



University of Roehampton

## DOCTORAL THESIS

### Dancing sites ethics, agency, and the choreographic act

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**Dancing sites:**

**Ethics, agency, and the choreographic act**

**By**

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**A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of**

**PhD**

**Department of Dance**

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**Abstract:**

The following PhD by published works assembles a series of publications and creative works that focus on site-based dance practice in live performance and film. Together, this collection activates, contributes to, and expands the discourse around site dance as a cultural practice, with particular attention paid to the form's political, ideological, and ethical underpinnings.

The thesis draws from three central building blocks. First, it draws on a collection of interviews (conducted by myself and Carolyn Pavlik) of site-based choreographers in North America, *Site Dance: Choreographers and the Lure of Alternative Spaces* (2009). Due to this anthology's standing as the first volume to address site-based dance practice and due to its focus on first-person experiences by well-known site choreographers, the volume offers an essential primary resource that grounds many of my assertions in this thesis. Of particular import, I argue through the text's introduction that a defining trait for the field is the concept of 'attending to place', a concept that has evolved into a thematic basis for this thesis. The second building block includes the gathering of key critical theories from the disciplines of dance studies, performance studies, visual art, geography, philosophy, architecture, sociology, and anthropology to frame the investigation of site-based dance practice; such theories – specifically those concerning agency, discipline and the dancing body, the unpacking of space and place, the critique of neoliberal globalization and its impacts on cultural practices, and the appraisal of site-based practices via environmental ethics – serve as a basis for scrutinizing site dance over the past fifty years. As a third building block, my own practice-based research (in choreography, direction, film editing, and performance) provides concrete, hands-on data to further

the investigation of site-based practices, data that has elicited critical insights into the changing role of site-based performance in an era of ideological and environmental upheaval.

Employing these building blocks and adopting a transdisciplinary methodology, *the thesis argues that the considered choreographic act as undertaken in site dance practice operates to expose and potentially destabilize hegemonic and hierarchical value systems and ideologies, generating new ethical and agential avenues in a neoliberal, globalized, and Anthropocenic age*. Yet, the thesis also encourages a level of vigilance, advocating for the evaluation of particular acts under an environmental and social justice framework. In assembling these publications and creative works and then offering a retrospective analysis of them through this supporting statement, the thesis works to problematize and evaluate site-based dance practice in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

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## Contents: Portfolio of Published Works

PPW – Previously Published Work

DF – Dance Film

One note: the portfolio of published works below does not adhere to a precise chronology; rather, it is arranged to follow a flow of ideas, clustering chapters together that address particular critical concepts.

### 1. PPW

Kloetzel, Melanie and Pavlik, Carolyn (eds.) (2009) *Site Dance: Choreographers and the Lure of Alternative Spaces*. Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida.

### 2. PPW

Kloetzel, Melanie (2015a) 'Site-Specific Dance in a Corporate Landscape: Space, Place, and Non-Place'. In: Hunter, V. (ed.) *Moving Sites: Investigating Site-Specific Dance Performance*. London: Routledge. pp. 239-54.

An expanded reprint of Kloetzel, Melanie (2010) 'Site-Specific Dance in a Corporate Landscape'. *New Theatre Quarterly* 26:2 (no. 102) pp. 133-44.

### 3. DF

Kloetzel, Melanie (dir.) (2011) *The Sanitastics*. Calgary, AB: kloetzel&co. (8.5 minutes)  
<https://vimeo.com/105659988>

### 4. PPW

Kloetzel, Melanie (2015b) 'Bodies in place: location as collaborator in dance film'. *International Journal of Performance Arts and Digital Media* 11(1) pp. 18-41.

### 5. DF

Kloetzel, Melanie and Curtis, Jeff (dirs.) (2007) *Icarus Fried*. Pocatello, ID: kloetzel&co. (3.5 minutes)  
<https://vimeo.com/248023758>

### 6. PPW

Kloetzel, Melanie (2016) 'Location, Location, Location: Dance Film and Site-Specific Dance'. In: Arendell, T. and Barnes, R. (eds.) *Dance's Duet with the Camera: Motion Pictures*. London: Palgrave Macmillan. pp. 19-47.

### 7. PPW

Kloetzel, Melanie (2013) 'Have Site, Will Travel – Container Architecture and Site-Specific Performance'. *Conversations Across the Field of Dance Studies* XXXIII. pp. 23-9.

8. DF

Kloetzel, Melanie (dir.) (2015c) *The Dwindling Dispute*. Calgary, AB: kloetzel&co. (5.5 minutes)  
<https://vimeo.com/134755965>

9. PPW

Kloetzel, Melanie (2017a) 'Site and Re-Site: Early Efforts to Serialize Site-Specific Dance'. *Dance Research Journal* 49(2) pp. 6-23.

10. PPW

Kloetzel, Melanie (2017b) 'Site, Adapt, Perform: A Practice-as-Research Confrontation with Climate Change'. *Dance Research* 35(1) pp. 111-29.

11. DF

Kloetzel, Melanie (dir.) (2017c) *Room*, Calgary, AB: kloetzel&co. (7.5 minutes)  
<https://vimeo.com/247541260> PW: Room2018

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Finally, an enduring thank you to my remarkable family (parents John and Judy, and siblings Jeff, Steve, Jennifer, and Andrea), my wonderfully patient partner, Andy, and my deeply clever and bright-eyed girls, Day and Camas, for supporting me through these prolonged endeavours.



## I. Introduction

### **Delineating a Field: Promises and Pitfalls**

An introduction for a large research project offers an opportunity to look back and to look forward. A researcher may look back to the various stages or developments of a research journey; yet, fundamentally, an introduction is a forward offering, a preamble for a depth of work to come. For a project such as this, which addresses research that has taken place over a decade (or, in truth, *decades* as an artistic investigation), the weight on the ‘looking back’ feels not only predominant, but potentially overwhelming, far surpassing any effort made to ‘look forward’. However, this attempt to ‘introduce’ a project that seems historical in nature also affords a different prospect, a chance to examine any chain reactions or circulations of critical analyses that have resulted from an initial spark. In this way, this supporting statement functions as an opening, a place to assess a field, both retrospectively and presently, and to chart some potential paths ahead.

But what has happened in this last sentence? Were we not just speaking of time, of the temporal nature of such research? How is it that spatial metaphors of ‘place’, ‘field’, and ‘path’ could sneak so readily into our temporal discussion?

Indeed, this imposition of space into our time-based discourse is, to be pertinent. For we cannot maintain a restricted focus on the temporal when we are plunging into the topic of site and site-based art. Further, if we are to discuss defining or demarcating a ‘field’, namely site dance, we must embrace the spatial metaphor as essential to our analysis. In other words, space, site, and other such terminology must take their ‘place’ at the epicenter of our discussion. Yet, in this move toward the spatial, we must also maintain a certain suspicion. As geographers have observed, beginning in the 1980s and continuing into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, ‘spatial metaphors are in

vogue' (Pile and Thrift, 1995: xii). Stephen Pile and Nigel Thrift examined this interest in spatial metaphors in their anthology *Mapping the Subject* focusing in particular on the usefulness of such metaphors for feminist and postcolonial efforts; as they noted at the time, spatial metaphors allowed scholars to establish new sites of action for disempowered and also spatially restricted subjects (18). Yet, Pile and Thrift also found such metaphors in danger of being coopted, with modernist assumptions around speed, flow, and the uniformity of space being handily reasserted (23-4). As they describe it,

...much of the writing employing spatial figures...neglects the crucial importance of different *places* – performed spaces in which psychical and social boundaries are only too clear, in which resources are clearly available to some and not others, in which physical force makes contact.... In other words, in the process of metaphorisation ground is lost. (1995: 340)

As a scholar writing about site art, I empathize with Pile and Thrift's concerns. Each site is not only *space*; it is an individual *place* with particular markers of power, culture, knowledge, story, aesthetics, and so forth inscribed thereon. In other words, it is the *differences* between places, which interestingly they call 'performed spaces', that can hold spatial metaphors in check, controlling for their indiscriminate application or use.

Indeed, it was this initial (and abiding) interest in *individual* places that helped set me on the research path that I describe in this supporting statement. Drawn to this interest by way of multiple creative processes (both my own and others) to make site-specific dance works, I became fascinated by what particular places could bring to a

creative process, as well as, potentially, what a creative process might bring to a place. Yet, when I began to write about these processes (and these possibly dual vectors of influence), I found myself diving into an arena that had had minimal treatment in scholarly texts. I found many publications on site-specific visual art and a growing discourse on site-specific performance. But such scholarship rarely included discussion of site-based dance or choreography. Further, the moving and sensate body, while implied in site-based performance dialogues, did not seem to figure as a key part of the discussion, either in terms of the creative practice or for knowledge generation.

Thus, I found myself in an ‘open field’. Not ‘open’ in the colonialist sense that it was empty and waiting for hegemonic and masculinist control, a frontier that demands domination (Nash, 1993). Such a ‘field’ is precisely an example of the treachery of spatial metaphors and how they can be reinstated through scholarly discourse, a scenario that Pierre Bourdieu outlines quite clearly in his commentary regarding social spaces, the construction of fields, and the relationship between field, habitus, and cultural capital (1993). No, it was not such an ‘open field’ and I was (perhaps unconsciously then and more consciously in retrospect) aware that I did not want to begin from such an imposition. Due to my work with other choreographers as well as my own cautious steps into the ‘field’, I knew that many remarkable artists (mostly women) had been constituting the genre for years, making artwork that questioned, molded, altered, inscribed, or even reflexively analyzed it. These artists – Anna Halprin, Meredith Monk, Ann Carlson, Joanna Haigood, and the X6 collective, to name a few – had been probing the possibilities of leaving the studio and the stage for decades, considering how and what and in what ways a dancing body could enact physical exchanges with individual places.

In other words, I came to the ‘field’ not with a view to stake a claim, or to position myself as author(itative). Rather I came with admiration for the artists that came before me as well as with a level of ingenuousness around the project; I knew full well my neophyte status and was ready to learn from experts well-established in the genre. What’s more, as an artist myself (a position that is often overlooked or spoken *for* in North America where practice-as-research methodologies were/are not prevalent), I was determined that the artist experts would ‘have the first word’, so to speak. It was my good fortune at the time to meet another acolyte, a person as invested as I in this new adventure to explore site-based dance via the choreographers themselves, Carolyn Pavlik. Thus, in 2005, Pavlik and I embarked on a three-year journey to interview a group of American site choreographers, as well as to collect, edit, and/or assist in the writing of essays by these same artists that addressed what each artist saw as critical to the creative process and performance of site-based dance.

After going through this lengthy interview process and then editing the interviews and the essays (work which both Pavlik and I jointly undertook), it was time to consider and then craft the frame for the text. Pavlik and I divided this framing based on interest and perceived proficiencies; I functioned as author of the introduction and four section prologues, while she oversaw the comprehensive bibliography and numerous photo permissions. Due to the fact *Site Dance: Choreographers and the Lure of Alternative Spaces* (Kloetzel & Pavlik, 2009) would be the first collection to address the ‘field’, thereby acting as a very material marker to define it in the future, the writing of the introduction was (I was vaguely aware) a profound task. Thus, I endeavoured to compose, 1) a basic profile of the site choreographer, 2) a cursory but hopefully sufficient history of site-specific dance in the United States, and 3) a breakdown of key terminology in the field with a nod to

the strides being made in site-based visual arts and performance. As part of this introduction, I also submitted a hypothesis for the volume, namely that what unites site choreographers and, by implication, the field of site dance, is the site choreographer's interest in 'attending to place' (2009: 6-7).

At the time, I was hopeful that such an introduction would help not only to frame the field, but also to highlight some future directions for the genre's scholarly discourse. For me, one of these key directions – as emphasized through my 'attending to place' hypothesis – centered around observation, care, and conservation, a path that will be made more evident throughout this thesis. However, this effort to 'frame and name' the field did not sit easily with all site dance practitioners. As Meredith Monk chided me when I interviewed her, 'when you can name something, the mystery of existence and direct experience is gone' (2009: 39). Now, a decade later (and hopefully wiser), I feel my face reddening at my efforts. At the time, I had only minimally engaged with issues of mobility, globalization, or various theories of space and place that are critical elements in the field; I had not yet probed the limits of language, concepts of ecology, or the spatial implications of precarity. The depth of these ideas had not informed my youthful proclamations.

Yet, oddly, a decade later, I am amazed to find not only that the volume continues to offer an important source for the field, but that some of that stitching around 'attending to place' still holds. Yes, the stitching has frayed in certain areas, a level of rethreading has taken place in others, and the thread's limitations have become more apparent (for one, due to the fact that it was conceived solely via an American context). But I have also found, through subsequent writings by myself and others, that the concept of site choreography as a way to 'attend to' (as in pay attention to) individual sites as well as a method for 'tending to' (as in caring for)

specific places (2009: 6-7) through a ‘processual model’ (Gottschild, 1997: 168) still stands. Indeed, it is around this critical concept, as well as the ethical dimensions of it, that the current thesis coalesces.

Thus, in the following supporting statement for the PhD by published works, I will enact a tracing of the concept of ‘attending to place’ as it has appeared in a collection of my publications and dance films between 2007-17. I will reveal the fraying and the rethreading that this concept has endured over that time, and I will assess the strength of the concept a decade after its insertion into the circulatory system that is site art scholarship, pedagogy, and creation. Much of this can be witnessed in the various pieces of the thesis itself, i.e. in the attached publications and creative works that make up the thesis; I will not reiterate here the depth of these arguments as they can be read in detail later. Yet, I will undertake this tracing as overtly as possible, in order to discern how various scholarly theories, practical research, and disciplinary codes have come to inform, redirect, and question the trace over time.

As a key part of this tracing I will stress how the field of site dance has proven both wider and more fluid than I had originally perceived. Indeed, as I delved into site-based dance practice, I discovered another dance genre that not only intersected with, but seemed to inhabit the site-based terrain, i.e. dance film. As such, I began to probe this virtual form, discovering that the dance film genre has not only drawn heavily from site-based terminology, tactics, and objectives, but has also been designated by screendance scholars *as* a site-based practice, a categorization suggested by Douglas Rosenberg (2000) and reinforced by Katrina McPherson (2006). Thus, in the publications and films collected here, I will address the conception of ‘attending to place’ in not one, but two genres: site-based live dance

performance and dance film. As I navigate between these two genres in the various parts that constitute this thesis (in particular in items 3-6, 8, and 11 of the thesis), I emphasize how the genres come together in critical and complementary ways, revealing a porosity between them that began with that initial historical step in both genres to ‘reframe’ the dancing body. In short, it is the examination of both live site performances and dance films in terms of framing, and in terms of lexicon, intent, and creation strategies, that enables me to consider how *multiple* dance genres have made and continue to make specific strides to address the dancing body’s relation to populations and places outside of the cloistered environments of the theatre and studio space. I would argue that it is through such an expanded and critical reframing of the site-based dance genre that a larger analysis of sited dance practices, whether live or filmic, can be made: their inception, endurance, diversity, and lasting value.

Finally, and of critical import, I come to such a tracing from my position as an artist, as a person sustained by, invested in, and informed by the creative process. As stated previously, I embarked on the journey to create *Site Dance* with a deep respect for the creative process and how it can inform the production of theory. As an artist who had begun to perform site works almost from the inception of my professional dance career (at the tender age of 23), I have been fortunate to be involved in site-based creation processes with well-known site artists Leah Stein, Ann Carlson, and Phil Smith; I have also pursued many site-based processes of my own – from 1998 to present – and collectively these processes have driven me to analyze them more intently. These processes made me want to understand not only why site choreographers pursued such challenging endeavours, but also what guided their particular choreographic choices, inspirations, and strategies of creation. Thus, when I began to write about these efforts, I felt this emphasis on process was not a theoretical

gambit, but rather, fundamentally, practical; in other words, I believed one of the critical elements to share with others had to do with the tricks of the trade. Since then, my own theoretical journey has matured and expanded, greatly informing and informed by the various research activities in which I have engaged, whether live site performance, site-based workshops, or dance film. Accordingly, in this supporting statement as well as in the collected publications, the focus on creation processes and strategies stands out as significant, consistently informing my scholarship (and, naturally, my artistic research) in a pivotal way.

In sum, this supporting statement offers a way to witness two key markers in my publication and creation history, that is, 1) the role of the choreographic act and specific choreographic strategies in ‘attending to place’, and 2) the larger dimensions (ethical, sociopolitical, cultural, environmental) of such acts over the past fifty years. For, it is at the intersection of these two markers that this thesis stands: *utilizing the rubric of attending to place to chart and assess the site-based choreographic act from the mid-twentieth century to present.*

Yet, even as I write these words, I am aware that an added move is taking place, a manoeuvre that throws a wrench into a simple trace. For, how has ‘assessment’ crept into the equation and what does such a manoeuvre imply?

Indeed, I believe it is this final move toward evaluation and assessment, particularly as framed by larger environmental concerns, that allows this thesis to achieve the ‘looking forward’ discussed at the start of this supporting statement. In other words, by *assessing* strategic choices being made within the field to attend to place, I have anchored this discussion in the larger frame of *social and environmental justice* that is becoming a cornerstone of today’s discourse. Three key aspects of this



discourse pose particular interest for the publications and creative works assembled here.

First is the focus on *ethics* as an important lens. Due to its encompassing of issues of habit, custom, normative standards, and value systems, ethics offers a helpful framework through which to consider cultural practices and their effect on humans, other species, and the environment. I believe that such a lens is critical for examining site-based choreographic acts over the past fifty years, but even more so as we consider future justice-oriented trajectories within site dance practice.

A second key concern revolves around notions of *agency* and *dehierarchization*. As a concept, agency has grown in import within the dance studies realm (as I explain in detail in section III), in part due to the relative marginalization of dance both as a cultural practice and academic discipline and the concomitant effort to address such marginalization. Thus, as a topic, agency continues to populate dance publications, this one included. Yet, importantly for this thesis, the drive towards agency within dance studies here meets with a similar dehierarchizing operation inspired in part by the area of environmental ethics, which over the past fifty years has pondered how to destabilize existing epistemological and ontological hierarchies to extend agency beyond the human frame to include other species, other objects, even ecosystems and the planet at large.<sup>1</sup>

Thus, I come to a third key concern that helps to guide this thesis, the *Anthropocene*. All publications examined here developed during a time when increasing consideration was being given to humanity's destructive impact on the planet. Indeed, this impact has become so extreme that geologists have coined a new

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<sup>1</sup> This drive to revamp existing epistemes and ontologies, which has been actively pursued in the field of environmental ethics since the time of deep ecologists like Arne Næss (1973, 1986), has more recently been popularized through new materialism (referenced later in this document); it is also evident in the drive to upend hegemonic hierarchies in the environmental and social justice movements.

term to address this era, the ‘Anthropocene’. In 2000, Paul Crutzen and Eugene Stoermer first suggested this term to carve out a new geological era, one that was defined by human impact on the planet (Crutzen, 2002). While this term has not received its official stamp of approval from the powers that be (i.e. neither the International Union of Geological Sciences nor the International Commission on Stratigraphy has officially approved the geological subdivision, although their sanctioned working groups have), the detrimental impact of human activity on the planet has become incontrovertible and, since 2013, scholars, scientists, and cultural analysts have begun to apply the term in earnest as a form of shorthand for citing the human damage to the planet.<sup>2</sup> I too have found the term inherently useful as a method for stressing the need to examine our cultural practices in light of environmental impact and, thus, although you will not find this term in any but the final portions of this thesis, I readily claim the Anthropocenic lens as one that frames the research collected here.

Joining these concerns, I outline *three critical prospects* with regard to site dance practice and performance: first, I submit that site dance processes over the past fifty years have demonstrated the potential to query and even destabilize hegemonic terminology, cultural values, and customary physical practices; second, I propose that specific dehierarchizing strategies employed within the form offer a route for expanding concepts of agency, in particular, to diverse populations and varied sites; and, finally, I illustrate how analyses of assorted site dance practices reveal the different capacities of such practices to probe, reinforce, or subvert specific ideological precepts including those associated with neoliberalism, globalized

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<sup>2</sup> A quick search on a library website with pre- and post-2013 as a date delivers radically different numbers on numbers of articles published that cite the term ‘Anthropocene’ (i.e. fewer than 3,000 between 2002-2012 and more than 11,000 between 2013-present). [https://ucalgary.summon.serialssolutions.com/advanced#!/search?ho=t&rf=PublicationDate,2002-01-01:2012-12-31&l=en&q=\(anthropocene\)](https://ucalgary.summon.serialssolutions.com/advanced#!/search?ho=t&rf=PublicationDate,2002-01-01:2012-12-31&l=en&q=(anthropocene)) (Accessed 7/2/18).

political economies, and environmental ethics. Consolidating these prospects, I contend that site dance currently stands at a tenuous crossroads, with specific site-based practices plotting quite different paths – constructive or destructive – in a world dominated by cultural, economic, and ecological precarity.

In sum, **I argue that the *considered* site-based choreographic act operates to expose and potentially destabilize hegemonic and hierarchical value systems and ideologies, generating new ethical and agential avenues in a neoliberal, globalized, and Anthropocenic age.** Yet, I also stress that it is only through judicious scrutiny of various site dance practices, in particular these practices' effect on the human-environment relationship, that we can determine a helpful and hopeful site dance praxis for a post-human world.

Thus, in meshing the choreographic act, ethical and ideological evaluation, concepts of agency, space, and place, and the Anthropocene, this supporting statement not only looks back, inspecting the published and creative works for critical moves around 'attending to place', but it also looks forward, assessing how site-based dance practices as well as the discourse around them have implications for a present and future that is growing increasingly dire on the environmental front. Through such an examination, I illuminate particular trends and traps prevalent within the field of site dance, underscoring the need for an ethics of practice as we dive headlong into the hazards of the twenty-first century.

## II. Roadmap for a Thesis

As stated initially, this supporting statement functions as a guide for traversing the various parts of a thesis written or created over an elongated time span, more specifically between 2007-17. To provide a sense of these parts, I will offer a brief summary of each of the thesis ‘chapters’ below – published works and dance films – to highlight how these parts contribute to the overarching argument addressing site-based dance practice and its ability to attend to place in an era of neoliberal globalization and environmental upheaval.

### a. *Site Dance: Choreographers and the Lure of Alternative Spaces*

The thesis commences with the introductory chapter and four section prologues of the volume *Site Dance: Choreographers and the Lure of Alternative Spaces* (Kloetzel & Pavlik, 2009).<sup>3</sup> Altogether, these segments provide a fundamental frame through which to embark on an examination of the work of site-based dance practitioners. In the introduction, I delineate site dance as an outgrowth of the Happenings and Judson Dance Theater, and, markedly, as an offshoot of experiments by Merce Cunningham and Anna Halprin. I trace key developments by Lucinda Childs, Meredith Monk, Trisha Brown, and others to help establish the field in the 1960s and early 1970s, and I emphasize the import of organizations such as Creative Time and Dancing in the Streets in the growth and development of the genre. The text’s introduction and prologues also provide a profile of the site choreographer, a brief history of the genre, a breakdown of the key terms and questions around ‘site-specificity’ for the field, a hypothesis underscoring the site choreographer’s interest in ‘attending to place’, and an argument for four secondary themes that serve to define

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<sup>3</sup> Research for *Site Dance* was conducted between 2005-2007 while I was in the United States (at Idaho State University) and then in Canada from 2007-2009 (at University of Calgary).

the field and its principal aims and ambitions. These four themes – excavating place, sensing site, revering beauty, and accessing community – underscore site dance’s investment in historical, phenomenological, aesthetic, and communitarian priorities when creating site-based art.

The prologues and introduction serve to contextualize the meat of the anthology, the work of the site choreographers themselves. Proposed as a critical primary source for the field, *Site Dance* provides a substantial compilation of hands-on knowledge. Choreographers discuss the different types of site performances they have created, how their site-based research processes commence and what triggers such processes, the steps taken to make site work, the issues that site work addresses, and the audience responses they have received. They note their sincere satisfaction in the process, the community interactions such processes spark, the onerousness of site projects, and their varied understandings of what ‘site-specificity’ might entail. Assembling and making use of these generous insights and intent on emphasizing the role of the site choreographer in defining the field of site dance, my own written portions portray site choreographers as artists who ‘sensitize us to local contexts’ (2009: 3) and who ‘provide a performance translation of place that heightens our awareness of our surroundings’ (2).

With respect to this thesis, the included segments of *Site Dance* perform four critical operations. First, these segments delineate a practical scaffolding that allows for a fuller examination and understanding of the site-based choreographic act and its attendant creation strategies. Second, they offer the premise and rationale for ‘attending to place’ as a key concern within the genre of site dance, a concern that alludes to the ethical imperatives at the genre’s core. Third, the segments introduce the four secondary themes that function as a practical guide for future charting and

analyzing of the most prevalent strategies and objectives in the genre. And, finally, it must be emphasized that the foundational research conducted for *Site Dance*, both for the introduction and prologues as well as for the interviews and edited essays in the volume, has facilitated, fostered, and incited all subsequent portions of this thesis in a substantial way.

b. ‘Site-Specific Dance in a Corporate Landscape: Space, Place, and Non-Place’<sup>4</sup>

Moving to a deeper consideration of the links between site art and human geography, the second chapter, ‘Site-Specific Dance in a Corporate Landscape: Space, Place, and Non-Place’ (Kloetzel, 2010, 2015a<sup>5</sup>), delves into the nuances of individual terms that have become fundamental in the site dance field. Specifically, I examine how geographers have defined *place* and *space* since the 1970s, and I consider how site-specific scholars have taken up these definitions for their own purposes. Noting how perceptions of space and place have shifted over time, I propose that bringing site-specific dance into the discussion triggers another shift as we are forced to reassess our assumptions about terminology from the perspective of the body. Through a practice-as-research analysis of the creative process for my site-specific dance film *The Sanitastics* (2011), I contemplate site-specific dance’s ability to accentuate three conceptions of site – space, place, and Marc Augé’s (1995) ‘non-place’.

To facilitate such an examination, the article considers the impact of particular choreographic strategies on Calgary, Canada’s Plus 15 or Skyway system, a system of bridges and pedestrian pathways suspended fifteen feet above the street that runs

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<sup>4</sup> Other than the film, *Icarus Fried* (2007), all subsequent portions of this thesis and the research conducted for them occurred since 2007 during my tenure at the University of Calgary and while on sabbatical in the United Kingdom in 2014-15.

<sup>5</sup> The later 2015a publication is a developed reprint of the original 2010 article published in *New Theatre Quarterly*.

throughout the downtown core. In examining the effect of such strategies on this apparent non-place, I underscore how certain strategies deployed in site dance practice, ones that encourage a) subverting restrictive rules, b) experimenting with fantastical roles, and c) accessing narrative plotlines that satirize a site's performance of itself, can query or even interfere with the corporatized imposition of the non-place into urban areas. In presenting this practice-as-research exploration, I stress how site-based creation processes can foreground multiple conceptions of site and, in so doing, probe the choices we make with regard to urban planning and, more generally, the human-environment relationship.

c. *The Sanitastics*

Creative support material for 'Site-Specific Dance in a Corporate Landscape', as well as for the two articles that follow, exists in the 8.5-minute film, *The Sanitastics*, released in 2011.<sup>6</sup> This film – whose process included the 2008 research and on-site filming, a live performance of the work in 2009, and a very lengthy post-production phase (all of which impacted my 2010 analysis of the process) – follows four surveillance superheroes as they attempt to eradicate contamination (chiefly embodied in the 'organic being' of a flower creature) that has been mysteriously introduced into the Calgary Skyway system. Using powerful, angular, travelling movement, cleaning metaphors, and film techniques that vault the plot into the surreal, the film ironically skewers the underbelly of Skyway culture (the oil

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<sup>6</sup> *The Sanitastics* was selected by jury for presentation at the Third Coast Dance Film Festival in Houston, TX (2011) and the Third Coast Dance Film Festival on Tour in Slippery Rock, PA (2012), the Sans Souci Festival of Dance Cinema in Boulder, CO (2011) and the Sans Souci Festival of Dance Cinema on Tour in San Marco, TX (2013), the 2011 Oklahoma Dance Film Festival (Tulsa, OK), the 2011 Festival Internacional de Videodanza de Uruguay, Sao Carlos Videodance Festival in Brazil (2011), and for a three-month run at the EPCOR Centre in Calgary, AB through the Gallery of Alberta Media Artists in 2011-12. The film was also selected as part of TenduTV's 'Essential Dance Films' series in 2012.

corporations that dominate the municipalities' skyscrapers) by emphasizing the extravagant disinfecting feats and authoritative regulations that consistently transpire within the system.

For this film, the site itself – distinguished for the enforced travel and consumerism that exemplify the system as well as for the 'in-limbo' positioning of the bridges – seemed to lure me into toying with concepts of identity as portrayed in Augé's (1995) analysis of the 'non-place'. Instead of a more 'conventional' role-playing that may have felt necessary at a historical or many-layered site, the non-place implied by the Skyway left me free to revel in futuristic possibilities for both the choreography and concept. Like our culture's current investment in sci-fi movies and games – an endless list of comic book characters or figures from another world all pieced together with remarkable special effects – I too tried to leap into the imaginary to create the sci-fi site-specific spoof, *The Sanitastics*. Yet, even as this process and the site suggested such a tack, the realities (and headaches) involved in being on site gave me the chance to examine how even the most dedicated and unyielding 'non-place' can momentarily assume characteristics of 'place' and/or 'space'. Of particular import for this thesis, *The Sanitastics'* production process and resulting film, 1) facilitated my efforts to unpack geographical terminology, and 2) provided me with an introductory practice-as-research mechanism for addressing the gaps in the site dance 'frame' I had created in *Site Dance*.

d. 'Bodies in Place: Location as Collaborator in Dance Film'

In creating and analyzing *The Sanitastics*, I found myself considering more deeply the overlaps between the fields of site dance and dance film. Venturing into this new territory, Douglas Rosenberg's early comment that '[v]ideo dance is a site-



specific practice, its site being video itself' (2000: 275) brought me up short.

Obviously, the lexicon being employed in the site genre was finding application in other areas of dance. But did the overlap between these two genres go beyond lexicon and, if so, would an expansion of frame to include dance film be beneficial for a more thorough analysis of site dance? These questions led me to scrutinize more emphatically how dance film, like site-specific dance, has executed a comparable 'reframing' of the body, and what the impact of this reframing might be on the human-place relationship.

Thus, in my fourth chapter, 'Bodies in Place: Location as Collaborator in Dance Film' (Kloetzel, 2015b), I offer a concise analysis of dance film history, specific screendance offerings, and the filmic and narrative strategies used in dance films – strategies I tag as 'techniques of integration' – to stress the significant role that location plays in dance film. Fundamental to my argument is that 'techniques of integration' in both production and post-production stages of dance film creation – including such camera work as canted angle shots, revolving shots, close-ups, and wide angle shots, as well as the embrace of narrativity, absence of spoken text, and extreme temporal and spatial experimentation in the editing process – act to dehierarchize the roles of dancer and place, altering normative conceptions of both humans and place.

In short, the aim of these techniques to move beyond displaying place as merely a beautiful backdrop for a dance film, serves to underscore place as a partner with whom humans, via their dancing bodies, can create meaningful exchanges. Building on these assertions, I also explore how perceptions of narrativity in the film genre as a whole, in concert with the research being conducted around mirror neurons and kinesthetic empathy, have allowed for an effective communication of this

dehierarchized human-place relationship across the screen divide. In sum, I argue that the integrative strategies used in the dance film genre have rendered place as not only an essential marker for comprehension of dance films, but a collaborator and protagonist alongside and in dialogue with a responsive, phenomenal body.

e. *Icarus Fried*

To support my assertions in ‘Bodies in Place’, I drew from my experiences in making *The Sanitastics* as well as an earlier 3.5-minute dance film, *Icarus Fried* (2007).<sup>7</sup> The creation journey for *Icarus Fried*, which resulted in both film and site-influenced stage presentations, was instrumental in the development of my theories around ‘techniques of integration’. Through a collaborative process that involved filmmaker Jeff Curtis, clarinetist John Masserini, Joan Tower’s neo-classical composition ‘Wings’, myself as dancer/choreographer/director, and – of utmost import – the site of an abandoned egg farm in Idaho, I began to discover how a site – which was not at the outset highly considered in the creative process – could actively thrust itself not only into the camera’s frame but into the thematic interstices of a work. This idea, that a site could ‘talk back’ (even forcefully) to a work that was, for the most part, superimposed upon it, is one that grew and intensified as we continued to work on site and discover the substantive changes that the site was enacting upon the work.

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<sup>7</sup> The film *Icarus Fried* has been selected for presentation by jury at the 2007 Danca em Foco, International Festival of Video and Dance (Rio de Janeiro, Brazil), 2007 DANSCAMDANSE International Dance Film Festival (Ghent, Belgium), 2008 Northwest New Works PodFest (Seattle, WA), and the 2007 Sans Souci Festival of Dance Cinema (Boulder, CO), where it was chosen as a Best of Fest. It was also screened at the following live performance events: iMove Company performance in Pocatello, ID (2007), the evening length performance *Icarus Fried* in Calgary, AB (2009), the evening length performance *Icarus Refried* in Flagstaff, AZ (2011), and the Spring Dance Festival in Flagstaff, AZ (2017).

In sum, as we traversed through the production and post-production stages for this film, we found that a piece that initially juxtaposed soaring virtuosic musical motifs against desperate physical suspensions, impatient waiting, and seemingly tangential bird-like gestures, became a much deeper (and more darkly humorous) investigation into concepts of enforced reproductive roles and biological destiny as we began to film on site (in a blizzard). The post-production editing process, which allowed us to marry the integrative camera work – long shots, close-ups, and rapidly changing or canted angles – with images of how the farm may have appeared when it included a living animal population, provided critical insight into the ways a site could propel its way into the spotlight, functioning as a dialogic partner to our efforts.

f. ‘Location, Location, Location: Dance Film and Site-Specific Dance’

To complete this trilogy of publications that address the intersection of site dance and screendance, I perform a more detailed consideration of the connections between the genres in ‘Location, Location, Location: Dance Film and Site-Specific Dance’ (Kloetzel, 2016). After offering an analysis of the parallel objectives and early works in the two genres, I underline how both forms embraced alternative contexts and altered perspectives on the body to effectively democratize Western dance practice. This assertion regarding democratization builds on my argument regarding the significance of place in ‘Bodies in Place’; more specifically, it rests on my tracing of the dehierarchization of people and place that occurs in both genres. Such dehierarchization, I argue, comes about through particular choreographic and filmic strategies that serve to query and transform assumptions around place, bodies, and performance. These strategies – including the use of unusual pairings between performers and place, the aforementioned ‘techniques of integration’ (such as the

visual merging of performer and place or extreme long shots and close-ups that toy with depth of field), the use of movement at odds with conventional perceptions of a site, experimentation with scale, time, and distance, the use of massive numbers of dancers, and/or temporal collisions between past and present – upend assumptions regarding who and/or what is performing as well as how humans should or could act in particular sites.

As I highlight the subversion at play in these strategies, a subversion that, I argue, begins the process of democratization, I go further, underscoring how the other choices in the creative process – to perform in accessible contexts, pursue audience participation in the work, and/or include untrained movers as a work’s main performers – can serve to more fully realize the democratization of both forms. While I stress that such a democratization is not always the end result, with certain dance filmmakers embracing, for example, the virtuosity, spectacle, and photo-shopped bodies that exist in excess in popular media, I demonstrate how specified choreographic strategies pursued in both dance film and site dance genres can connect populations to one another and to the environments in which they reside.

g. ‘Have Site, Will Travel – Container Architecture and Site-Specific Performance’

Moving back into the arena of live site-based performance, in a chapter titled ‘Have Site, Will Travel – Container Architecture and Site-Specific Performance’ (Kloetzel, 2013), I begin to delve directly into the ‘mobility turn’ as discussed in the social sciences and as applied to site performance by Fiona Wilkie (2012, 2015). Through scrutinizing an event created in, on, and around a collection of ISO shipping containers retrofitted for performance, I query how the phenomenon of mobile architecture may intersect with site-based dance practices. Examining the ISO

container as an icon of globalization, I link this structure to the recent focus on mobility in sociology and performance studies, highlighting how examining such a structure through dance, a medium whose premise rests on mobility, offers a new critical perspective to this growing discourse.

After emphasizing the qualms around mobility that exist in the site-specific realm, I introduce site-based choreographies by Eiko & Koma, Ann Carlson, and myself as examples that begin to embrace mobility, making them ripe for consideration under the ‘new mobilities paradigm’ (Sheller & Urry, 2006). Then, through a brief critical reading of my own and a selection of other dance works shown in ISO containers at the 2012 Fluid Festival in Calgary, Canada, I observe that site-based performance in this mobile context operated ‘at a loss’; I borrow here from economic language to underline the *inability* of most works presented in this venue to wrestle with the economic overtones implied by the ISO container. Few of the works showcased seemed able to address the deep links between portable architecture, mobility, international trade, and globalization, a situation that gives pause to those analyzing such works under the auspices of site-specific performance. However, in the end, I speculate that further creative undertakings in shipping containers and other portable structures could be fruitful or even essential as globalization’s investment in transport, trade, flexibility, and efficiency dominate the planet.

#### h. *The Dwindling Dispute*

After multiple live performances of the site-adaptive work *Dwindling Dispute* *TKO* as discussed in ‘Have Site, Will Travel’, I pursued a filmic rendering of the piece. Indeed, it was the live performance version of this work (that prompted the film) that also initiated my leap into the realm of ‘site-adaptive dance’ (i.e. dance that

is created for presentation in a series of geographically discrete, non-theatre sites), and the examination of such site-adaptive work acts as the basis for all remaining chapters of this thesis. Of particular import for this thesis, the 5.5-minute film, *The Dwindling Dispute* (2015c)<sup>8</sup>, gave me my first chance to examine how (or if) a site-adaptive work, when going through the film production process, could have a similar relation to site as that experienced in my earlier site-specific endeavours.

*The Dwindling Dispute* is structured as a comedic and interactive boxing match of manners employing an absurdist script and ostentatious costuming. Drawing from the Red Queen/White Queen dialogue from Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking Glass*, the work is crafted for a square of brilliant green artificial turf, attempting purposely to conjure amusing recollections of regal ribbon-cuttings, sporting events, and dog lawns. In the film version of this work, I was able to experiment with the scale and details of the Red and White Queens' interactions with the doll (Alice) in humorous ways by employing certain 'techniques of integration' – extreme close-ups, wildly moving cameras, and canted angles. In doing so, I was initially disappointed to find that while the portable stage for the work (the artificial turf) did secure a highlighted role in the film, the larger site had a more subordinate role, similar to my experiences of performing the live site-adaptive work in the shipping containers. Yet, strangely, as the production process progressed, with us returning to the site multiple times over the period of a year, the site itself seemed to mimic the absurdist and eerie instability in the film with the surrounding buildings seen in the camera frame literally being torn down as the historical East Village of Calgary underwent an enforced gentrification process. In other words, rather than the

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<sup>8</sup> *The Dwindling Dispute* was selected for presentation by jury at the ADF International Screendance Festival in Durham, NC (2015), the dance: made in canada Festival in Toronto, ON (2015), IDST in Edinburgh, UK (2015), the POZA Project Dance on Film Night in Glasgow, UK (2016), the Calgary Underground Film Festival Dance Film Night in Calgary, AB (2016), and for a three month continuous run at Arts Commons in Calgary, AB (2018).

site pressing itself upon the film as occurred in *Icarus Fried* or engaging in a productive and equal dialogue as was the reality for *The Sanitastics*, the artistic process itself seemed to function as a portent of the site's dissolution.

In short, through this mimicry, *The Dwindling Dispute* offered another opportunity to witness the volatility of 'space' and 'place' as well as question the principles that reside therein. While the romance of space, of 'unfixing' a site and providing a liberating route 'away' from place, seems provocative, when such a trajectory crosses paths with the neoliberal precepts of gentrification at work on a marginalized and crumbling historic site, the 'space' at play is merely, as Augé (1995: 30-38) notes, a rendering of supermodernity's biases. Although *The Dwindling Dispute* does not directly shine a light on the fluctuations occurring on-site, the growing absurdism in the film underscores the instability in concepts of space/place as manifested in the site. As highly contrasting images of performers, props, portable site, and material site collide with one another and work to destabilize all involved via various techniques of integration, questions around mobility readily surface. Viewers are left considering neoliberalism's love affair with mobility – its gendered impacts, its effects on and erasure of historic urban areas, and its penchant for both bullying and horror-film-like narratives (not to mention its potential treatment of sites as resources - a problematic vector within the film's own process, I would argue). In sum, the creative process for *The Dwindling Dispute* as well as the discovery of these impacts, which are teased out either directly or obliquely in the film, helped to facilitate and shape my subsequent analysis of site-adaptive performance outlined in the final chapters of this thesis.

i. 'Site and Re-Site: Early Efforts to Serialize Site Dance'

Continuing my critical focus on mobility in the site dance field, in ‘Site and Re-Site: Early Efforts to Serialize Site Dance’ (Kloetzel, 2017a), I endeavour to look more closely at the historical roots of ‘site-adaptive’ dance performance. In particular, I examine the move to ‘serialize’ site-based performance, i.e. tour a work to a series of distinct sites, underlining the changes that occur when we transform from valuing place as a singularity – an essential premise in many site-specific dance and screendance projects – to embracing the multiplicity of place.

Returning to the mobility discourse as applied to site-specific art and performance by Miwon Kwon (2002), Fiona Wilkie (2012, 2015), and Victoria Hunter (2012), I examine the mobile site works of North American choreographers Ann Carlson, PearsonWidrig DanceTheater, Eiko & Koma, and Stephan Koplowitz as exemplary of early attempts to take site dance on tour. Then, stressing the import of *adaptation* in the serializing process, I detail the strategies needed to enact such mobility, including a keen focus on the possibilities of adaptation within a performance score, an attention to common attributes between spaces, and/or the use of a portable stage. Finally, I argue that employing the lenses of adaptation and serialization helps not only to situate the site-adaptive practice within the larger discourse of globalization, but also serves to activate larger cross-disciplinary dialogues between site dance and the areas of disability studies, geography, adaptive studies, and economics.

j. ‘Site, Adapt, Perform: A Practice-as-Research Confrontation with Climate Change’

I build on this examination of site-adaptive performance by unpacking the deeper implications for embracing ‘adaptation’ as a strategy in ‘Site, Adapt, Perform:



A Practice-as-Research Confrontation with Climate Change’ (Kloetzel, 2017b). In particular, through this chapter, I employ practice-as-research methodologies as a way both to dissect and to assess more critically the increasingly popular serialized form.

In analyzing my process for the live site-adaptive work *Room* (2014-17), I describe and scrutinize various creative strategies that I either borrow, such as the use of the portable stage and adaptable scoring as described in ‘Site and Re-Site’, or develop through *Room*’s creative process, such as the use of ‘generic phrasing’, repeated but altered surface-to-surface interactions between body and place, and a slippery monologue – all of which serve to draw attention to the similarities and differences between places. This investigation, which frankly unearthed more failures than successes, served to highlight the crumbling foundation of the adaptation discourse, a discourse that relies on problematic ‘survival-of-the-fittest’ assumptions.

In sum, by combining findings from the phenomenological explorations of my dancing body as well as from cultural analyses of the climate change debate by Dipesh Chakrabarty (2009), Claire Colebrook (2011, 2012), and Bruno Latour (2014), I argue that only by fundamentally shifting the direction of the adaptation discourse – on scales from global to the personal – will we be able to build a site-adaptive performance strategy that resists the neoliberal drive towards ecological and economic precarity.

k. *Room*

My final contribution to this thesis is the 7.5-minute film *Room* (2017)<sup>9</sup>, filmed on site at various locations in Glasgow, UK and Calgary, Canada. Discussed at

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<sup>9</sup> *Room* was released in Fall 2017 and is currently being reviewed for screendance festivals internationally. The film was presented as part of an evening of live performance at Mile Zero Dance in Edmonton, AB in October 2017. The live performance of *Room* has been presented at Swarthmore College in Swarthmore, PA, at Mile Zero Dance in Edmonton, AB, at the IF Series at Southside

length in ‘Site, Adapt, Perform’ (2017b), the practice-based research conducted for both live and film versions of *Room* was key to my understanding of the connections between site-adaptive performance, neoliberalism, and ecological precarity.

Rather than employing the currently popular green screen, *Room* was filmed at multiple sites between 2015-17 and it purposefully utilizes the reality of these many sites to underscore the failures and anxieties associated with environmental adaptation the world over. Through close-ups of physical interactions with a site and quick cuts between sites, the human body figures as both inherently mobile but also fixed in place, i.e. unable to escape the vagaries of environmental transformation. Further, due to the framing tactics employed in the live version of the work – with the structure creating a transparent ‘frame’ for each site in which it is placed – the additional reframing layered onto this by the camera reads as a double entanglement (entrapment) with body, place, and (misguided) adaptive efforts inextricably and disastrously joined. I offer *Room* as a fitting final chapter to this thesis due to its substantial knitting together of practice-based methodologies in live performance and film with the developing theme of ecological precarity in the Anthropocene.

## I. Research questions

The above documents collectively point to a set of research questions that I have developed over the past decade and that now act as the basis for this thesis. These questions include:

- How do conceptualizations of ‘space’ and ‘place’ (including non-place, no-place, any-place, and the like) influence the site performance genre, and how

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Studios in Glasgow, UK, at the University of Glasgow in Glasgow, UK and at The House at University of Plymouth in Plymouth, UK.

do site-based practices in both live and virtual dance mediums inform, question, or reframe these concepts?

- How have and how do cultural practices such as site-based dance and dance film influence, guide, and/or direct human perceptions of, interactions with, and treatment of the environment? What part does a site play in this process, and how can hierarchies and issues of agency for both people and place be examined in site-based dance practices?
- What relationship exists between site-based dance practices and cultural and individual value systems? What specific role do site-based creation and choreographic strategies play in the formulation of such value systems?
- How do the ideologies and systems of neoliberal globalization impact the development and realization of site-based dance practices? Can site dance play a role in reinforcing, altering or subverting such ideologies, and, if so, which site-based practices enact such outcomes?
- In light of Anthropocenic realities that frame contemporary culture, how can site-based dance practices be assessed and evaluated for their impact on the environment itself and on the human-environment relationship? As such practices navigate between the circumstances of environmental transformation and globalized neoliberal agendas, which ones demonstrate potential for shaping both ideologies and practices in a post-human world?
- Finally, what does the research collected here indicate for future trajectories within the site performance field? What challenges and priorities figure prominently for the field, particularly as serialized site performance expands, as new technologies transform the screendance genre, and as pressing cultural and environmental concerns hold sway?

Taken together, these questions constitute a platform for the research conducted here. In the following section, I will delineate the key conceptual underpinnings and methods that guided the development of such questions and offer some guideposts for how such concepts have grounded my investigations in the various publications and creative works assembled here.

### **III. Critical Concepts and Methods: The Roadmap's Scaffolding**

The chapters highlighted above have evolved through dialogue with a set of critical concepts; these concepts stem not only from various academic disciplines – dance studies, performance studies, sociology, and geography, to name a few – but also from exchanges with a diversity of sites and an assortment of site artists and artworks. Below I detail the most significant of these critical concepts, ones that have meaningfully impacted the trajectory of this thesis.

#### **a. Dance and the body in academic discourse**

The published and creative works collected here concentrate on the choreographic act and its consequences. Yet, when writing about dance, this act and its processual steps are often not on immediate display. Instead focus may be placed on the historical or cultural context of a form or a work, the performance as a product, the background of a choreographer, or on larger theoretical insights that may stem from or be linked to the (dancing) body. Indeed, it is through this last option that other fields began intersecting with dance scholarship in the 1980s as more and more scholars began to 'use' the body as a potent object of analysis. However, as Susan Foster bemoaned two decades ago when she witnessed this increasing focus on the body, 'These writings seldom address the body I know; instead, they move quickly past arms, legs, torso, and head on their way to a theoretical agenda that requires something unknowable and or unknown as an initial premise' (1997: 236). Certainly, Foster and other scholars over the past forty or so years have attempted to redress this trend, offering informed analyses that mark, and remark on, the power, presence, significance, and impact of the body and the choreographic act within a variety of

cultures over time and across space; yet the inclination to employ the dancing body as metaphor continues.<sup>10</sup>

On the surface, this ‘resourcist’ penchant, to borrow from Una Chaudhuri (1995) and Laura Levin (2014), that Foster observes is one consequence of analyzing an artistic medium that retains a certain ‘mystery’ in academic circles. After all, how are we to investigate a form that seems to slither, creep, and tiptoe outside and beyond the confines of verbal and written language? As dance scholars such as Foster (1986, 1995) have made clear, discussing dance through the medium of verbal language poses distinct difficulties due to the slippery nature of movement as a language. In other words, while post-structuralists have waxed poetic about the fluid nature of verbal/written signs for decades – beginning with Barthes (1977) and Derrida (1978) – movement semiotics travels much further into the arena of ambiguity, making verbal analysis of dance complicated to say the least. Even decades after Foster’s initial insights, this issue is still vigorously discussed (Brooks and Meglin, 2014). In other words, translating a physicalized process and performance into verbal and written form is neither a simple task nor one that is necessarily pursued by choreographers who may use physical and/or sound- or rhythm-based communication, rather than verbal language, as a main methodology in their creation processes.

This was the situation I faced when attempting to survey and analyze site-specific dance as a form. First, finding evidence of the ‘mysterious’ form was difficult, perhaps in part due to the challenges I have just detailed, but also due to the

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<sup>10</sup> To demonstrate this persistence, over 90,000 entries appear *outside* of the discipline of dance when doing a search on ‘Dancing bodies’ in an average academic library search. <https://ucalgary.summon.serialssolutions.com/search?q=dancing+bodies#!/search?ho=t&fvf=Discipline,languages%20%26%20literatures,f%7CDiscipline,architecture,f%7CDiscipline,applied%20sciences,f%7CDiscipline,physical%20therapy,t%7CDiscipline,public%20health,t%7CDiscipline,recreation%20%26%20sports,t%7CDiscipline,dance.t&l=en&q=dancing%20bodies>; accessed 5 June 2018.

more prevalent interest in either the dancing body on stage (in dance studies) or in the more well-known visual art or text-based site works (in art history and performance studies). Second, the idea that the body itself could function as a site, and, more importantly, that these two sites – the body and the place – could embark on a communicative dialogue, was, at best, tangential to the major topics under discussion. For me, it became critical to address these challenges and find a way to place the dancing body squarely in the discourse around site performance.

In order to do so, I began to look for details of historical site dances, at first sifting through the archives for rare reviews or previews of an outdoor dance performance or seeking footnotes or asides in general dance history volumes that might mention works that took place in alternative contexts. For example, I accessed the work of Sally Banes (1987, 2001) – in particular her anthology (2003) that collected the writings of Deborah Jowitt, Steve Paxton, and Janice Ross – as well as Ross's (1995, 2007) own biographies of Anna Halprin. These were critical in understanding the evolution of the dance scene in the United States in the 1960s, particularly with regard to the key developments of the Judson Dance Theater and its impact on the site dance genre. These texts were also vital as they offered descriptions of early site works by Halprin, Paxton, Childs, Monk, Brown, Deborah Hay, and others. In addition, interviews conducted by Effie Stephano (1974) and Eleanor Blau (1989) addressing early site dance works, as well as descriptions of such works included in Hendel Teicher (2002) and Marcia Siegel's (2007) volumes, provided essential details. To provide further background on the larger experiments of the 1950s, such as the Happenings, I sought out details from performance historians Stuart Hobbs (1997), Jack Anderson (1997), and Michael Kirby (1965). Foster (1986) and Roger Copeland (2004) were also important in outlining Merce Cunningham's

strategies that influenced the first generation of site choreographers, and Ann Cooper Albright (2007) offered detailed readings of Loïe Fuller's early site-based experiments for the dance film genre.

For more recent works, the situation was a bit simpler, requesting access to video footage from a dance company or, where possible, talking directly to a choreographer. And, in my case, such access became more readily available during my research for *Site Dance* when I was fortunate to be in conversation with sixteen noteworthy site choreographers through the interview process. The repository of primary source material that accumulated into *Site Dance* presented me with a wealth of information to move forward in my analysis of what both the body and the medium of dance could offer the site performance discourse.

To analyze this growing repository, I employed the critical insights from two notable dance scholars: Foster, as mentioned above (and again below), and Brenda Dixon Gottschild. In the 1990s, Gottschild began to highlight dance as an inherently processual activity, one that resists mere product orientation. Noting in her analysis the key, but typically overlooked, role played by dancers and choreographers of colour, Gottschild underscores the need to prioritize 'dancing' over 'the dance' (a concept she stresses is common to both ethnographic and artistic communities). In this, she also borrows from anthropologist Victor Turner's idea of 'performing' research (1982) to emphasize our need to adopt experiential methodologies that 'apprehend the vitality and energy of the subjunctive mode of process as an antidote to overdoses of the declarative, full-stop mode of a product-oriented tradition' (1997: 168). Gottschild's work consistently rings true in my own creative practice where the process figures, impacts, and inspires as much, if not more, prominently than the final performance. And the import of Gottschild's work for analyzing site-based practices



becomes more evident when she takes great pains to stress the critical role of *context* for all research processes and performances; as she opines, we should always ‘let the context suggest a methodology’ (169). Although her comments ostensibly are directed toward historians, her accent on the significance of context as a guide for processual methodology applies directly to the site performance genre and how choreographers function within a site-based practice.

A second key development for my understanding of the role of the dancing body within site performance came during the interviews for *Site Dance*. Ann Carlson, a well-known choreographer who regularly pushes the boundaries of discipline and practice, offered this comment during our discussion: ‘As choreographers, perhaps the first “site” is the body and all the visual, cultural, and behavioral signs ingrained in the body that impact the work. It circles out... from the site of the body to the context of where the body stands’ (2009: 107). This observation, like Gottschild’s, needed no second endorsement as it was innately obvious to me. Certainly, the body itself is a rich site that, as Foster has described (utilizing Michel Foucault’s theories), functions as a ‘body-of-ideas’ (1997: 236) in communication with a variety of people and places; in other words, along with understanding the body as a perceptual and phenomenological organism – a common processual as well as analytical approach within site-based dance and, now, site dance scholarship (Hunter, 2015b; Barbour, 2011) – our bodies are also, fundamentally, created or ‘disciplined’ through various methods of instruction (dance and otherwise). As such, our bodies become ‘bodies-of-ideas’ formed by and situated in a larger cultural, sociopolitical, and, I would add, environmental context. In this way, all the ideas inscribed upon the body end up in dialogue with a context and, thus, these ideas end up framing and directing the resulting physical engagement with a site. As

Gottschild again frankly reminds us, ‘we bring our cultural, social, and preacademic habits and predilections to bear upon both the topics that we choose to research and the manner in which we go about it’ (1997: 168). In other words, while we cannot avoid such inscriptions, it is critical for us to recognize them and see how they frame our contextual research. This premise, that a body as a site with all of its (acculturated) inscriptions exchanges with the larger site (and all *its* inscriptions), underpins this thesis in a profound way and, though not always explicitly stated, can be found underlying each component. As one example, in my discussion of democratization of site dance, I highlight the critical role that individual affinities and expertise can play in a site dance process, fundamentally adding, directing, and structuring a site work and the human-site exchange (Kloetzel, 2016). In addition, my own movement proclivities and penchants<sup>11</sup>, on immediate display in the four films, quite clearly work to direct, frame, bolster, limit, and nuance my choreographic and lexical choices; indeed, I underline how these personal, and thus obviously acculturated, exchanges with individual sites led to, first, a critical reframing of space and place (Kloetzel 2015a), and, second, my analysis of ‘techniques of integration’ (Kloetzel, 2015b).

The third claim that grounds my investigation into both the body and dance’s place in site performance, as well as in dance film, emerges from the work that Foster has been conducting on empathy and the choreographic act. In her volume *Choreographing Empathy*, Foster compiles the first thorough analysis of how the

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<sup>11</sup> These proclivities and penchants, which, for example, stem from a long training history in release technique, contact improvisation, gymnastics, Alexander technique, and both live music and theatre performance, as well as a choreographic education grounded in postmodern creation strategies, have fundamentally impacted my creation processes on site. Such disciplinary training also meshes with my investment in deconstructive methodologies around gender and characterization to indicate directions for my site work. This is not to say, however, that the site does not have a say in this direction; indeed, as is noted in my PAR discussions as well as in forthcoming publications, the site often has a very active role in defining the directions for a given work, indicating that a ‘trained body’ may still find windows of innovation and agency within and even outside of a disciplinary frame.

dancing form communicates with a viewing audience. Fundamental to this analysis is work in the neurosciences on mirror neurons (synaptic connections that fire when both seeing and doing an action), as well as investigations that Foster has been conducting for decades on corporeality as a historical and cultural construct that emerges most clearly through choreography. Combining these research tacks, Foster argues that what earlier dance historians saw as unmediated, involuntary, or universalist responses to specific choreographies, were actually highly individualized responses that were meticulously constructed and impacted by ‘common and prevailing senses of the body and subjectivity in a given social moment’ (2010: 2). This genealogical understanding of choreography and how it communicates between bodies (i.e. performers and audience members) at a given moment is crucial for my analysis of how sited dances and dance films connect to various populations. Indeed, although not fleshed out in Foster’s text, her emphasis on ‘Land’ as one of three critical corporeal epistemes that has historically impacted ideology, knowledge production, and structures of power (13) offers much theoretical meat for site-based analyses; this is a tack that I just began to hint at in ‘Bodies in Place’ and ‘Location, Location, Location’, but one that I am eager to continue in future analyses as I investigate concepts of both specificity and adaptation – the genealogies of these terms, their role in processes of parsing, mapping, and colonization, and their impact on present site-based processes.

One final note: I would be remiss if I did not reiterate Foster’s lasting impact on my scholarship through two critical vectors that she helped to highlight both as my teacher (in seminars at UCLA) and through her publications. These vectors – which develop from the critical theories of Foucault and Michel de Certeau and manifest as a *dialectical tension* or, as Gottschild might claim, a *contrariety*, a concept that she

believes should be credited to Asian and African cultures (1997: 168) – allow for a deep consideration of dance’s place in Western culture. As I have noted, Foster has taken great pains to chart the ‘lineaments of culture’ (1997: 236) carved into our bodies by the various instructional methods accessed in a dance class. Under this scenario, our bodies are molded or constructed to become what Foucault calls a ‘docile body’ (1977: 138), in this case a vessel for a given technical discipline. This analysis acts as one of the aforementioned dialectical vectors, depicting the body as a target of disciplinary acts with an inferred *lack* of agency. Yet, Foster has also problematized this image, borrowing from de Certeau (1984) to chart out an oppositional vector that questions such concepts of agency for the dancing body. For instance, in examining the body involved in social protests, it is precisely the *trained* body – in this case the body trained for protest situations - that *effects* change; as she avers,

When individuals choose to participate in these kind of political demonstrations,...the physical imbues them with a deepened sense of personal agency. In achieving this sense of agency, protestors are not enacting a script, where the body would function as mere instrument of expression.... Instead, the process of creating political interference calls forth a perceptive and responsive physicality that...deciphers the social and then choreographs an imagined alternative. As they fathom injustice, organize to protest, craft a tactics, and engage in action, these bodies read what is happening and articulate their imaginative rebuttal.

(2003: 412)

This exploration of agential vectors and the value systems at play within various technical disciplines has proven highly beneficial for the field of dance studies. It encourages scholars to critically assess movement disciplines and performances for individual and cultural influences and impacts, and it persistently compels dance scholars to ask such questions as: Are the various cultural methods of training/construction of the body absolute in their effects? Or does the individual have agency either within the training or when putting the training to use? Can a disciplined/aculturated individual body work counter to, alter, or transform the cultural system(s) that created it? By what methods? Such queries have served and continue to serve as a guide on my own research journey, and it is through such questions that I have come to others that are more directly linked to my study of site dance practice. These questions include: where does agency rest in the construction of both individuals and cultural practices, with the human or with the environment? By what methods can place ('natural' or human-designed) construct our physicality/corporeality? Such queries are a direct outcome of the investigative path plotted by Foster, the results of which can be seen in the collection of publications gathered here.

b. Lexicon and discourse development: cross-genre connections

In addition to examining the role of dance and the body within site-based practices, another conceptual agenda in this thesis is lexicon and discourse development. This emphasis surfaced due to repeated encounters with what I perceived to be a lack, or merely misuse, of appropriate terminology in the field; it also emerged due to my dissatisfaction with seemingly fixed definitions of commonly employed terms in site-based performance analysis. While this focus began to

materialize in *Site Dance*, particularly with regard to perceptions of site-based dance as an ‘amateur’ medium, it became more insistent in subsequent publications. For *Site Dance* I concentrated on laying a foundation for a discourse to develop around the genre. As Martha Bowers succinctly worded it in the volume, ‘For the field to develop, it’s important to have a critical language that understands it for what it is and doesn’t try to evaluate it based on previous models of dance-making for proscenium spaces’ (2009: 278). This disconnect between stage- and site-based models of choreographic presentation instigated the creation process for that initial text, and the drive to offer a parallel or more specialized narrative that follows the development of site dance practice (rather than the larger genres of contemporary dance or site-based performance) has acted as a prompt for this thesis as a whole.

In short, a main motivation for my work has been to create a practicable and effective discourse for the site dance genre, one that employs viable and appropriate terminology that has been acutely examined. On this tack, a first area of analysis that I explored involved terminology around ‘space’ and ‘place’, terms that litter the site performance field for obvious reasons. To examine these terms, I turned to a collection of well-known theorists, namely geographer Yi Fu Tuan (1977), phenomenologist Edward Casey (1997), anthropologist Marc Augé (1995), and philosopher Michel de Certeau (1984), to help consider how space, place, and non-place develop and function in society, particularly in relation to specific cultural practices. As my research progressed, I found others from visual arts and architecture – Jeff Kelley (1995), James Meyer (2000), Lucy Lippard (1997), and Jane Rendell (2006) – that added key viewpoints on how such terminology relates to our analysis of site art. Rendell, for example, writing from a disciplinary position of architecture and borrowing from de Certeau’s notions of space and place, argues that site art has a

particular ability to offer a transgressive *space*, a hopeful trajectory in her view, as opposed to a romanticized notion of *place*. Through my own practice-based research in conversation with these theories (Kloetzel, 2015a), I began to comprehend how these terms and definitions could operate within a dance-focused process. By examining specific physical interactions that take place between bodies and particular sites and/or between multiple bodies in communication at a given site, I started to tease out how space, place, and non-place could be inherently linked to – or made purposefully fluid by – bodily acts and processes.

As my analysis expanded to dance film, such linkages and fluidity became more obvious. Enamoured of the borrowing from the site performance genre that I witnessed in the dance film genre, both in terms of creative practices as well as in the scholarly analysis put forward by Douglas Rosenberg (2000), I began to appraise the dance film genre more closely to further my understanding of cross-genre lexicon, strategies, and discourse. As I followed this path, in particular through Rosenberg's efforts (2000, 2010, 2012), but also through the analyses offered by Sherril Dodds (2001), Erin Brannigan (2011), and Harmony Bench (2010), I found that these scholars' critical insights not only afforded an essential baseline for interpreting the past and present of the 'dance film' genre (a designation that is still being negotiated as I note in 2015b: fn 1), but again prodded me to analyze my conceptions of 'space' and 'place'. Bench, for instance, in scrutinizing screendance's interest in what she calls 'no-place' (a blank void, often black or white, against which a dancing body appears) and/or 'any-place' (again a dancing figure imposed on multiple backgrounds using green screen technology), asserts that certain choices in the genre have Western colonialist and imperialist implications as the body in 'no-place' or 'any-place' performs 'unfettered movement' on a 'neutral' ground (2010: 54). Bench's discussion

is resonant with and, indeed, stems from discussions forwarded by Henri Lefebvre (1991), Valerie Briginshaw (2001), and Doreen Massey (1994, 2005), who interrogate, for example, the innocence of ‘space’, particularly, in Briginshaw and Massey’s case, in terms of gender. Such analyses were influential as I continued my examination of dance film and then, eventually, site-adaptive dance, particularly as concepts of failure and entrapment (either due to ecological precarity, disciplinary mechanisms, or rigidity of filmic framing) grew prevalent during the creative process for *Room*.

Indeed, lexicon and discourse development have become more critical as I have progressed into analyzing what I have carved out as a sub-genre under site-based forms, namely site-adaptive dance. For this sub-genre, which had its roots in the 1960s, but which, prior to my own offerings (2017a, 2017b) had had no scholarly treatment, the discourse needed to be cultivated from its base, and defining the sub-genre’s features, aims, and intentions required, again, the need to read across disciplines and critical concepts. To do so, I found it necessary to embark on another terminological investigation, in this case around ‘serialization’ and ‘adaptation’, which are key threads for analyzing the genre and its impact. Reinforcing the dilemma around both discourse and lexicon, these conceptual threads have provoked, yet again, an analysis of how space and place – as well as the various versions of these (non-place, any-place, in-between space, etc.) – operate in a cultural era dominated by neoliberal globalizing forces.

- c. Genealogical trace and evaluation of site-based performance and creation strategies



A third conceptual trajectory in this thesis involves the genealogical tracing of site-based processes and performance. Initially, this involved examining site-specific visual arts and theatre scholarship, in particular to employ these writings as a yardstick for analyzing the parallel or disparate moves within the field of site dance. As the first to study and evaluate site-specific art, visual arts scholars and critics advanced elemental theories regarding the development and progression of the form. For the research discussed here, Kwon (1997, 2002) has been especially significant as she was the first to frame site-specific art in terms of its critical relationship to site. Her own tiered system of evaluation – including, to put it simply, physical and phenomenological readings of a site, critiques of a site’s social construction, and, finally, mobile or discursive examinations of site – has offered an outline to rub up against analytically in many of the publications included here.

The site-specific theatre community has also contributed in important ways to this genealogy. In providing the first analysis of site-based performance arts, Nick Kaye’s *Site-Specific Art* (2000) has been crucial, particularly in the inclusion of, first, Clifford McLucas’ reflections on the ghost/host relation between performance and a site, and, second, Meredith Monk’s ideas around mapping and residue. Since then, significant offerings have included Mike Pearson and Michael Shanks’ *Theatre/Archaeology* (2001) where they explore views on site-specific performance as an archaeological endeavor (2001), Pearson’s *Site-Specific Performance* (2010) that provides an important summary of key concepts as well as further theoretical development for the field, and Cathy Turner’s article (2004) that explores the relationship between site art and Winnicott’s potential space. Others like Gay McAuley (2005) and, more recently, my dance colleague Victoria Hunter (2012, 2015a) have also proposed significant hypotheses regarding the challenges and

slippages in the relationship between performance and site as the form has developed. Finally, Fiona Wilkie's enduring contributions in the site performance realm have provided critical information for advancing every research endeavour undertaken in this thesis. From her initial survey article (2002) that helped to define some of the key questions in the site performance field, to her analysis of mobility (2012) and transport (2015) that has proved vital in the development of my own analysis of site-adaptive performance, Wilkie's continued contributions have been critical for interpreting the field and its genealogy, as well as for outlining key features of site performance in an era of globalization.

In enacting such a genealogical trace, one of my emphases has been, as noted, on lexicon and discourse development; yet, it has also been fundamentally concerned with the strategies at work within the individual processes and how these strategies have developed and/or transformed over time. Like others in the site-specific theatre community, evident particularly in Pearson's work and through the work of the artists from Wrights & Sites (Phil Smith, Simon Persighetti, Cathy Turner, and Stephen Hodge), I am keen to detect and decipher the details of site-based processes so that the strategies at play can be analyzed and evaluated. Certainly, this aim gains prominence through the decision to highlight site choreographers in *Site Dance*; yet, in each publication that follows, either through examining the work of others or through my own practice-as-research investigations, I have presented, proposed, or probed particular choreographic strategies within the site dance and dance film genres.

This focus on strategies again derives from Foucault-influenced dance scholarship that foregrounds the critical importance of instruction or cultivation on both individual humans and cultural practices. As explicated above, Foster highlights

this cultivation in terms of how disciplines ‘create’ the body (1997), but she further notes how specific choreographic tactics, whether intended for protest purposes (2003) or for artistic ends (2001, 2010), communicate, comment on, and construct spatialized actions to various ends. In this thesis, such foregrounding of choreographic choices, tactics, and/or strategies comes into play in almost every publication. Whether this means underlining what I call ‘techniques of integration’ (2015b, 2016) or noting the tactics employed to adapt to a series of sites (2017a, 2017b), my interest in conducting a genealogical trace of such strategies is prevalent throughout this document. To further this trace in the area of dance film, I drew from my own filmic undertakings as well as from the first-person essays by dance film directors and choreographers in *Envisioning Dance* (2002) and Katrina McPherson’s (2006) how-to manual *Making Video Dance*. And for live site dance performance, I gleaned from my own practice-as-research, from the many artists in *Site Dance*, and from witnessing a variety of site-based performances. In all, I was able to amass an ample set of site-based strategies for further analysis; indeed, as I compiled such strategies, I was also able to ascertain the relative correspondences or distinctions within and among the various site-based dance practices I was addressing. For a more comprehensive list of these strategies, including a depiction of how such strategies overlap and diverge and some potential implications for these strategies under the rubric of ‘attending to place’, see Appendix A.

While such a compilation offers a generous source in and of itself, it is the attendant interest in *evaluating* such strategies, both in terms of their past and present enactments, that has acted as a larger driving force throughout this thesis. Without question, this drive towards evaluation stems in part from the deep implications of ethics that underpins Foster’s (and Foucault and de Certeau’s) work; cultural

constructions of the body as well as individual bodies' attempts at agency (in accord with or in opposition to such constructions) inevitably hint at or directly signpost the cultural value systems that a body may be enacting or resisting. As such, in analyzing the body and its actions, we are, in turn, delving into the ethical imperatives of the body's actions. It is through my interest in scrutinizing these imperatives – or, more specifically, evaluating site-based choreographic strategies for their larger ethical, socioeconomic, political, and environmental effects and impacts – that I come to the remaining critical concepts that underpin this thesis as a whole.

d. Mobility, globalization, and neoliberalism

In the last five years, my research journey has increasingly concentrated on how a larger socioeconomic and political milieu impacts, influences, or is influenced by the development of site-based dance practices. This tack began due to my realization that my own site-based creative endeavors no longer seemed to fit neatly under the site-specific label (Kloetzel 2010, 2011, 2013, 2015a, 2015c). Indeed, as my work became more mobile, both in response to the design of individual sites and to the economic tenor of the time, I felt the need to delve deeper into the dilemmas raised by the 'new mobilities paradigm'. This direction entailed, initially, digging into the paradigm as developed by sociologists Mimi Sheller and John Urry (2006), geographer Tim Cresswell (2006), and women's studies scholar Caren Kaplan (1996), who have all developed critical theories on cultural mobility. Yet, due to the mobility turn's resonance in many academic areas, I quickly found other scholars investigating through this frame, particularly in the site-specific arena. Indeed, even prior to Sheller and Urry's seminal offering (2006), site-specific scholars, including notably Kaye (2000) and Kwon (2002), had been pondering the implications of mobility for the site

art field, in part motivated by the controversy around Richard Serra's *Tilted Arc* (1981). Wilkie's additions to this (2012, 2015), which meshed Kaye and Kwon's analysis with the insights gleaned from the new mobilities paradigm, have been critical for breaking down assumptions around any inherent *immobility* of site performance, and, as noted, have been significant for my own developing research on site-adaptive performance.

This investigation of mobility prompted me to consider further how mobility was deeply implicated in the ideologies and practices of globalization. Indeed, as international trade has spurred a steadily increasing flow of goods and peoples across space, globalization and mobility have become firm bedfellows, ones that cannot be pruned apart or probed independently. This twinned reality has provoked a less-than-direct research path as I wrestled with the problematic environmental and socioeconomic consequences of the globalized embrace of mobility. At first, I tried to resist the spectres of mobility by clinging to a more traditional understanding and depiction of site-specificity in *Site Dance*. I reveled in phenomenological and/or historical and cultural dialogues with place, clutching, like Serra perhaps, to concepts of inseparability or permanence that I hoped might curb the inexorable drive toward mobility.

Yet, I knew almost immediately the naïve nature of such a stance and began to poke and prod other, perhaps less trodden, mobile possibilities, in search of a path that would not swallow whole the givens of globalization. Initially, this led me to consider how my own site-specific practices could upset such givens, using mobile, traveling, and impish creation strategies to destabilize the yoke of homogenization and corporatism (Kloetzel 2010, 2011, 2015a). But my inquiry into mobility and potential methods of resistance to globalized actualities did not end there; instead I found this

inquiry was one that held promise for a much deeper examination of the links between emerging artistic practices and the cultural realities that shape them (Kloetzel 2013, 2017a, 2017b, 2017c). In particular, as part of this investigation, I have come to examine how the characteristics of and strategies employed within recent site dance practices may be reflective of wider ideological trends.

In short, as I have probed deeper into mobility as an icon of a globalizing world, I have also encountered other tenets of neoliberalism, the ideology that presently shapes and controls the practices of globalization. Indeed, I have found these tenets – flexibility, mobility, efficiency, cost-effectiveness, adaptability, and the like – at the very basis of site-adaptive creations and this realization has molded much of the research in this thesis over the past five years. Initially, this led me to examine the role of portable architecture within site performance (2013), for which Jure Kotnik (2008) offered valuable insights regarding the ISO shipping container as a symbol of globalization. As I probed further into this arena, I relied on geographers such as Gordon Waitt (2008) and Massey (2005) who offered their own critiques of place-based spectacle and commodification, as well as on the keen insights of Jen Harvie (2013) who investigates the impact of neoliberalism and the neoliberal economy on twenty-first century performance practices. As part of this research, I have, like Harvie, delved deeper into the political and economic underpinnings of site-adaptive practices, observing the potential links between the rise of this new subgenre and the increasing economic precarity that governs today's various artistic practices (Kloetzel 2017a, 2017b). Such increasing precarity, which was explored quite effectively in *The Drama Review*'s 2012 issue addressing this topic, has spurred my research into the correlation between labour conditions, the gig economy, and site-adaptive performance.

e. Ethical implications: Environmental ethics, activism, and the Anthropocene

The 2012 *TDR* issue on precarity mentioned above included an incisive offering by the Critical Art Ensemble (CAE). In their article, CAE notes that, cultural workers suffer from a third form of precarity beyond their precarious positions within the economic and political systems: ecological precarity, which is the general condition of existence for humans and many other species brought about by the purposeful ethical bankruptcy of neoliberalism.’ (2012: 56)

This statement, which underlines the notion that environmental conditions are fundamentally linked not only to larger socioeconomic and political realities but also to ethics, is another critical principle that frames this thesis.

My own background in environmental history (my MA History thesis addressed the links between physical practices and environmental ethics) that stresses the human impact upon the environment, as well as my site-specific practice (pursued before, during, and after my MFA Dance) that prioritizes communication with local environments, jointly demonstrate the inextricable nature of humans, cultural practices, and the environment. Reiterating this idea, much of the research collected here affirms the notion that humanity’s own choices, actions, and ideologies leave a fundamentally negative impression upon the locales that cradle them. Although this deeply problematic actuality clearly shapes my research, at the start of my research journey, I was determined to offer a counter-narrative as well, one that held up site-specific dance as a practice that could provide an antidote to a dire future. Through this counter-narrative, which included my hypothesis around ‘attending to place’, I

hoped to begin a larger consideration and ethical assessment of site-based cultural practices.

As my research has proceeded, I have continued to consider site-based live performance and dance film under the ethical framework of ‘attending to place’, with deeper consideration paid to both beneficial and detrimental impacts such practices may have on the environment. In part, this has grown as a consequence of my earlier MA research into environmental ethics, in particular its focus on axiology and moral standing; indeed, though not overtly discussed within this thesis, fundamental research in that field – by Aldo Leopold (1949), Arne Næss (1973, 1986), J. Baird Callicott (1994) and others – has provided an important background for many of my assertions that address human value systems and their relationship to larger ecosystems. In addition, as my focus on agency has extended, arguing not only for the agency of the dancing body, but also for the environment within which that dancing body is situated (Kloetzel, 2015b, 2016), I have (in hindsight) found myself running a strangely coincidental course alongside new materialists who advocate for agential realism (Barad, 2007) and vibrant matter (Bennett, 2010).

In short, these concerns regarding agency, ethics, and the human-environment relationship are threaded throughout this collection of works; they are evident in my publications as well as in my artistic undertakings – mostly seen here in *Room* and *The Sanitastics* – and have seeded such work with what some might call activist intentions. Certainly, my analysis of *The Sanitastics* (2015a) demonstrates this consideration, as I probe the creation process for the film to uncover incisive querying of corporatism, homogenization, and consumeristic urban planning. This tack is also evident in my publications that delineate particular dance film techniques that both ‘reintegrate’ and ‘dehierarchize’ peoples, communities, and places (Kloetzel, 2015b,



2016), and in my work that argues, with the help of social anthropologist Helena Wulff (2003), for the ability of screendance and site dance to ‘democratize’ populations (Kloetzel, 2016). And while my focus in particular publications certainly addresses dehierarchization in human-to-human interactions (2016), my overarching concern continues to be on assessing the hierarchy evident in the human-place relationship. To address this concern, I have underscored site-based live art and film practices that, I believe, achieve impressive strides in such relational dehierarchization (2015b, 2016).

Yet, in my most recent work, I have also begun to analyze an increasing number of site-based processes, my own included, that cause concern on both environmental and socioeconomic fronts. Again, my own experience in this arena has acted as a guide. In creating as well as witnessing an increasing number of traveling site works presented in the festival milieu, I have come to analyze what I term ‘site-adaptive dance’ as a cultural practice. From its inception, this analysis has prioritized comparing larger cultural trends with my own practice-based research, all with an eye toward ethical assessment. To realize my goals within this research path, I have turned to historian Dipesh Chakrabarty (2009), anthropologist Bruno Latour (2014), cultural critic Naomi Klein (2014), and philosopher Claire Colebrook (2011, 2012) who have all contributed substantial and substantiated concerns regarding humanity’s future in an era of deteriorating environmental conditions.

In sum, by examining developing practices, such as mobile and site-adaptive dance forms, in light of the Anthropocene – the first geological era that is considered anthropogenic based on aggressive and potentially devastating human activities – I place the dialogue around site-based dance practices squarely in the realms of ethical assessment and environmental justice. Indeed, in placing site dance practice under

such an evaluative rubric, I am demonstrating my fervent belief that the place-based cultural practices in which we engage may impact – either constructively or adversely – the very direction of humanity’s, and all other species’, future.

f. Methodological approaches: Transdisciplinary and practice-as-research

The critical concepts outlined above have supported my research journey in a substantial way and the results of this journey can be perused in the publications and film works attached to this supporting statement. Yet, it is important to note that it is through the probing and, more significantly, the *layering* of these concepts that a key methodological approach employed throughout this thesis emerges. In short, I have adopted a *transdisciplinary* approach for the research collected here, tracing such critical concepts across disciplinary boundaries to facilitate my study of site-based practices; this, along with the practice-as-research methodology detailed below, have functioned as complementary approaches, both spurring and grounding my investigations.

The transdisciplinary approach utilized in this document prioritizes a systemic or holistic orientation by resolutely drawing from many disciplines (Basarab, 2002; Lawrence and Despres, 2004), and by listening to a variety of contexts and populations. As such, this document borrows from and communicates with research conducted by sociologists, anthropologists, geographers, philosophers, performance studies scholars, and environmental scientists, as well as by artists in various site-based forms; it also reveals the influence of exchanges with a variety of rural, urban, public, and private sites. This determined effort to maintain a broad perspective within a research process is one that I aspire to, even though it is nearly impossible to be exhaustive within such an approach (a conundrum that echoes the challenges of a

PAR approach as I will note below). However, like Gottschild's reminder to 'let the context suggest a methodology' (1997: 169), a transdisciplinary approach offers a way to combat ingrained methods that reinforce systemic disenfranchisement and disempowerment, a critical step as we attempt to address an ethics of both practice and place.

A number of transdisciplinary lenses frame my investigations. A first one involves the examination of 'space' and 'place', made explicit in my earlier articles (Kloetzel, 2010, 2015a), but also materializing in other key locations in this thesis. Other transdisciplinary lenses also readily emerge, in particular one that assesses how various cultural practices impact the human-environment relationship. This lens, which quite clearly helped spur the 'attending to place' hypothesis, allows for the possibility of taking stock of cultural practices and their effect on the environment in different contexts. Employing this lens, I have been able to consider, for example, specific filming and editing techniques that stress the benefits of physical and phenomenological human-place exchanges (Kloetzel, 2015b), other more problematic dance film strategies that render such exchanges immaterial or inconsequential (2015b), and specific strategies in both dance film and site dance genres that work towards democratization and dehierarchization (2016).

Layering a third transdisciplinary lens – one that brings together the intersecting realities of neoliberalism, globalization, and mobility – onto these first two lenses, has also been impactful. Together these lenses have helped me probe, for instance, the increasingly popular form of site-adaptive dance and its embrace of mobility, flexibility, and serialization, hallmarks of globalized neoliberalism. Amplifying the need for a transdisciplinary approach due to its knitting together of the already transdisciplinary 'mobility turn' with a second 'adaptive turn' that I have

found developing in the disciplines of theatre, disability studies, geography, and economics (Kloetzel, 2017a), the investigation of site-adaptive dance has also led me to comprehend how site-based practices could be implicated in the neoliberal ‘gig economy’ and its attendant drive towards precarity, both ecological and economic (Kloetzel, 2017b, 2017c).

Adding a final ecological lens – also transdisciplinary in nature – onto my investigations has enabled me to develop a deeper and more critical analysis of the various cultural practices that humans undertake, particularly in light of current environmental circumstances collectively signified via the moniker of the Anthropocene. As this final lens meshes the ‘attending to place’ concerns with the larger realities of global transformation, it offers a means for scrutinizing the ethical bases of site dance practice in light of environmental justice issues. In fact, as the realities of the Anthropocene loom ever larger, with scholars from the sciences, arts, and humanities as well as activists, politicians, and, indeed, diverse global populations all contributing to the discourse, this transdisciplinary lens has the potential to envelop many others under its expanding cloak, a situation that bodes well for inciting systemically-oriented discussions that can address growing environmental concerns.

In sum, through employing and communing with a set of transdisciplinary lenses and investigations, and by joining these with the practice-as-research approach detailed below, the research collected here appraises site-based dance practices, both live and screen-oriented, within a larger cultural, socioeconomic, and environmental milieu.

A second, but no less critical, approach that informs this thesis is the practice-as-research approach (PAR). These two methodologies, PAR as well as the transdisciplinary one described above, help to formulate a practical/theoretical

dialectic with practice-based tactics functioning as a foil to my scholarly investigations and vice versa. As Baz Kershaw et al (2011) have noted, practice-as-research has ‘radically upset [the] philosophical applecart’ (63), challenging binary separations between body and mind or practice and theory in order to spur insights that are often more holistic in nature. Kershaw’s ideas around practice-based methodologies, very much akin to Gottschild’s processual methodology, have been important in my own practice, particularly as I encounter the ‘troublesome contradictions’ (Kershaw, 2011: 64) that a site-based artistic process may spark (Kloetzel, 2017b).

Of particular import, the PAR approach has offered me a way to examine the collected choreographic strategies ‘from the inside’ and, of note, within two genres (often by comparing strategic use in both live site performance and dance film). In other words, while it has been useful to trace others’ attempts to employ certain strategies (Kloetzel, 2009, 2015b, 2016, 2017a), it is often my own efforts to enact these same strategies that provides me with the tools for deeper analysis and assessment.<sup>12</sup> As one example, for *Room*, I built the work around the strategy of a transparent second space that could be moved from place to place for performance. While I was able to hear about (through interviews) and witness (on film) Eiko & Koma’s use of a similar strategy in *The Caravan Project* (1991), it was only through my own deployment of it that I was able to consider its relative worth in light of ‘attending to place’; in particular, I discovered that this strategy could be helpful as a way to provide commentary on the links between sites as well as on the inability of

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<sup>12</sup> It is important to note that reflexive comprehension and informed application of PAR methodologies does not appear ‘evenly’ throughout this thesis. Indeed, earlier works such as *Icarus Fried*, I would not classify as PAR, yet significant insights still emerged from such work. Since *The Sanitastics*, however, PAR processes have provided me with meaningful data for analysis. Through continued application over the 10-year span witnessed in this thesis, my PAR methodologies have altered and grown, presenting broader and richer avenues of analysis as seen through *The Dwindling Dispute* and *Room*.

humans across the globe to adapt to the dire circumstances of climate transformation (Kloetzel, 2017b, 2017c). This detailed investigation of a particular strategy was noteworthy as it allowed me not only to expand the knowledge base around the development, implementation, and impact of particular site-based choreographic strategies, but also to offer a model for future PAR investigations. Also critical to these PAR explorations was the fact that I could apply and test specific strategies in not one, but two areas – on site and on screen – adding to the depth of my assessment. The results of such ‘testing’ can be witnessed through the film works offered as a supplement to this thesis (2007, 2011, 2015c, 2017c), as well as perused through my PAR-focused publications (Kloetzel 2015a, 2015b, 2017b).

Overall, I would argue that jointly employing PAR and transdisciplinary approaches has provided me with a productive and perceptive dialectical methodology, one which challenges systemic biases and binaries that traditionally undermine artistic, in particular dance, research that deeply considers physical knowledge and action as fundamental within cultural, socioeconomic, environmental, and political contexts.

#### IV. Conclusion: Considering Impacts and Contributions to Knowledge

In bringing together the various publications and creative works that make up this thesis, I have been able to bear witness to a maturing discourse, one that is finding new grounding, new trajectories, and new dilemmas. In 2005, when this thesis was launching (through the first interviews being conducted for *Site Dance*), the field of site dance, and to a lesser degree dance film, stood rich with creative acts, but almost uninvestigated in terms of written analyses. Now, in 2018, I find myself looking at a larger and much more multifaceted field, one which includes a set of my own research outputs that have contributed meaningfully to it. This fact – that I have been able to generate critical discourse around what I see as important but underexamined genres – gives me much satisfaction and I am pleased to be able to submit this supporting statement and the collected portions of this thesis as part of that discourse.

##### a. Quantitative and qualitative impacts

In charting this discourse, I am able to examine any potential impacts that the various parts of this thesis have made. On a quantitative level, this is easiest to establish through the foundational *Site Dance: Choreographers and the Lure of Alternative Spaces*, whose influence can be traced through the nominations and reviews the anthology has received, as well as through its use as a textbook for various university courses. For example, in 2009, the volume was nominated for the de la Torre Bueno Prize® (Society for Dance History Scholars) and for the CORD Outstanding Publication Award, and the book received positive reviews in such academic journals as *Dance Research Journal*, *Dance Chronicle*, *The Theatre Annual*, as well as in dance trade journals, *Dance Teacher* and *Dance Studio Life*, and

in the larger academic community (see Appendix B for a full list of reviews and mentions). In terms of pedagogical impact, the book has been selected as the main textbook for the first MOOC (massive online open course) on site-specific performance offered through the California Institute for the Arts (delivered four times between 2013-16) and has been used as a resource in dance departments in the UK, US, and further afield.<sup>13</sup>

Of perhaps greater significance, the research for this thesis has begun to craft or support particular discursive avenues that either did not previously exist or had little notice. Certainly, this is case for the discourse around site-specific dance, which is now not only recognized as a form that warrants further examination in and of itself – as witnessed by Vicky Hunter’s *Moving Sites* (2015a) volume – but also as a form that scholars readily discuss in their anthologies that address site-specificity (Birch & Tompkins, 2012), dance studies (Carter et al, 2010), and geographical and organizational concepts of space (Pine & Kuhlke, 2013; Biehl, 2017), among others. Indeed, in tracing the influence of my publications on the larger field of performance, one of the most satisfying realizations is how scholars are employing the concept of ‘attending to place’ to support their own investigations into social dance, screendance, movement notation, and popular film, among others.<sup>14</sup> In addition, my pairing of site

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<sup>13</sup> For example, the volume has acted as a textbook in such courses as Special Topics in Theatre at Harlaxton College in Grantham (UK), Creative Practice2 at Bath Spa University (UK), Creative Process in Dance at the University of Maryland (USA), Making Space: Site, Performance, Intervention at Colorado College (USA), and through my own Site-Specific Performance courses in Idaho (USA) and in Calgary (Canada).

<sup>14</sup> Some of these scholarly articles include Brigitte Biehl-Missal’s ‘Filling the ‘empty space’: Site-specific dance in a techno club’ (2016) in *Culture and Organization*, Harmony Bench’s (2010) ‘Screendance 2.0: Social Dance-Media’ in *Participations*, Naomi Bragin’s ‘Turf Dance, YAK Films and the Oakland, CA, RIP Project’ (2014) in *The Drama Review*, Glenn D’Cruz et al’s ‘Dancing Dandenong: The Poetics of Spatial Politics’ (2016) in *Contemporary Publics*, Tara Munjee’s movement notation article, ‘Single or multiple: looking at location in movement notation’ (2015) in *Research in Dance Education*, and Michelle Bernier’s ‘Fred Astaire’s site specific choreography’ (2015) in *Studies in Musical Theatre*, which addresses dance in popular film. In addition, many graduate students have accessed my publications for theses and dissertations from Simon Fraser University (Canada), University of Texas (USA), Temple University (USA), Barnard College (USA), Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts (Australia), Western Kentucky University (USA),



dance and dance film has functioned as a critical grounding for both fields (the reason the editor at Palgrave gave for suggesting my contribution to *Dance's Duet with the Camera* act as the foundational chapter for that text), and through this, in concert with the international circulation of my own site-based film works (as detailed in footnotes 4-7), I am pleased to detect an increasing interest by artists and scholars in examining the critical import of location in dance film (Bench 2010; Bernier 2015; Bragin 2014). A third discourse to which my publications notably contribute is performance ecology. While the links between my work in dance and this parallel field, which stems from (and has thus far almost exclusively analyzed) the discipline of theatre<sup>15</sup>, are not yet overt, it is clear that such parallel trajectories indicate a mounting attentiveness to ecological issues and how specific performance practices address them. Indeed, I look forward to seeing how analyses in theatre being conducted by Baz Kershaw (2007), Carl Lavery (2018), Stephen Bottoms and Matthew Goulsh (2007), and others (Arons and May, 2012) begin to cross-pollinate with dance in upcoming publications, investigating, for example, what substantive impacts different artistic disciplines and practices might have on human behaviour in the Anthropocene.

A final noteworthy path is one that stems from my practice-as-research work; Susanne Ravn, for example, in her article 'Dancing Practices: Seeing and Sensing the Moving Body' draws from my, as she calls it, 'insistence on performing...research in an embodied way' (2016: 62) to argue for the ability to consciously shift or transform

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University of California, Riverside (USA), St. Mary's College (USA), and University of Oregon (USA), among others. Others in the larger community of performance studies and theatre also reference the work, from articles and reviews by Phil Smith (2015a, 2015b) to Josephine Machon's text on immersive theatre (2013) to texts on Euripidean theatre (Wiess 2017) to DAH Theater (Barba et al 2016). And, although such sources are clearly incomplete in terms of their analysis, Google scholar notes that my works are cited by 67 other scholarly texts, and Academia.edu boasts that 263 papers (38 highly cited ones) with authors from Romania and Belarus to the UK (and in fields from Religion to Dance to Gender Studies) mention my work (as of April 2, 2018).

<sup>15</sup> The one exception to this exclusivity being Arden Thomas' contribution addressing Anna Halprin's work in Arons and May's book (2012).

the connection between movement awareness and the sense of physical surroundings. Brigitte Biehl too points to the value of this same PAR work for its ability to offer ‘artistic resistance’ in corporate non-places, enacting a strategic disruption of ‘clean organisational spaces’ (2017: 99-101). Phil Smith, in an upcoming book on site performance from Palgrave, also borrows significantly from my practice-as-research as he highlights my work with *The Sanitastics* for its embodied transgressions as well as my five-point process in creating *Room* that acts as, he claims, borrowing from Mike Pearson (2012: 81), an ‘ablative’ choreographic method.

This final example, which is grounded in my work on site-adaptive dance, figures as a particularly meaningful example of the impacts my research has made. Smith and I have been working together during the time I have been investigating site-adaptive performance, since approximately 2014. As such, our discussions, which began during collaborative research on what we are variously calling ‘pseudo-sacred spaces’ or ‘places minus one’, have informed both of our research pathways. Indeed, my interest in adaptation has also significantly influenced our work together as this interest has directed us toward examining both the encroachment of generic spaces and the prospects in versatility for our collaborative movement scores. Our work is currently being compiled for what we hope will be a practice-based trade pamphlet entitled ‘Move Your Self: Movement Meditations to Resist the Gaze’ as well as for academic outputs. In addition, my work on site-adaptive dance, which resolutely launched during my research year in the UK in 2014-15, attracted attention as my initial thoughts on the form were delivered in two conference keynotes at the University of Chichester for the Performing Places symposia. Indeed, Vicky Hunter was so intrigued by my assertions that she used my commentary in the introduction to

*Moving Sites* to both problematize and advocate for the impact of festivalization on sited dance practices (2015a: 18).

In other words, my work on site-adaptive dance, which grew into the final two publications included here, has offered and will continue to offer a meaningful path of investigation both for myself and others. For myself, I am continuing this path with an article that has been accepted with revision through *Contemporary Theatre Review* on the characteristic of versatility within site-adaptive performance. In this paper, through an analysis of two site-based live performance projects, Willi Dorner's *Bodies in Urban Spaces* (2007-17) and Brandy Leary's *Glaciology* (2013-15), I launch an investigation into how the drive to serialize is impacting the evolving creation methods in the site-adaptive dance genre, pressing creators toward versatile performances that either streamline a score for efficient adaptation or rely exclusively on open improvisational structures. Employing the critical insights of Levin (2014), Wilkie (2015), and Harvie (2013), I consider how the methodologies of site-based performance can problematize, but also profit from, neoliberal agendas in an age of tourism, migration, and precarity. Indeed, the intention with this upcoming article, as well as for the two previous articles addressing site-adaptive performance (included in this thesis) and three other papers that are currently in development, is to develop a monograph on site-adaptive performance to be submitted to Palgrave Macmillan in 2019-20.

This does not mean, however, that my focus on site-*specific* dance has disappeared. Indeed, of particular significance at present is work that I am conducting with Hunter and Karen Barbour for a co-authored book that will be released by Intellect in 2019. In this forthcoming volume, which I have co-authored along with Barbour and Hunter, we broaden the field of site dance by examining particular local

practices (undertaken in Europe, North America, and the South Pacific) in light of larger global realities and, of particular note, we stress the critical role site dance can play for generating key theoretical insights and conceptions. In addition to the co-authored introduction and conclusion, I present three chapters in the text, all of which build on the work conducted in this thesis.

In the first of these chapters, using insights regarding choreographic strategies gleaned directly from my previous publications (2009, 2016), I offer a reading of site-specific dance practice in North America as one with activist potential. This chapter outlines the tactics pursued by site dance practitioners that, I argue, continue the revolutionary ambitions evident in the Judson Dance Theater era. Adding Canadian choreographers, along with the voices from *Site Dance*, to round out the North American context, I borrow from my previous publications to pinpoint how certain tactics within the site dance genre – recontextualization, perceptual disruption, subversion of place-based cultural norms, and democratization of practice – have advanced clear civic aims and political objectives over the past fifty years. A second chapter for this volume delves into certain site-specific strategies, in particular dialogic practices, that encourage practitioners and audiences alike to create links between local and global scales and occurrences. Employing the practice-as-research approach evident in my earlier publications (2015a, 2017b), this chapter tracks the methodological deployment of Bakhtin’s dialogism in two of my own site-specific works to advance the possibilities of *polyspatiality* in site performance.

Then, in my final chapter for the new volume, I conduct an investigation that was hinted at in *Site Dance* and that has acted as an implied frame for this entire thesis, namely the investigation into the links between site dance and environmental ethics. In sum, in this chapter, I trace the parallel trajectories of the two

simultaneously emerging fields from the mid-twentieth century to present in order to examine how ecological principles came to bear on both fields. After outlining the fundamentals of the field of environmental ethics, including its foundational and sustaining interest in anthropocentrism, axiology, metaphysics, and wilderness, I compare these premises to site dance practice in the 1960s and 70s that developed specific tactics to foment an *ecosystemic awareness* of place. This awareness, which embraces the principles of *relationality*, *dehierarchization*, and *intrinsic value* of people and place, shows the ethical possibilities that emerge from meshing *environmental justice* and *agential expansion*: a joining, I propose, that could subvert mistreatment of both the planet and its inhabitants.

Overall what this charting demonstrates is that the research collected here has enjoyed a circulation through expanding spheres (particularly in English-speaking scholarly communities), with the field of site dance experiencing a decided increase in interest and publication since this thesis began. Key to this growing interest is the expanding and expansive link between art-making and issues of place, one which spurs my own on-going creative and scholarly endeavours. For it is at this juncture that I believe this work sits at present: underscoring the transdisciplinary connections between fields and stressing the impact that human art-making can have on the environment at a delicate moment.

#### b. Contributions to Knowledge

The impacts delineated above have been made possible through specific meaningful contributions to knowledge that have arisen from the various components of this thesis. I will outline the most noteworthy of these contributions below and offer some concluding thoughts on the future of the site dance field.

As a first contribution, this thesis helps to unpack various human conceptions of space and place, evaluating and re-evaluating such conceptions by way of corporeal artistic practice. More particularly, the research collected here advances the notion that site-based dance practices contribute to and shape such conceptions, thereby potentially impacting human decision-making with respect to larger environmental contexts (both urban and rural). As I work to critique seemingly established concepts, I underscore the hazards that reside in fixed impressions of space and place and I note how various renderings of location – whether influenced by neoliberal urban drives toward efficiency, technological innovations, or persistent colonialist tenets – must be examined with a suspicious eye, particularly in light of current environmental realities. Also, significantly, much of this analysis of value-laden geographical concepts comes from physicalized practice, highlighting the role that embodied phenomenological investigation can play in the development of human perception.

Delving deeper into the environmental ramifications of site dance practice, the thesis also contributes critical insights regarding site-based practice and its ability to influence or transform perceptions of agency; in particular, the thesis works to reframe human views of the environment, stressing the need to expand agency beyond humanity and highlighting the equality of exchange that can take place between humans and their surroundings. To enact such an investigation, the Anthropocenic frame serves a critical ethical function, underscoring how the site-based act may have larger implications as the planet suffers the consequences of detrimental human activities. And, although a fuller analysis of agency and moral standing in relation to the environment postdates this thesis in terms of my own research, the initial paths addressing agency and the critical operation of *dehierarchization* in realizing such

agency figure as key contributions stemming from this document. In highlighting dehierarchization, as well as the ‘techniques of integration’ that destabilize commonly held perceptions and classifications, the thesis sets up and intersects with larger discourses that emphasize the need to upend Cartesian subject/object, male/female, mind/body and nature/culture hierarchical dichotomies that privilege (white male) human pursuits over the environment.

Extending this metaphysical critique, a third key contribution comes from this thesis’ appraisal of specific site-based choreographic practices – dance film, site-specific dance, and site-adaptive dance processes and performance – for their role in fortifying, altering, constructing, and/or subverting larger human value systems and ideologies, with particular attention paid to issues of environmental and social justice. As part of this, the thesis begins to consider how site dance practice upholds or challenges the hegemonic structures and properties of neoliberal globalization; it outlines the democratizing possibilities that may result from site dance’s disruption of perceptions, conventions, and experiences of time and space, and it specifically questions the growing dominance of homogenized ‘non-places’, the decline of historic urban areas, and the tendency towards spatially-focused precarity in Western cultures today. The thesis also pointedly scrutinizes globalized neoliberalism’s fascination with flexible, cost-effective, mobile, and adaptive forms that stress efficiency and enforce socioeconomic and ecological precarity on various cultural sectors; in doing so, the thesis contributes a valuable model for future justice-oriented critiques of emerging site-based performance practices.

Finally, the thesis offers key critical analyses of some recent trends within site-based dance, with a particular eye towards considering the ethical dimensions of these developing practices. In examining the various evolving sub-genres within site-

based dance practice, including adaptive and serialized forms as well as the shifting priorities, strategies, and technologies employed within screendance and site-specific dance, the thesis draws attention to how newly emerging tactics in these sub-genres may constitute either a full embrace and even augmentation of problematic neoliberal directives, or may serve to destabilize and disrupt such directives, offering new possibilities for ethical behaviours and agential expansion with respect to planetary ecosystems.

In sum, by considering the practices described here under the wider rubric of ‘attending to place’, I have been able to offer an assessment of how site-based performance strategies intersect with, support, and/or challenge specific ideologies and practices that circumscribe or influence human perceptions and behaviors. I have contributed key conceptual threads around site dance practice and its ability to question or contest dominant or normative values and systems; I have identified and underlined specific dehierarchizing strategies that can expand concepts of agency; and I have offered careful analyses of specific site-based practices and their relationship to the contradictory ideologies embedded in neoliberalism, globalization, and environmentalism. In short, by weighing site dance practice against current environmental and sociopolitical realities, this thesis charts a critical path, exposing potential promises and pitfalls within the field of site dance and stressing an ethics of practice as we enter an era of ecological precarity.

For myself, it is this drive towards an ethical assessment of practices and strategies, with a critical eye to the political ideologies that underpin them, that appears crucial at this moment. For it is through such an assessment that we can ascertain which practical approaches may lead to a positive future path for the humans on the planet and which may spell out disaster.



Through this ongoing research, I look forward to witnessing and adding to the growing discourse around site-based practices – site-specific and site-adaptive dance performance and dance film. As I have watched the expansion and increasing popularity of these genres in today’s cultural milieu (and marketplace), it is clear that the forms need continued critical scholarly analyses so that we, as artists, do not blindly follow a path plotted by market-led ideologues steeped in neoliberal mindsets. Rather, as new technologies and new authoritarian doctrines emerge that impact human mobility, political action, economic patterns, and cultural trends, as well as the planetary ecosystem at large, we, as the site-based arts community, need to map our own course by employing practices that prove favourable rather than deleterious to our home planet; we need to offer insight, guidance, and sustained creativity to generate tactics and forms that resist damaging hegemonic developments while encouraging helpful and empathetic relationships to develop between people, cultures, and the larger environment.

It is my hope that with lasting critical scrutiny, and with wariness toward hegemonic ideologies, we can gather supportive site-based cultural practices, principles, and policies that chart a dehierarchized path through the Anthropocene, a path that values and prioritizes planetary requirements as much as, if not more than, human desires.

## Appendix A: Choreographic Strategies

The strategies that I discuss in the various parts of this thesis can be divided into three categories: those for site-specific dance alone, for dance film alone, and for both site-specific dance and dance film. In addition, as my work has progressed, teasing out ‘site-adaptive’ dance within the larger genre of site dance, the strategies under this larger category have expanded and they work to problematize any simplistic notion of site-based dance.

For *site-specific* dance alone, these strategies include:

- reframing/recontextualizing the dancing body at a *single* ‘alternative’ (i.e. not the stage or studio) site
- siting live performance in public spaces to increase accessibility and/or approachability of the work
- closely observing a singular site with an eye towards appropriate size, placement, and pathways of both dancers and audience
- creating audience ‘tours’ or particular exchanges between a singular site and audience as critical elements of the performance itself - this may include audience participation (enforced, voluntary, or spontaneous) in the live process and performance of the work

For *dance film* alone, strategies include:

- dual reframing through both alternative contexts and the architecture of the camera
- experimenting with (often extreme) temporal and spatial realities through the editing process
- embracing narrativity

- using the camera to focus on minute and detailed parts of bodies and movement
- using canted angles, revolving shots, close-ups, and, in particular, wide angle shots that merge, alter, and/or highlight the relationship of the body and place (i.e. ‘techniques of integration’)
- using two-dimensional, screen-based platforms such as YouTube, Vimeo, etc. that are accessible to large swathes of the population

Yet, the list of strategies that apply in *both* site-specific dance and dance film genres outweighs these separate classifications (a scenario that is not surprising when looking at the placement of Meredith Monk as a pioneer in both genres). This list includes:

- recontextualizing/reframing the dancing body in alternative sites
- executing detailed physical and phenomenological explorations of place
- experimenting with unexpected movement (non-pedestrian, unconventional, and/or quotidian) at a given site
- conducting site-based historical and/or present-day research – this may include research into a site’s function, aesthetics, resident communities, and/or design over time
- prioritizing said research (physical, historical, aesthetic, communitarian, etc.) such that a site functions as a director and/or as a main determinant of a work’s thematic material and movement vocabulary
- accessing non-theatre-going publics
- fostering dialogue between the physical body and place through improvisational scores, phrase material crafted on site, and/or material that

undergoes alteration based on specific interactions between performer and place

- highlighting said dialogue by drawing attention to the response of body to place and place to body
- utilizing various ‘techniques of integration’ that blend, blur, or question perceptual norms of bodies in/and/relating to place
- experimenting with time, space, and framing through the use of momentum, gravity, depth of field, audience placement, sight lines, and/or post-production editing techniques
- diversifying a work’s cast beyond the professional performer realm
- using often unconventional costuming that directly references or mimics the site (through referencing textures, colours, history, design, or function of the site)
- offering extended views of place, using stillness, extremely slow movement sequences, and/or the long shot

In addition, as I began to examine *site-adaptive* dance under the umbrella of site dance, I uncovered a number of new strategies, many of which can be detected in the dance film genre as well. These include:

- using portable or moveable ‘stages’ that can be erected/installed at a series of sites
- generating adaptable movement material and scores that can be utilized in a variety of spaces
- observing a series of individual (and at times disparate) sites to discern similar spatial characteristics and design in order to determine emphasis and/or sequence of a work for a given site

- generating generic movement material that directly comments on commonalities or differences between places or on the human-place relationship
- generating thematic material in dialogue with one site that relates to a series of sites, potentially functioning as an allegory for larger concerns (local, national, or global)
- adopting paradoxical performance methodologies that embrace failure and demonstrate contradiction

Naturally, not all of these strategies are present in each site-based performance or dance film. Some choreographers have minimal contact with community members at a site, while others make community the focus of their work; some make ‘guerilla’ works (attempting to skirt the attaining of permits or permissions), others are sponsored by prominent production houses who are themselves responsible for such permissions; some prioritize an aesthetic approach, others place precedence on actively (or provocatively) adding to current social or political discourse. These differences naturally have significant impact on a strategy’s design and implementation. Yet, by identifying the presence of such strategies and witnessing their varied enactment, it becomes possible to gain an informed perspective on how site dance and dance film make use of particular strategies and what a given strategy’s impact might be.

Through the research outlined in this thesis, I have begun to assess this impact and will note here some of my findings as framed by the notion of ‘attending to place’. For instance, in *Site Dance* (2009) and ‘Location, Location, Location’ (2016), I describe how certain itemized site-specific strategies – reframing dance within public spaces, encouraging improvisational exploration in unusual environments, and

devising tours (and audience participation) on site – all serve to: increase the accessibility of a work to larger publics; offer new takes on how bodies can interact with their environments; encourage close observation and multisensory engagement with a place over time; and cultivate audience interaction with a site by facilitating three-dimensional and multisensory encounters between audience and a site.

In the same way, in ‘Bodies in Place’ (2015b), I highlight how strategies exclusively employed in dance film – integrative camera techniques, narrativity, and/or sharing through web-based platforms – offer a much wider range of results in relation to ‘attending to place’ due to the acute differences in application of these strategies. While many directors who use such strategies do successfully foster attentiveness to place, other directors (notably Thierry de May in *Rosas Danst Rosas*) may utilize the same or similar strategies with different outcomes (for example, I argue that in the case of *Rosas Danst Rosas*, rather than attending to place, the strategies employed tend to sexualize young women in problematic ways).

When examining strategies that are employed both dance film and site-specific dance, the results are less mixed. These strategies, which tend to prioritize the detailed scrutiny of and phenomenological interactions with a given site, typically constitute a concentrated and effective method of ‘attending to place’. In applying such strategies, I argue that these forms end up enacting a dehierarchization of humans and place, at times even blurring rigid perceptual boundaries between humans and their environments. Sometimes this blurring comes from framing choices, sometimes from experiments with timing and spacing, and sometimes from movement vocabulary or costume choices; yet, the results of such experimentation point to the ability of such strategies to, first, disrupt expectations around who or what is performing, and, second, question, highlight or, possibly, satirize the normative,

hierarchical relationship between humans and place. Such specific attempts at dehierarchization that serve to query the human-place status quo as well as to elevate the regard for place for both performers and audience allow a site to function in a directorial or protagonist role within a particular work. Further, as such creative works push outside the bounds for stage-based productions through the use of public space or web-based platforms, thereby accessing publics that may not typically witness dance, the body-place connection prioritized in such efforts is communicated to new populations via the mechanism of kinesthetic empathy (Foster 2010).

However, as elucidated in the later portions of this thesis, the strategic success in fostering ‘attending to place’ in site-specific dance and, to some degree in dance film, has not always met with the same success in the site-adaptive dance arena. Here, the results appear more mixed, with *certain* uses of portable stages, adaptable scoring, or generic movement generation fostering ‘attending to place’, and other deployments failing to cultivate the same degree of attention. When successful, site-adaptive strategies may reveal connections or highlight differences between various sites in ways that provide commentary on either problematic or hopeful aspects of human-environment interactions. They may also, if employed effectively, be able to achieve an allegorical revelation regarding human impact on place due to issues of mobility, ideology, or globalization. Yet, such an achievement, I would argue, has rarely found full realization in the site-adaptive genre and is, perhaps, a goal that (I would argue) needs emphasis as the form develops.

## Appendix B: Site Dance Reviews

Bernard, Hope (2012) *Site Dance: Choreographers and the Lure of Alternative Spaces*. Edited by Kloetzel, Melanie and Pavlik, Carolyn. Reviewed in: *The Theatre Annual*. 65 pp. 98-101.

Gerecke, Alana (2012) *Site Dance: Choreographers and the Lure of Alternative Spaces*. Edited by Kloetzel, Melanie and Pavlik, Carolyn. Reviewed in: *Dance Research Journal*. 44(2) pp. 114-7.

Harris, Jillian (2012) *Site Dance: Choreographers and the Lure of Alternative Spaces*. Edited by Kloetzel, Melanie and Pavlik, Carolyn. Reviewed in: *Dance Chronicle*. 35 pp. 99-103.

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