin or well proportioned, must mold itself repeatedly into the abstract forms presented in class and then on stage. The dancer's self exists to facilitate the craftlike acquisition of skills: it serves the choreographer and, ultimately, the tradition by ordering the body to practice and then to perform ideals of movement" (Foster 1997). This dancer who has difficulty moving without being told what to do was so afraid to be expressive and 'mess up'. What is so crucial to fostering a somatic approach in dance pedagogy is "the notions of *unknowing* and the *beginner's mind*, letting go of ready-made knowledge to allow discoveries and fresh insights" (Bresler 2018). Her knowledge had been only 'copy' and 'follow', so during these two months together I really worked on facilitating an environment for her to explore, and be more comfortable with the way she wanted to move. It was a very delicate process to begin to explore this side of openness and exploration at the beginning. "Dance and movement embedded in the physicality of our humanness and humility can be a place of inquiry and the fertile ground that moves under our feet to enliven many kinds of arts-based practices. May we dance through this glorious and paradoxical journey into what we know and what we don't know" (Snowber 2018).

The third and final story is one of a trained dancer, but also someone who participates in raves and festivals regularly. As I began to ask the same questions as I had for the other dancers, the mannerisms that were being displayed by this dancer demonstrated someone who is an introvert, has self-doubt, and questions her validity in many circumstances that involves others, not just dance. This person had not been in a set piece for almost 10 years and was feeling very insecure. She stated that she “has a bit of a tendency to project these insecurities on seeing other dancers I’m with as far better than I am, which isn’t very conducive for growth and teamwork.” She remembered instances about where some of those insecurities arose and the circumstances surrounding them. Her memories immediately brought to the surface her experiences with dance conventions. She remembered vividly coming into those spaces and seeing the “confident girls who had their look together”, and mentioned that she wasn’t like that. She spoke of many elements in that atmosphere that made her uncomfortable with herself and her surroundings. The idea of constantly being watched and critiqued so you could be “the one” picked to go up on stage by the instructors, and also the way that different groups of dancers’ would look at others that they didn’t know is something that bothered her in these situations. She felt more comfortable in the space with her friends from her studio, but she recollected a time when she went to a convention by herself. “That felt really isolating, which was a weird feeling because I was learning dances that I really liked and doing movement and practicing things that made me feel joy but I was doing it in this kind of like environment where I was self-conscious of my surroundings. Then when you weren’t dancing I would just go find a corner and eat a sandwich by myself.” Stephen Nachmanovitch stated, “In our compartmentalized,

alienated society there is such tremendous hunger for union, for grounding, for surrender” (1990). She struggles with feelings of isolation, inadequacy, and social anxiety still to this day, and she said even in Rave/Festival situations that are much more open to uniqueness she still questions her self-worth. She has had a really hard time acclimating to any group setting that involves numerous people, even though she mentioned that moving is the only thing that makes her feel better when she is depressed. We did not have enough to keep delving into her history and work through all of this anxiety, but my hope is that we started to unravel some of these thoughts with the short time we had together.

There is such an opportunity at these events to make it one of community and togetherness when there are hundreds of dancers/people together there to move and explore. Why do so many of these stories revolve around these conventions and studios being isolating and a breeding ground for comparison, competition, and self-doubt? There is a wasted opportunity here. When these memories come up later in life it should be remembered as something that promotes growth, creativity, and inclusion. There are plenty of stories where kids grow up in healthy environments so I don't want to negate any of the hard work that a lot of educators have done and are doing in this realm. There are just too many instances where growth as a dancer and human being are not top concern. This is exactly what came up from the conversations with my dancers and they came from so many different backgrounds and environments. Through socially engaged pedagogy that is viewed through a somatic lens, dancers can learn through a transformative and a restorative platform that would be more helpful and healthy for the mind and body. “My goal in working with students is to open possibilities

for lifelong learning for them so they will take dance with them as a way of learning more about themselves and as a way of knowing the world around them” (Kay 2011).

Leading Up To, and Filming at Arcosanti

What a whirlwind of uncertainty and excitement it was leading up to and preparing for when we filmed, which ended up being on December 9-10, 2020. Due to Covid concerns and restrictions the ASU dancers and I only met 3 times all together, and I met one time with the Arcosanti Residents and the Hoopers/Fire dancers. Luckily I ended up with such a wonderful group of people and movers, and for that I am truly grateful. I did establish early and kept reiterating that this project was about them and their personal journey through every step we made. I truly feel that keeping that in mind at rehearsal led them into that safe space for exploration in a very minimal amount of time. The whole film was geared towards showing the journey and transformation from being full of self-doubt, comparison, and worry, to a place of enlightenment, embodiment, and self-worth. One of the hardest aspects for me through this process was figuring out the progression of sections for the film so they felt cohesive for the story. I struggled with this tremendously as we got closer to that December day. What should I start with and end with? Will it make sense? Does it have to? How am I going to plan everything around the sunset and sunrise? I am a planner and I like to have aspects of projects organized and planned out, but because of my free spirit and calm demeanor I can also roll with the punches seamlessly if need be. That aspect of my personality ended up coming in very handy.

In planning the scenes I decided on getting a poster board and cut it up into individual sections and wrote on each one the location of filming, song being used, what dancers would be part of that section, and what supplies if any I would need for that section. (See Addendum 1) I would lay them all out on the floor and play with different scenarios and structure until I felt like it would logically make sense for the timeline. We had plenty of tie dye blankets and tapestries for the auditorium scene which was originally planned for Thursday. There was going to be around 15 extra people coming up just for that scene that are all Deadheads that were so excited to be part of the project. I ordered Magic Flames for the Ritual Night scene so the fire would glow very vibrant colors. Since we would have to stay the night up North I rented rooms for all of the participants for the night. Anyone who did not feel comfortable rooming with someone due to the current Covid situation got their own separate room. My main concern was the safety and health of everyone who so graciously was coming up to Arcosanti with me for 24 hours, and I wanted the dancers to feel as comfortable as possible. I truly wanted to create our own little festival community at Arcosanti for the day and bring all these people together who didn't know each other to collaborate and move. I made chili and cornbread for everyone so we would have dinner after we got done filming since there was no restaurant close, and brought pastries, fruit, and coffee for the morning since we were going to be getting up early to start again. I was told later how much they appreciated this, but besides that, it was just another way for us all to sit and get to know each other better during this process.

The changes and rearranging began the night before we were going to head up to Arcosanti. One of the residents called me and said we could no longer have an actual fire

for the Ritual scene at the edge of the cliff due to a fire they had up there that week and they were nervous because of the dry brush. Ok that was fine, but it was 11 o'clock at night and I was driving up there in the morning? I decided to run to the store that night and bought tons of battery operated lights/candles to give the illusion of fire at least in the fire pit. One big obstacle that ended up rearing its head was the rainstorm that was supposed to be coming. There had not been rain in 3 months and this was supposed to be one of the biggest rainstorms we have had in a while. Really? All of our scenes except one were to be shot outside, and it was really important to me to get the shot at sunset in the garden area, so the wheels had to turn again. Am I going to have to restructure this whole project as I was driving to Arcosanti? The answer was a big yes. I was driving there on a Wednesday and the storm was coming in Wednesday night but the bulk of it would be all day Thursday. I no longer could film the auditorium daytime scene or the rooftop scene that I wanted to be in the daylight on Thursday, so I had to call of my friends and tell them not to come anymore. I was worried about the structure now, but just kept going and let the cards fall where they might. Stressing about situations like this never gets you anywhere, and I truly believe everything happens for a reason.

I began messaging the dancers, since I went up there 2 hours before them to get situated, and let them know that the timeline will be different but to just trust me and it will be fine. As I did so, one of my dancers called me at Noon and told me she wasn't feeling well and was no longer comfortable with coming up and participating in the project. We were going to start shooting at 3. Yet another hoop to jump through, which inevitably allowed me to be in more of the project and kept one of the hotel rooms open for us to film in the morning. As the videographer got there I let him know that we were

going to change many sections due to the inclement weather and we began shooting the rooftop scenes first while we still had sun. The clouds started rolling through the canyon as we began the garden scene, which turned out to be such a beautiful backdrop and we got our shots. What was truly amazing to me was everyone's willingness to trek around the property up and down I don't know how many stairs over those 24 hours, with a positive attitude even as they were getting tired and hungry. We created a small group with a collective consciousness that was so inspiring for me and that aided my vision for the scenes due to their willingness to explore anything I was asking.

The pieces kept falling together as we rolled with the punches. I was concerned about the auditorium scene and how we could get that shot at night instead with only a few people? As I was talking about this scenario to one of my dancers one of the Arcosanti residents heard me and said, "Why don't we see if the Lighting Director will come out and turn lights on for you tonight?" The people of that community were so helpful and made this process so much easier through their graciousness. After we got done with the Hooper and Fire Dancing scene, we all headed to the auditorium with 15 minutes left to shoot. We had to be done shooting by 9 pm for quiet hours, and this time needed to be respected since we were coming into their space. As we walk into the auditorium I was assuming the audience part of the auditorium would just be lit up with white fluorescent lights. Boy was I wrong!!! He turned on flashing, colorful, LED lights that ran under all of the concrete steps and seats. This was such an unexpected delight since we had just got done filming the Hooper's section with the LED lights and this coincided beautifully with the new timeline that was organically coming to fruition. At the time we started to film, random campers walked by and asked us what we were

doing. So naturally, I asked them to be a part of that scene and they obliged. A few extra Arcosanti residents randomly walking by ended up joining us also, which gave us a little bigger crowd than we originally started with. We got done filming literally at 9 PM! As I started collecting our stuff, one of the residents that participated in the project said, “Can’t we dance a little more? We never get to have dance parties?” So I played another Grateful Dead song that was not for the film, but was just for us to dance, laugh, and move together in this little community we created. It was such a beautiful way to end the night, with such happiness and joy. Now it was time to eat, talk, and celebrate what we had just accomplished with so many obstacles to overcome.

We knew Thursday was going to be raining, but that was an understatement. The high that day was 40 degrees and we truly were freezing filming outside all morning. The rain never stopped. I wanted to keep my dancers out of the rain as long as possible because I needed to find different steps for them to dance on that maybe had a little bit of a cover for them. I happened upon the steps we used with the beautiful tree with all of the autumn colors illuminating and glistening with raindrops. Again, I was not planning to shoot at that spot, but it ended up being one of my favorite scenes because of the color of that tree and the darkness of the steps in that cubby. Mother Nature ended up being on my side. All of the scenes where I wanted there to be a feeling of contemplation and doubt, were the ones we filmed in the rain and I feel that created much more contrast and mood than there would have been without the rain. My dancers were troopers and stepped up to the plate and danced in the freezing rain for 4 hours so we could get all of the shots. I am truly grateful for their perseverance and trust in me through the process and being pliable enough to roll with the constant changes that ended

up being this project that day we filmed. We created a space to dance, we created memories, and we created our own community where it didn't matter if you had danced for 15 years or had never danced before. All that mattered was that our 'little festival' created this together, and it further illuminated my stance that dance can bring people closer together and create community where there is none.

Participant Responses After the Project Completion

After we completed filming for the Project I was very curious on how the Participants felt about being a part of it. It was of utmost importance to me that they grew somehow from this project, and that the experience was a positive one that created community for everyone involved. I sent all of the participants a series of questions to find out their thoughts and feelings from participating in this process. The questions I prompted them with were:

How was the process for you?

Is there anything you learned about yourself in this project?

Did you feel a sense of community with all the different groups brought together?

I have copied 4 of the responses that I received below. These are stated in the participants own words and no changes were made to their responses. There are no names or personal information put with their statements.

Participant #1

This was my first experience doing an official performance at ASU so I was unsure of what to expect, doubting myself and my abilities before rehearsals. It was a small group of dancers that I was able to meet and though our rehearsals

were rarely all together, the final product didn't reveal that detail. Coming into Arcosanti, I was honestly filled with anxiety, from lodging with someone unfamiliar, the filming, my appearance, etc. But I was actually able to enjoy myself at the site and surprisingly, the process itself. Everyone was so warm and I was able to extend myself out to classmates that I had barely spoken to this past semester. The filming process itself was fun and I was able to see other talents like hooping and fire dancing, it was incredible to witness these up close. I felt a little sad when the night ended and I had to go to sleep because I knew I would be leaving in the morning. Overall, I had a really wonderful experience with this project and I'll forever be grateful that I was able to be a part of it.

Received 1/30/2021

Participant #2

This project made me realize how freeing simply moving is. Growing up in a studio setting, most all of the dancing I've done has been technically driven or structured to some extent. While we were given opportunities to improv and dance however we liked, I always felt as though the movement I created had to follow certain unspoken "guidelines." That if it wasn't intricate or didn't show off my technical skills, I shouldn't be doing it. Participating in this project confirmed what I think I've known deep down this whole time: improv is meant to be anything. It's meant to be whatever you want it to be - no matter the setting. I've never been to a rave or festival before, and I loved the energy the other girls who have brought. Dancing with such a welcoming group under noncompetitive circumstances opened my eyes to the absolute freedom that comes with moving in whatever way you feel like moving. While I may not have felt I could do that in a studio setting, I'm so grateful to have experienced it now. I honestly didn't like improv until I experienced this side of it. If I'm being honest, I've also always wholeheartedly hated watching myself dance - to the point that I literally wouldn't under any circumstance, if I could help it. Watching this project back was the first time I've ever watched the movement I created and been genuinely proud of it and happy with it. I think this is due in part to the fact that I wasn't worried about being perfect. I wasn't even worried about liking the movement I created. I was solely focused on enjoying myself to the fullest extent. This is a bit of a sidebar, but I think it's really important and applies here. I've always been a perfectionist about certain things - the most prominent of them being my grades. While having a conversation with one of my teachers in high school about how hard and stressful it was to maintain straight A's, she said something to me that genuinely changed the way I thought about school. I've only now been able to see how it applies to dance after doing this project. What she told me was that I only had to worry about understanding and learning the subject matter. That the good grades would follow as a result of such. While this may seem really obvious, it completely flipped the way I approached my classes and schoolwork. Not only did it make me worry about my grades less - it made my intense classes and

homework so much more enjoyable. Quite simply put, my goal changed. Rather than trying to get good grades for the sake of maintaining a 4.0 GPA in order to be offered the best college scholarship I could, I simply did my very best to learn what I was being taught - and she was right, everything else followed. In the same way, I've always danced with a fear of not being perfect. Most of the way I danced was with the mindset of not simply wanting to look like a bad dancer. What I should have been doing, though, was dancing, for the sake of enjoying dancing. This project has shown me that beautiful movement and therefore also contention with movement occurs when the dancer is enthralled by what they're doing rather than striving for perfection. In other words, genuinely enjoying and being interested in learning causes good grades in the same way that genuinely enjoying the creation and spirit of dance results in beautiful movement. At least in a much more fulfilling way than solely striving for good grades or perfection in dance does.

Received 12/28/2020

Participant #3

I feel like before this project I had lost a lot of confidence in my hooping. Being a part of this project helped show me that often times I'm too hard on myself. When I saw the final footage I was immensely proud of myself and my hooping. The process for me was a little nerve wracking. I normally don't do choreography and was worried I would mess it up. But overall once I arrived I felt much more at ease when I realized the other dancers weren't judging me. I absolutely felt a sense of community once all the groups were together. The final scene where we all danced as a group was so fun and magical. It felt like we were one collective body and each of us were operating differently to create a cohesive movement.

Received 2/12/2021

Participant #4

This project was an absolute honor to be involved with. To be considered as a "dancer" for this project came as a surprise to me and at the same time, was a really great reminder that where you might see flaws or a lack confidence in yourself, other people might see far beyond that. My experience with dance and hoop dance is 100% self-taught. I have always wanted to be a dancer but did not find I had the coordination or confidence to pursue it. This project helped me break down the mental wall in my head (that I suppose has been shaped since being in school where labels and cliques are a ruling factor of "who you are") that I am "not a dancer" because I was/am not a "dance student". What I learned about myself is that I am a dancer and I am whatever I want to be. I mean, I knew that already but when asked to do something outside of your comfort zone, you start to question things, mostly your worth. "Am I *good enough*?" The transpersonal

experience we all face with every challenge in life. This project put me with other passionate artists who saw me as a *perfect addition* to a creative and collective experience even though I had no idea what I was doing at times when asked to do simple choreography. To them, it's not about my skill, my training, or knowledge to determine my worth, it's about what we are putting into this project, which is passion, art, creative expression, and community. It's about tearing down those labels of "trained dancer" vs "untrained dancer" and see each other as humans all expressing ourselves through the most primal outlet of movement. This project taught me that even though it feels scary, I want to be seen and in a way I can feel happy about and be proud of. I probably would have written myself off forever as anyone to be involved in some type of dance project but now because of the positive and inclusive experience of this project I will most likely seek out more opportunities to dance and be seen.

This process was amazing! To even just be there and watch and witness this all come together was SOOO COOL!!! The location was fantastic and the music and dance was incredible. Watching someone's larger vision come to life, as an artist myself, is really truly inspiring!! Tiffany has always put together really expressive pieces of art. Having known her for 25 years and having seen recital after recital of hers, you can always tell her directing style. It is emotional, expressive, and dynamic. The concept of the project is real and it is the breakdown of the artist's psyche. It's the constant need to feel accepted and feel perfect in how you show up in this world by the way you creatively express yourself and then what it's like when you realize you can breakdown those barriers and really be free to be you. To add to that feeling of breaking free from these societal standards, just being on site with the residents and artist at Arcosanti added to the message of this project. Do not let any limitations hold you back from putting yourself and your expression out there because when you do, like the Luna Flora artist and local resident did, you will see how many people you will touch and inspire when you put your heart, passion, art, and self out there.

This process came at an interesting time in my life. I am a psychology student studying the psychosomatic connections of trauma held in the brain and in the body. Through my research I have found that when your nervous system has created survival patterns in your brain and body, one of the most helpful ways to "rewire" your nervous system and "move" beyond your responses to trauma is to participate activities that have you "tap into" a state of "flow". I had taken a night off from school to participate in this project and I found it so relevant that each dancer I talked to all could resonate with this "state of flow" or happy place. It reminded me again of the transpersonal journey we are all on, it also reminding me how vital and important it is to feel this peace in your own body. It was a great reminder to come back to myself and to not be afraid to do so and to be seen in doing so. It's okay.

YES YES YES!!!! And thank goodness for it! 2020 was hard and isolating. I am a music girl! Prior to covid my life was full of shows, live music, camping festivals and LOTS of free form dancing. The music festival culture is

the new counterculture movement of our time, creating a community of outcasts. The whole foundation of it is bringing people together to experience music and art, express, heal, feel, entertain, and enjoy. Having that taken away from me in 2020 was a major blow to my mental health that I didn't even realize until it was gone. Coming together with this group of strangers during a global pandemic was one of the highlights of my year. Being out there at Arcosanti, first of all is an experience of its own, but to get dressed up and walk the terrain with the girls to the next filming location felt like walking to the next stage or camp at a festival. It fulfilled my needs of community in a way I cannot explain. These girls didn't know me, they didn't care I wasn't an ASU dancer or that I couldn't dance at all. They actually boosted me up and were excited to see what myself and the other hoopers could do. They wanted to play with our hoops and flow toys and we got to show them tricks. I also got an opportunity to meet other girls who were hoopers and got to share tricks and toys with them too. Something I have not gotten at all in 2020 and honestly I haven't really ever known anyone else who hooped. So it was like coming together and already knowing you're friends even though we didn't know each other. It's like being a kid all over again but as an adult, so instead of feeling weird and insecure if anyone likes you or if you fit in, you all consciously choose to just pump each other up, believed in each other, and chose to just be there for each other, because life is already hard enough and dance and art and community is real. It felt really great to be in my element at the end when we all came together for the free for all Grateful Dead dance party. That's where I felt the most confident and comfortable, dancing with or without my hoop and I got to have fun with the "trained dancers" who looked like they just walked into their first dead show like... everyone is dancing around like a flailing fool and I will too! Haha! That's how it starts that's how we all become one merry grateful family!

Received 2/10/2021

Project Reflection

“Teaching based on phenomenological pedagogical theory seeks to create connections to the participants’ experiences. Knowing that lived experiences and feelings are significant in order to understand, actively make use of and develop knowledge makes it important that teaching creates resonance in and among the participants by making what they are presented with meet their lived experiences and involves them emotionally” (Nielsen 2012). After the project was over and I was able to

look back on the journey and reflect on all of the participants responses, this aspect of the process and the project was a success. I feel that the dancers were able to express themselves without feelings of comparison or self-doubt that had plagued them so many times in other circumstances. We imitate our surroundings and adapt to each new situation, and dance genre, as is needed or “expected” in each environment. With the way I presented this project and material, we worked on debunking these expectations that so many times we instinctively gravitate to. To be able to break out of this mold, or to have a “looser frame”, creates opportunity for expansion, not only as a person, but also for a community as a whole. “Since space is socially constructed, specific spaces acquire social meanings through the discourses that surround them and the ways in which they are accessed and developed (Jones, Pritchard, Morgan 2009). Exploring this “in-between” space is where growth is nurtured, and the mind, body, and soul connection creates a dancer that moves from a genuine place that is not fabricated. There is vulnerability in the “in-between”, and I know that I created a space for openness, exploration, contemplation, and movement that celebrated what each dancer had to bring to the table. A ‘performance’ shouldn’t always be just for the audience, a personal investment in the material is imperative to project authentic rawness in the movement, whether you are trained or not. I feel we explored this space well, even in the short amount of time that was available for this project, and this growth was affectively shown through the participants’ responses. My goal for this project from day one was to create this film around them, and this was accomplished. Inadequacies and self-doubt were washed away while we were at Arcosanti, and a celebration of community and diversity within that community was embraced. We achieved our goal. We were able to create a

community even through all of the obstacles that that formed in front of us. We were able to create a safe place for everyone involved to be themselves. We were able to bring different groups together that didn't know each other and feel as one. "Performing dance as a ritual does not mean that it lacks aesthetic qualities. The ritual may be enhanced if its outward form is beautiful. But the criterion for whether the ritual is successful is not whether it pleases, in some aesthetic way, the people who come to view it, but whether the dance has accomplished its purpose" (Halprin 2019). We achieved and successfully accomplished my goal and purpose for this project without a doubt.

Personal Growth and Reflection

The opportunity to create this film at Arcosanti is an experience that created growth and self-reflection not only for the dancers, but also for myself. Making the decision to go to Graduate School, and also working on this project has forever changed how I will work with dancers and create pieces. It has changed my pedagogical point of view and choreographic process drastically to be one of thinking more about the why than the how. I have begun to look at my approach to teaching in a whole new light. Bresler stated that, "*unknowing and beginner's mind*, letting go of ready-made knowledge to allow discoveries and fresh insights" (2019), is how we begin to be better educators. I went into this project feeling completely frazzled due to the feeling of 'not-knowing', but that is what led me down this path and assisted my growth as a teacher and a choreographer. There is room in rituals for structure while exploring the aspects of play that are embedded within that structure. I was able to provide a loose structure where each person could be themselves while still sticking to the concept of this piece. We

always grasp for what we know in stressful situations, and I am so happy in this case that I went for an untrodden path. These dancers' stories opened my eyes to the numerous possibilities that can be explored through this subject matter, and how working through these stories helped them experience movement in a whole new way.

I have been asked to come back to Arcosanti to create another movement workshop, and I look forward to this opportunity sometime in the near future. The community of Arcosanti has also expressed interest in having me organize a live performance in their amphitheater once Covid is behind us. I am beyond excited for those ventures and look forward to continuing and growing the relationships that were formed there with that community of artists. I am also looking forward to begin teaching in a College setting at some point and sell my studio in the next couple of years to continue this new chapter in my life.

My future goals for projects would be to create a “happening” at ASU involving as many people from as many different backgrounds and cultures who would want to participate. I envision a hundred people or more on either the soccer fields or the football fields coming together focusing on love, community, and embracing uniqueness, and inclusivity. “When a large number of people move together in a common pulse with a clearly defined purpose, an incredible force takes over. It is a power that can renew, inspire, and heal” (Halprin 2019). This project and my continued education the past few years has launched me into a new trajectory that I feel has just begun.

Conclusion

“ABR pedagogies, just like research, aim at a “sweet spot” between observations skills and unknowing; between following a careful plan and the ability to improvise; and between the voice of the situated self and others’ perspectives” (Leavy 2019). The culmination of this project and process comes down to this. Arts-Based Research is so important to connect our mind, body and spirit. People need community and they need to feel accepted for who they are. Movement needs to be internalized and can’t be fabricated from a superficial ‘copying’ from educator to student and there needs to be legitimacy to the exploration from both sides of the table. I knew there was a problem with the cutthroat competitive culture that a lot of young dancers are growing up in that hinders the proprioceptive growth, but my research validates the need for pedagogical change in these environments. I learned through this project that the ‘trained’ dancers were much harder on themselves with self-image problems than the ‘untrained’ dancers I worked with, and this was due to the comparative tendencies that happened in studio dance spaces. Appreciation of personal unique qualities is not celebrated and is something that needs to be looked at to foster growth, self-acceptance, and kinesthetic awareness in a number of studio settings. Even as I worked with the ‘untrained’ dancers, they had a preconceived notion of what dance is and were worried that they couldn’t keep up with the ‘trained’ dancers. Everyone’s story is different therefore everyone dances in their own way. We all speak the language of movement, but it is just how that language is nurtured that matters. Movement tendencies are created through lived experiences and these differences should be celebrated and not squashed. None of us can fit into a ‘mold’ and shouldn’t have to.

Continuing with my journey as an educator I will work on this aspect to help dancers understand this connection. This quote by Anna Halprin summarizes my thoughts not only with this project, but the way I now approach my pedagogy. “I began a more conscious search for new techniques. Not the kind of physical techniques that would enable us to lift our legs higher, turn faster, fall and rebound more smoothly, or invent more dance “moves”. Instead, I was looking for techniques that would include emotional, visual, theatrical, and kinesthetic experience and offer new ways to explore human nature, individually and collectively. These new techniques needed to maximize differences and commonalities, as well as allow for mutual creation and the integration of mind, body, and emotion. I wanted new ways to listen to emotions through movement and for collaborating with other artists and interfacing with the environment” (2019). In the end, everyone felt on an even playing field for this project and I could not have asked for a better outcome with this small group of movers. Dance is transformative and brings us to commonality and empowerment if structured correctly. Change can happen, and dancing not only with yourself but in groups, can facilitate this change. An amazing journey of movement, community, embodiment, and personal growth arose during this research, and I look forward to the roads ahead. For that I am GRATEFUL.

Ripple By: The Grateful Dead

Ripple in still water
When there is no pebble tossed
Nor wind to blow

Reach out your hand if your cup be empty
If your cup is full may it be again
Let it be known there is a fountain
That was not made by the hands of men

There is a road, no simple highway
Between the dawn and the dark of night
And if you go no one may follow
That path is for your steps alone

Ripple in still water
When there is no pebble tossed
Nor wind to blow

You who choose to lead must follow
But if you fall you fall alone
If you should stand then who's to guide you?
If I knew the way I would take you home

Addendum 1 <https://photos.app.goo.gl/1YKG9gb7z4HkbgEX9>

Addendum 2 <https://photos.app.goo.gl/tnhviX8HHsKz2oXn7>

Photography Credits: Veronica Jean Lovato

Addendum 3 Dance Film (Culminating Project)

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/12hor5YUBXNOt5FfnIEaBCsjHQuFW8d1W/view?usp=sharing>

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