

Chesapeake Project Description
DANC488: Dance, Ritual, and the Everyday, Fall 2015
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During this new Project-based Learning course offering in dance, concepts of Sustainability interwove throughout the semester. We explored how dance, nature, culture, respect for the body and planet have always had a synergistic interdependence, often marked during ritual activities or ritualized behaviors. We incorporate individual and collective rituals, both our own as well as ones celebrated in other cultures and explored the interface between ritual and performance. Themes investigated included: space and place, time and life cycles, the body, gesture and the senses, nature and sustainability, myth, ethos, material culture and symbols, and states of consciousness.

Sustainability Themes -- Sustainability themes explored throughout the semester:

- Environmental Stewardship
- Interconnectedness and Interdependence
- Cultural Diversity and Indigenous/Traditional Knowledge

Learning Objectives related to Sustainability

1. Bring kinesthetic and sensory intelligence into experiences of environmental awareness. Develop awareness of the body's connection and interdependence with the earth and how daily decisions impact individual and natural resources.
2. Effectively communicate how the arts, particularly dance, can contribute to a stronger 'sustainability consciousness,' including promote healing, engender group solidarity, express individual or collective history, or nurture social change.
3. Develop strategies and demonstrate ability to produce an original dance project integrating a variety of multidisciplinary modalities. Learn to create participatory or presentational dance events that have the capacity to impact individual, community and environmental renewal.

Class Activities

Several classes focused on local and global water issues, earth/planetary awareness, and cultural diversity/traditional knowledge. While these were presented on separate class days, similar themes overlapped across several classes. The classes included the following video viewings, guest presentations, and experiential activities.

Water Issues:

Activity: Pond ecosystem movement experiential out at pond behind Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center. Later this evolved into dance improvisation and choreographed phrase. Presented overarching concepts of Sustainability and later focused on themes

related to water. We discussed the reading, *Water is Life*, and watched/discussed videos:

One River Mississippi (DVDs and YouTube) (a multi-sited event created by Marylee Hardenberg that took place across several states up and down Mississippi River.

- **Website for One River Mississippi:** <http://www.globalsiteperformance.org/oneriver/>
- Video excerpt of DVD: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BP3rYnO7tJo>

Global Water Dances (GWD) a dance event that began in 2008 and now happens every year around the world on June 24 where local choreographers create dance events related to their own local water issues. Every group does some of the same choreography and then creates their own. It is videotaped and uploaded to GWD website.

- **Website for Global Water Dances:** <http://globalwaterdances.org/>
- (excerpt 2013 GWD): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vOmfvIKMuM4>

River choreography created by contemporary dancers, Eiko and Koma, in and about the river.

- **Dancing in Water: The Making of River (2009):**
<http://eikoandkoma.org/dancinginwater>
- Cynthia Stevens' *Source*

Earth/Planetary Awareness:

We read: *Nature and Creativity* by Andrea Olson.

We were visited by Anna Halprin, 95 year old dance pioneer of avant-garde dance, dance and healing and **Planetary Dance/Earth Run**. She came as a virtual guest, video-conferencing in from Northern California to lead our class and others in her famous Planetary Dance Ritual. We also read several chapters in Halprin's book, *Earth Dances: The Body Responds to Nature's Rhythms, Planetary Dance, and The "Earth Run" from Circle The Earth*.

- Anna Halprin's *Planetary Dance* Ritual Event: <http://www.planetarydance.org/>
- <https://www.annahalprin.org/>

We watched Allison Orr's *Trash Dance* and were later visited by her. We had discussions on her various community performance projects with normally unseen service workers (sanitation workers, electrical workers, gondolier rowers, etc.).

- Allison Orr's dvd **TRASH DANCE** (on reserve in Performing Arts Library (MDVD 514) or available for rent from Amazon).
- Websites: <http://trashdancemovie.com/> and <http://www.forkliftdanceworks.org/>

Cultural Diversity/Traditional Knowledge:

Classes on:

- Kathak Dance from India with visit to Hindu Temple (taught by Miriam Phillips).
- Mexican *Dia de Los Muertos*

Master Classes and Guest Lectures from:

- Regina Miranda from Brazil on Creative Cities; Sustainable Communities
- Vajira and Sudesh Mantillake Madamperum, dance ritual from Sri Lanka and relationship to rice cultivation, belief systems. Also, his application of traditional dance to Engaged Mindful Social Activism.
See: http://www.ethnovisions.net/EV/SRI_LANKA_series.html
- Mustapha Braimah from Ghana on traditional Ghanaian dance ritual and relation to natural environment, ancestral heritage.
- Christopher K. Morgan Native American, Hawaiian dance and relation of movements, gestures, costumes, musical instruments to natural environment. Discussed his contemporary choreographic work, Pohaku about rice, identity and sustainability.
- Camille A Brown, identity as a Black female in an urban American culture, African American everyday rituals, community, history. In tandem with CSPAC, BLACK GIRL: Linguistic Play

READINGS related to Sustainability:

Nature and Creativity, in *The Place of Dance*, by Andrea Olsen, Wesleyan University Press, 2014.

Water is Life, by Osprey Orielle Lake. From Northwest Earth Institute *Choices for Sustainable Living*.

Three chapters in ***Moving Toward Life: Five Decades of Transformational Dance, Earth Dances: The Body Responds to Nature's Rhythms, Planetary Dance, and The "Earth Run" from Circle The Earth***, Wesleyan University Press, 1995.

Assessment

Assessment came in the form of weekly journal entries on specific themes, individual and group creative projects, and in a final semester project.

Journal: Throughout the semester students kept a journal and were given specific journal prompts to comment on, collage, or draw related to readings, guest presentations, dance activities and their own creative and scholarly research. While sustainability concept interwove throughout the semester, we had one week where we utilized direct material from the Chesapeake Project on definitions and core concepts of Sustainability. Thus, further assessment came from class discussions and journal entries related to this main sustainability week to see how students comprehended concepts, synthesize videos and readings, and to reflect on ways they could make changes in their daily life practices (see questions below). Also, to assess how they processed an outdoor dance improvisation I led the class in at the pond behind CSPAC, and how they took sustainability concepts, particularly around ecosystems and interdependence of natural environment, into movement themes and choreographic form into their final project.

Selected Journal Prompts: Drawing on this week's class discussions, dvd-s, readings and guest presentation, reflect in your journals on the following questions:

1. In what ways do you see the arts, particularly dance, can contribute to a stronger 'sustainability consciousness?' You might consider dance's capacity to: promote healing, engender group solidarity, support cultural sustainability, express individual or collective history, nurture social change, or any other ideas you have.
2. How do you understand the body's connection and interdependence with the earth? What do you think are the benefits of bringing kinesthetic and sensory intelligence into experiences of environmental awareness?
3. Based on class discussions, reading, films, how do you see your daily decisions impacting individual and natural resources? What small action can you do on a daily basis to contribute to more sustainable living?

Final Project: Students also created a final performance or participatory dance project where they could choose a theme specifically related to Sustainability. All incorporated some notion directly or indirectly of concepts around nature, the environment, social/cultural awareness or equity, and all created projects that were interdependent on several factors.