

ABSTRACT

Title of Document: PLACE(D)
Ryan Nicole Chrisman, MFA, 2008

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Department of Dance

For a little girl who never went outside, who hated the outdoors, and who would not even consider getting dirty, I am astonished that my Masters Thesis was an evening length outdoor site-specific dance work where performers danced in a courtyard of mulch, hung from trees, and ran through audiences. This thesis chronicles my collaborative journey of making *Place(d)*, an investigation of the relationship between that which exists in a place and that which is placed in a space. I will explore my collaborations with nine dancers, one sound composer, two musicians, a videographer, myself as a costume designer, and other service related personnel. I will also look at how placing sound and movement in the space constructed time, altered perception, and taught me about the beauty of an ensemble. Above all, place, both the literal and abstract idea, functions as the indicator for creation and analysis.

PLACE(D)

By

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Thesis submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the
University of Maryland, College Park, in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Masters of Fine Arts
2008

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Preface

This document depicts the evolution of *Place(d)*, an evening length site-specific performance that I choreographed over a duration of fourteen months. The following program information serves to logistically support further discussion of my work.

Place(d) was performed March 6 and 7, 2008 in the Dance Courtyard outside the Department of Dance at the University of Maryland, College Park. Dancers included undergraduate dance majors Sarah Anne Austin, Elizabeth Dawson, Laura Heidhausen, Naomi Horak, David Stern McMichael, Rachel Novak, Katelyn Reber, Shelby Leigh Streimer, and Patina Lynette Strother.

Kyle Johnson, an undergraduate music theory and composition major, composed original music for the work, both electronically recorded portions and live portions. Live music was performed by Lee Hinkle on percussion and Justin Bland on trumpet. A film portraying an alternate look at the live work was made in collaboration with videographer Betty Skeen and was shown following the performance. I designed the costumes and Paul Jackson served as my Technical Director.

Acknowledgements

Above all, I thank my God for His ever-present strength, for blessing me far beyond what I deserve, and for keeping me grounded. Mostly, I thank Him for the grace that allows my failures not to be final.

Thank you Momma and Daddy for believing in me always, thank you for your unconditional love, and thank you for supporting every minute of every dream, no matter how crazy. It's an honor to be your daughter!

Trey, you bring me a little piece of home every day. Thank you for your musical soul and your humor; your sister is your biggest fan!

To the superwomen in my life – you grant me the ability to laugh, cry, and fall back into place. Thank you for being the friends a woman needs!

Brian, my outstanding fiancé, thank you for your extraordinary patience with my hectic schedule, for listening, loving, coming to my rescue, and making me smile no matter what.

Dancers, I am incredibly grateful for your endless choreographic contributions. Thank you for rolling in the mud, for putting your hearts into this, and for allowing me to direct the beauty that you all possess.

Betty Skeen and Kyle Johnson, thank you for extending your talent and vision to this work and for working with a sound and video novice. Lee Hinkle and Justin Bland, your creative gifts, efforts, and professionalism are truly appreciated.

Thank you to professors and mentors here and beyond for challenging me, for providing guidance and inspiration, and for giving me a chance.

Special thanks to Brad Pudner for his angelic landscaping efforts and to Maureen Mooney McNary, Alex Pile, and Allison Fory for outstanding service.

Alcine Wiltz, you are a delight! Thank you for being so approachable, for your sensitive eye and ear, and for agreeing to chair my committee. Your guidance, wisdom, and passion throughout this process and throughout my time here have left an imprint on me. Above all, your energy, spirit, and love of teaching bring me constant joy. Thank you for numerous conversations about the beauty of movement, for imparting your knowledge about the gifts of our bodies, and for being a true inspiration.

Anne Warren, your gentle and thoughtful approach gives me peace. Thank you for reminding me not to make excuses for my work, for taking this journey with me, and for always introducing me to new resources. Your depth, concern, and assistance throughout this journey are vastly appreciated.

Paul Jackson, your genius amazes me. The moment you stepped into rehearsals for my work the week before tech, I was filled with the magical thoughts of this becoming a reality. Thank you for making my courtyard dream come true and for always knowing the answer.

Karen “the bees knees” Bradley, what would I do without you some days? You are a strong, curious, and successful example of all that we can do with what we love. You challenge me and move me, you fill me with wonder and comfort, and you have taught me so much about myself. Thank you for teaching me about confidence, about vision, and about shape flow! You are truly a remarkable woman and I will never forget you. Thank you!

Thank you also to the audience, whose efforts to find their own meaning in the work brought meaning to mine. I am humbled by the efforts of everyone involved in bringing my work in the courtyard and on the page full circle.

Table of Contents

Preface.....	ii
Acknowledgements.....	iii
Table of Contents.....	vi
Chapter 1: The Magic of It All	1
Chapter 2: In the Beginning.....	3
Chapter 3: The Ensemble: Placed in the Space	8
Chapter 4: A Musical Journey	19
Chapter 5: Through the Lens	27
Chapter 6: Costume Challenges, Color, and Creativity.....	32
Chapter 7: Chaos, Control, and the Power of Asking.....	38
Chapter 8: In the End	43

Chapter 1: The Magic of It All

I imagined that I was a bug on a tree leaf during it all, that I was a part of something bigger, though small. There was something about the wind, the cold, the movement of the trees, the sounds in the space, and the moment of chance. Through the rustling of those trees, the scratching at the space, and the sounds of smacking hands on the ground or on the windows, dancers emerged into and out of different objects of nature. There was a tension in the audience, a curiosity, and unasked questions about where to stand and whether to move. It felt like an electrical current. The audience transitioned back and forth from spectators to inhabitants as they molded into the environment. Dancers slowly rose from places, incorporating the space into their movements. One dancer emerged from beyond the trees, a few from a bench, and some from the bushes bending into the ground with an indescribable oneness and childhood innocence. The music, with movement, gave birth to a life of its own.

Sound came from all directions. Re-recorded music surprised the audience from one end and live music greeted the space from the other coming in the form of the pit-pattering of feet as dancers ran, jumped, and rolled. It came in the wind. It came in the trees. It came in chimes that struck against each other, in the soft pitch of a trumpet, and in the sporadic hitting of percussion elements. It came in the delightful squeals and shouts of those running for safety in a sudden game of hide and seek. A sound would pierce on the left and then sway on the right, suggestive of the same sporadic music of nature. This orchestra of movement, space, and music at times mimicked the wind and built anticipation.

Wide eyed and flush cheeked – that fresh look that accompanies the freedom of whole heartedly playing – and bundled in a layered palette of off-white, tan, and brown clothing that contrasted the night, cloudy bursts of the performer’s breath were visible in the chill of the air. Looming shadows of moving bodies appeared on the brick walls surrounding the space, a result of the spare, but eloquent lighting above, beyond, and among it.

Above all, the dancers danced with all of themselves. With delicately placed fingers and curving torsos, performers shifted, investigated, and glanced. They walked and ran in freedom swinging and jumping from wooden beams overhead and rising above the space, making it their own, creating a language. For me, they created magic.

Sadly, this description barely captures in words the sense of vitality and mystique that I experienced when watching my work unfold in front of an audience. You had to be there; you had to see it, hear it, and experience it yourself. Perhaps you would have felt a similar magic or just maybe you would see something completely different, yet all the while meaningful. I saw something special and significant each time I witnessed the work. This particular magic I speak of came from almost two years of collaboration, a journey in which I faced many challenges, but an experience that taught me about the way I make work and about the way I want to continue making work.

In the following investigation of my choreographic process and the elements of collaboration that I tackled throughout, I plan to discuss why I created *Place(d)* and how it evolved in its physical, visual, sonic, and design states.

Chapter 2: In the Beginning

I first had the idea for this piece during my first semester here. I walked by the music courtyard one day and was struck by the blend of sounds coming from the practice rooms. At times, I heard an opera singer practicing, and at others, I heard a violinist and a pianist. Each maintained its own distinct sound, yet there were moments when the music melted into one large piece. This surprising ride transported me from my everyday walk and I felt compelled to join the experience through movement. As I walked through the space, I began to notice things that I otherwise missed in passing. This sense of awareness and the way the sounds intertwined while also maintaining their singular sound, similar to how bodies work together as well as separate, intrigued me and I began to envision dancers relating to the space and sound.

When I found out the music courtyard would be difficult to obtain for consistent rehearsals, I started to sketch a similar setting in the dance courtyard. I was pleasantly surprised, not only because it was more accessible, but also because it was filled with even more inspiration and resources. The courtyard was visually appealing; it possessed a stimulating yet serene environment, and it symbolized a place for sanctuary and encounter. At the same time, I found it curious and mysterious. I imagined that the space had stories, each tree with a specific memory and each bench stamped with interaction. I considered those who passed the space without really acknowledging it. The courtyard challenged me, and I was intimidated by that. For this reason, I sought it.

For me, part of creating work is about creating an environment or a place. Why try to create an environment like the courtyard on a stage when this one was right in front of me, living and breathing? The possibilities of interaction in such a special place coupled with my craving to collaborate with live musicians initially drove my desire to create this work.

The guiding premise for creation revolved around a theme of place versus placed. I thought an interesting relationship existed between the natural space and the elements that were not there everyday. The following questions originally guided my investigation: What currently exists in the place? What will be placed? What sounds live in the space? What sounds will be integrated? How does the place affect what is placed? Likewise, how do the placed affect the place? What does the place lend emotionally and physically? What do we notice about the place as a result of the placed that we did not before?

I planned to explore the use of my dancers to highlight parts of the space that may be otherwise ignored, accentuating the three-dimensionality of all working elements. Along with highlighting the space, I was interested in investigating the interplay between things that are a part of the space every day, irrespective of the performance such as plants, grass, wind sound, and street sound as well as things that are there because of the performance such as the dancers and the musicians. Percussion, for instance, is a go between for these two worlds from a sonic perspective. For instance, while you can make sound that is artificial to the space like cymbals and drums, or better yet mallet percussion, you can also make sounds that are much closer to things that occur naturally such as beating on a wood bench or

rattling bushes. Above all, I aimed to create an environment where the natural meets the artificial, where musicians and dancers could unite in movement and sound, and where most importantly, place (both the literal and the abstract idea) could function as an indicator for creation.

I quickly decided that I wanted an original sound composition for the work with the potential of live music in the space. Luckily, I encountered Kyle Johnson. Kyle's unique talents and in-depth perspective about sound along with his interest in doing something different made him a true asset to this work. Our collaboration was a long, but sudden process. Looking back, I would not change a moment of it despite the many challenges presented along the way. Collaborating forced me to speak about the material and my vision in a translatable way, in a varied way, with respect to sound, movement, space, and people. In Chapter Four, I will discuss the collaboration between Kyle and myself and the element of sound and music as a whole.

Video was another element of collaboration that I decided to tackle. I have always been intrigued with the idea of dance on film and the compositional choices that come with viewing movement from behind a lens. Unfortunately, I did not have the resources or the knowledge to embrace this project on my own. Betty Skeen kindly lent her talents and camera resources to my craving for film collaboration and we embarked on a new project for the both of us. Betty had never filmed anything that she had not choreographed herself. I, on the other hand, had never filmed anything that I *had* choreographed myself. We set out to make an alternate version of the live work with film as the vehicle. I felt the film could be shown in the event that inclement weather prevented the outdoor performance. This, of course, evolved into

an integration of the film into the performance evening regardless of the weather. I will talk about the evolution of the film and its final state in relationship to the live work in Chapter Five.

My biggest fear in starting to create this piece involved costumes. Not having a vast amount of costume design in my background, I was at a loss with where to begin. The costumes evolved over a period of nine months and took many forms and colors along the way. Trial and error truly describes my experience in finding the right costumes for this piece. In the end, I feel that the colors and silhouettes created were successful. I will share my design journey in Chapter Six.

Another thrilling collaboration experience during this project was working with the many facets of organization and service at Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center. I consider myself an organizer and I thoroughly enjoy planning events. In the course of this project, I developed and maintained relationships with the scheduling office, marketing, facilities management, production, publications, box office, and house managers and patron services. Dealing with all of these departments at the Center was very similar to the work I did at the Kennedy Center as a Program Assistant in the Education Department and the communication was extremely rewarding! Chapter Seven tells of the outstanding service I received and what it taught me.

Aside from the collaborations and challenges listed above, I believe the most significant collaboration of the entire project was the partnership between me and my dancers. Without their creative improvisations and truly dedicated spirit, this work would have never manifested the way it did. The physical and contextual

relationships established with space and with each other throughout my process made us an ensemble, the special group and experience of which I will first discuss.

Chapter 3: The Ensemble: Placed in the Space

For the past few years, I have been preoccupied with space. How do we define space? What meaning exists in a space? Would dancing in a space change the space? More specifically, how would moving in a space change it for the mover, for the watcher? Does the audience location change the perception of space? What is perception or orientation in terms of space? What are the boundaries? Do we set those or does the space? Is space something that exists apart from us or something that we create through action and impression of it?

All of these questions triggered an impulse in me to create a site-specific work for my thesis. I find it interesting that the pieces I am most confident about have been site-specific works. I feel like I ignore the space around me when I create work for a stage. Rather, I feel sorry for space that looks like it is beckoning to be inhabited. This led me to the courtyard.

Bordered by rock walkways on the left, back, and some of the front of the space and cornered by cement walkways on the right and rest of the front, the dance courtyard is a large square of potential. A wooden trellis spans across a section of the center front, but most striking to me is the circular area of grass that encompasses the middle and majority of the space. Flanked by four benches for two, this circle is also surrounded by areas of mulch, flower beds, and trees and bushes of varying size. Beyond the space and to the right lies Route 193/University Boulevard, giving the courtyard freedom and instigating the idea that the space is not contained. Canopied by the sky, the courtyard also possesses the essence of being enclosed. It is encircled with brick walls, each of which possesses glass windows of different sizes.

I look at this space and see something that may be forgotten. The objects inspire me and make me curious to investigate; I have impulses to engage with the space. Not only is it inviting and unique, but it is very inspirational and experiential. There is something special about the idea of moving in the grass, in the wind, with the sun shining across your face and the environment beckoning you to dance with it, in it, around it, and among it. I imagine that the space continues beyond the development on top of it. What once covered that space? What was there before the concrete was poured, before things were planted? What would someone notice in such a landscape? What would they have touched? What kind of character would such a land foster? What is our relationship to our surroundings? Is it our space? Is it anyone's? Can we interact as a community in that space in an organic way, a way which does not impose our presence or damage nature?

As much as *I* wanted to engage with it, I also wanted a site that an audience would be able to inhabit, the same place as dancers placed in it. I desired an interactive audience, to give watchers the feeling that they were in the performance themselves. I thought it would be highly improbable that any two members of my audience saw exactly the same as another in this type of environment. This set up a challenge for me in terms of directing focus in my choreography. I had to consider the experience of the space and what would shift my experience as a viewer when making the work. Where would I get pulled that I did not expect to go? What was so strong that I lost sight of everything else?

One might think that putting the audience in the same space as the dancers would possibly create a more contained sense of where boundaries exist. I had to

consider where the observing point would be for the audience. What would be the role of the observer? Where would they be in proximity to the dancers? Would the observer be part of the space that was being constructed? How so? I was fascinated with the idea that the audience could be looking at something and in turn, be watched. There was something about the glass windows surrounding the space, the possibility of an interactive audience, and an overall non-conventional work that appealed to me. It struck me visually and I wanted to create something special in that type of setting.

I began by distributing the dancers throughout the space, each in a different spot in the courtyard, focusing on surfaces and tactility. We allowed our looking for sensation to lead the way into the space, moving moment to moment, and concentrating on grasping onto and manipulating objects outside of what we anticipated the viewers' perception to be. We explored the space and the characteristics, working around it and under it, progressing from one event to the next and suddenly there were patterns to play with and challenge. We asked ourselves, what does it mean to enter a new space? Who are you beside me? Why am I out here, what are we doing, where did we come from?

Patina began outlining the grass circle in the middle of the space, Laura investigated the mulch, Sarah Anne and Katelyn started a very interesting relationship with one of the benches, and Shelby became queen of the trees. Most fascinating at the time was the way Shelby swung around the trees, hid behind them, crawled up them with her fingers, and allowed the branches to swing and vibrate, ultimately dodging around them. It was fascinating, playful, and evocative of the way a child

would play, yet it held a level of elegance and grace that led me to believe she was a child and adult all at the same time.

Sequences appeared and movements arose drawing us into a game of improvisation with space and time. Sometimes we were simply being, instant by instant, with a sense of distance towards each other and oneself. We had a space to be in, a space to call our own. That space became a place, our place. We were placed in that space and the very evident goal was to continue placing.

We touched the space locating known and unknown parts. Time stretched and sped up, duet relationships evolved creating engaging dynamics. I began working with these two concepts of space: exploring the space and engaging with others in it. I classified the concepts into two different entities, each with its own set of rules, qualities, and characters. At the time, there was very little reflection on the space outside the immediate surroundings, but then I moved Patina outside of the space near Route 193. She appeared in the piece later than the rest of the dancers in the beginning of the work as if from another place. Before that, there had been no reference to any actual boundaries. We had yet to acknowledge the walls of the courtyard. Movement and space were being constructed, but movement mostly just occurred out of structured improvisations rather than being planned. After the initial discovery and improvisation, we settled into the space and an internal dialogue of subtle shifting became the driving force of the work.

I had this vision of the audience happening upon the courtyard area and that it would be filled with dancers. This suggested an interesting relationship between natural space that ordinarily would not attract any attention and what was not there

every day. The dancers would in some ways be highlighting parts of the space that otherwise may have been ignored. For instance, Rachel and Shelby highlighted the three dimensionality of the trellis by hanging from it later in the piece. Quite simply, my vision was about the place, or natural setting, versus what I placed there. I was interested in what the place would make the dancers feel and do, what we would notice that we never noticed before, and what sounds existed in the space versus what sounds were a result of us being in it. How would we occupy the space both together and alone?

Sarah Anne became a focal dancer early in the work. She took on the role of introducing the space, but starting outside of it. She walked through the doors to the courtyard, passing through the audience as she entered the space where everyone else was already placed. Once in rehearsal, Sarah Anne mentioned a character vibe she had while performing the piece, something about the space being her own and feeling frustrated that it looked different or had other people in it while she was trying to dance in it. I questioned the idea of a narrative in the work at the time, but I welcomed the intention and inspiration. It was a joy learning that my dancers were taking ownership in the work, something that I encouraged directly from the start.

Sarah Anne's solo of entering the space symbolized the actual transition from being outside the space to inside it. She also provided one of two entrances for the audience to witness. Shelby also began outside of the piece curled up in a window behind the patrons. She entered much later than Sarah Anne and her entrance was one that many audience members may have missed depending on their stance in the perimeter. For me, Sarah Anne also breathed life into the space. She examined it and

her wonder took her to new places as people shifted around her. Using an early established movement motif of pointing to the space, Sarah Anne touched the space, claiming it, investigating it, and while she had yet to make a significant imprint upon it, she drew the space in and played an instigator in pulling others in to larger movement and discovery as well. She also introduced an arcing motif of the spine with the arms swaying overhead. This image appeared in various capacities throughout the work and each time it reminded me of the wind while also opening the focus up to what may have existed above the space. This movement was precariously balanced on top of benches throughout the piece several times.

During Sarah Anne's solo, the rest of the performers were placed in the space. Some were walking, pausing, sitting, and standing, but all were relating to the space and in some cases, using it to physically support their position. The image began quite static with everyone among the space, but it quickly became more kinetic as the performers began making minimal shifts of their bodies, in weight, focus, and shape. Each person made three shifts, one of which was dramatic in dynamic or tempo. After the third shift, they settled into a new place in the space and began shifting again according to the new location. This section serves as a recognition segment for me. It was quiet and subtle, but rich with intensity and curiosity. I let these shifts go on for quite a long time in hopes that the beginning would function as a vehicle for the audience to acknowledge, observe, appreciate, and examine the space and its ingredients. I begged the lookers to notice what they may not have noticed if we had just begun moving from the beginning. I asked them to notice the wind, the sounds, the dancers, any expression or character, and any relationship to the space. Maybe the

audience would be forced to see what they may not have before and take in each moment in its simplicity and subtlety. The beginning is minimal, and for a long time, it functioned as the root of the piece. It felt human and real. It was a felt experience occurring in front of me. Perhaps this section even maintained its role as the core of the work throughout.

There was a really interesting moment in rehearsal once when Sarah Anne and Katelyn were doing a duet on the bench in the middle of the space and Laura, David, and Shelby were sitting on the other benches watching. There was something stunning about them just sitting there in their natural comfortable position watching the movement and interacting with it. Laura, for instance, had her head resting on her arms propped on the back of the bench, but she picked her head up midway through Sarah Anne's phrase as if struck by something. It was a beautiful, human moment. The idea that others were witnessing movement struck a chord with me as well and I made a choice to place someone throughout the space often throughout the work, if not always, who could simply watch. Even in the end, when the dancers left the space and moved in the windows, the audience watched from inside the space. Their role had reversed and they were the ones being watched. The windows acted as a way to view the work and I intended for the audience to realize they were the ones being viewed. They were integrated into the piece the entire time, but by transferring "places," I aimed to bring their attention to that element of composition.

Early in my process, it came to my attention that the phrase work seemed disconnected. The challenge with creating movement in a site-specific space is finding a way to make that movement inextricable to the site. What could be done

only in that space? I did not want my phrase work to look like it could be done anywhere else. In an attempt to solve this problem, I started to focus on smaller groups, particularly duets, to build up to the phrase work. I enjoy working on duet relationships and realized that the phrase work needed to grow and build out of the organic relationships that were being created. I started building on the internal states and poses of the beginning of the piece allowing those shifts to introduce fuller, expansive movement such as in David and Shelby's duet. Their duet under the trellis evolved out of the statuesque poses they held on the benches.

Repetition as well as theme and variation exercises were some of the other tools I used to develop the movement. Two phrases were used throughout the entire piece. Seeing these done in repetition and transposed onto different locations such as the benches or the windows allowed me to extract meaning from them. It also allowed me to clarify how duets came together leading up to the eventual gathering of the entire ensemble toward the end of the work.

I had to consider the picture I was creating and what was transpiring between individuals and objects in the space. I bounced back and forth between the picture of stillness and the moving visual to aid me. What image did I see? What qualities did I want taking me into the space and into those relationships? I had to allow things to take time and give movement space to grow bigger, faster, richer and full of dynamic range. The phrase work had to be expansive enough to support the picture around it. I, again, had to pay attention to directing the eye in order to bring things into a larger environment.

During the process, it was also necessary to develop phrase work outside in the space so that it had an environmental feel to it. I did not want the movement to lose its breath in the space. When it rained during rehearsal time, the dancers and I were stuck working in a studio which usually backfired. Creating movement and experience in the studio did not look “felt” once it arrived in the space. In the end, I found the duets successful and before I knew it, duets were emerging all over the space, molding, imprinting, and touching it. It was stimulating to watch that evolve.

Presence was also a huge factor in balancing the awareness of the space and the alertness of the dancers. I spent so much time focusing on the relationship between the space and the dancers that I had forgotten to address the issue of the relationship between the dancers. Were they distant from each other? What was their context? Was there a lack of intimacy for a reason or was there a lack of intimacy at all? What was present? What was the presence they were emitting? What was the presence I wanted them to emit? When did they see each other?

To address the issue of intimacy and relationship between the dancers, we spent an entire week playing with focus. We made choices about when they were looking at each other and acknowledging each other’s presence. We also made choices about when they were unaware of counterparts. What did they see and how long did they see it? How did they see things or people? Playing with this opened up some connections that otherwise would not have surfaced. This also integrated the dancers into the work even more. Mostly, it heightened their understanding of who they were and what their relationship was to each other and nature. It also enhanced their performance quality.

From a physical standpoint, I would characterize the movement in *Place(d)* as gradual, minimal, and full of fragility, change, and sustainment. There are definite elements of suspension and momentum in the phrase work, something that I find personally enjoyable and easy to make. I also tend to appreciate extremely long moments of stillness and subtle glances. The dancers got used to me saying, “take a pause, just be, and sit in it,” or “marinate in that moment.” I think a long pause in timing has potential. It forces you to notice something. Perhaps the dancers were commenting on the space and its beauty or imperfections from an internal place. A pause is complex and the performers needed to be fully committed to convey that depth. We worked on finding inner dialogues together, not necessarily in terms of a narrative or a character, but more like an untold story of the space and the people. I saw the dancers flowing with the wind and curving with the trees; they expressed a natural pull and push created by the earth and gravity.

We also worked on things such as grounding while running through the space and releasing the head and spine with all of the momentous arching movement. We focused on counter tensions in their bodies so that energy was displaced all the way through the movement, and therefore all the way into the space. We also tried to make any watching or witness moments just as present as moments full of action. Integrating action points with watching points helped move phrase work into the piece as well.

Choreographing a piece and directing rehearsals, for me, is so similar to teaching. I crave the interaction with other passionate dancers, I truly enjoy teaching and solving movement problems, and perhaps what was most rewarding about this

entire project was the fact that I built an ensemble. Out of a cast of nine dancers, two musicians, one composer, and a videographer, I feel confident that I built a unity of trust, respect, energy, and fun. The give and take that was associated with such intense team work is unlike any other experience I have had as a graduate student. I love my ensemble, I am amazed by them, and I am proud of the work we made.

In the end, I was thrilled that the audience was a part of my composition. I made the work from that premise the entire time. I made choices and they had choices; they were a living, breathing, interacting part of the work. How they interacted, how they experienced the work, and how they were physically or visually touched and moved depended on them, but the implications of the space and what I did with it had influential power. I treasure the fact that the viewer physically experienced a moment where they may have had to make a choice. I, too, had a responsibility to guide the eye with movement and spatial design.

In addition, performance commitment was integral to keeping the audience involved. Specificity was crucial to keeping the performers engaged in the work and this type of engagement was just as necessary in pulling the audience into the work, into the environment that was being created. As fleeting as it was, guiding the eye through the many bursts of energies and shifts in the piece was essential. I think it was perhaps my major choreographic challenge. This is where sound came in and functioned as another channel for viewing.

Chapter 4: A Musical Journey

Sound played a vital role in *Place(d)*. The environment also played a crucial role by providing sound with which the dancers could interrelate. Having never worked with a composer before, I was daunted by the task of creating an original score. On the other hand, I was thrilled with the flexibility it would provide and with the fact that the sound would be solely for my work. I knew from the start that I did not want a traditional song score. Instead, I was seeking a sporadic and sparse composition. I was ecstatic when I met Kyle Johnson and learned of his interest in my work. He seemed to understand my vision and he had innovative ideas about how to incorporate sound. I leapt at the chance to learn more about music and he provided the means for me to do so while working on this engaging project.

Bouncing off the premise of place versus placed, Kyle and I started our work together by cataloguing sounds that both existed in the space as well as sounds that interfaced with the space in hopes of using them for the future electronic composition. We were focused on relating the ambient noise in the space to the artificial sound of the instruments. For instance, in the composition, sections of one type of sound could exist as well as sections of another, sections of both independent of one another, and sections of both molded together. In addition, traffic on Route 193 could be filtered to sound in harmony with the trumpet and the trumpet could suggest the chaos of the traffic.

Kyle and I brainstormed about the connections between mundane, artificial, and man made sound. How did the place versus placed spectrum refer to the sound and the dancers? More specifically, what sounds were there regardless of the piece

and what sounds were there because of the piece? How could the sound interface with the space, complement it, interact with it, ignore it, or accentuate it? What were the implications of the music on the dancers or on the space? What would be the relationship between the dancers and the music, between the music and space, or between space and the objects? What would be mobile versus immobile in the space, in or outside of the space, or in real-time or recorded time?

Sounds that were sampled in our research: traffic on Route 193, wind, leaves rustling, trees moving, bushes, birds that flew overhead, rock stomping from the walkway, sounds of the chimes, mallet percussion in the space such as hitting the windows and the benches, stepping up on benches as well as stepping back down into the squishy terrain, pulling on tree branches, hands banging the ground, bodies hitting against the wood beams of the trellis, gloves scratching against the trellis posts, and scuffing feet along the cement walkway.

Sounds that were amplified for the actual electronic composition: Trees rustling, rock stomping on the walkway, and sounds of the chimes. These amplifications complemented, foreshadowed, and followed real-time events in the work. An example of how this functioned as foreshadowing was exemplified in the beginning of the piece. The sound of the chimes sounded out through the space *before* anyone ever physically hit them together. When Laura finally hit them together, I appreciated the reminiscent quality that the earlier recording possessed and how it may have confused the viewer or allowed for sound recall later. In the same token, I found it especially interesting when certain sounds were repeated in the recording *after* they had been introduced live. Shelby and Laura stomped on the rock walkway

as they moved through the space toward their tree duet. This duet ended with Shelby chasing Laura back to a bench where Laura begins the piece. Not only did this chase foreshadow a larger game of hide and seek to come, but the sound of rock stomping replays electronically as Shelby walks away from Laura. I thought it was an interesting way to harmonize the sound that brought them together as they ended that little journey.

Outside of the natural elements of the space that were used to make percussive sound, percussion instruments that were used in recordings and live performance included five roto toms, five differently pitched temple blocks, one log drum with two pitches, a brake drum, two metal chimes, and two splash cymbals. Lee used mallet percussion to play these instruments as did Shelby, Laura, and Naomi in the piece when “playing” the space. I think this relationship to the mallet percussion was a way that Lee and the dancers were bound together. He would play first, introducing the space sonically or from a percussive perspective, binding him and the dancers together outside of the movement. Lee’s playing also accelerates throughout the piece; the first half of the work is all accelerations on the drums introducing them to the space and to the work, similar to the way the dancers introduce movement motifs into the work.

Kyle and I wanted to blur the line between the dancers and the musicians so we decided Lee should also be integrated into the piece with movement. As a result, Lee begins the piece the same way the dancers do and has a few movement sequences with the performers throughout the piece. Not only does he provide physical support in helping Rachel achieve her precarious position hanging from the front of the trellis,

Lee also provided balance in the space from a visual standpoint. His stature of almost 6'5" added an element of dimension to the space. His performance, too, brought a steadiness to the work. Not only was he another male moving in the space, but he brought a sense of calm, poise, and strength to the work.

Though Lee was integrated into the work from a movement standpoint, I felt his expansive percussion playing, which accelerated across a broad spectrum of instruments, was equally explosive. The fluctuations of notes he played gathered speed and complexity as the dancers also grew more expansive in movement. Overall, I felt the percussion element was quite fitting for the work. It had a raw sense about it and allowed sound to expand and contract among the space, comparable to the way I was building movement and relationships between the dancers and analogous to the way movement swelled and retracted physically and spatially.

Whereas Lee played a wide range of instruments in the piece, Justin played only a trumpet. This solitary instrument relationship was purposely different from Lee's association to the percussion and to the dancers. Kyle and I originally wanted to set Justin apart from the rest of the piece because we thought his sound would appear distinctly "placed" by placing him aside. His separation from the dancers and movement was not an aggressive one; rather, Kyle and I characterized it as more laid back.

Justin's sound was completely based on pitch whereas Lee's was more finite. In the beginning of the work, Justin played a few notes based on movement cues and in the middle of the work he played the same notes but they overlapped in an attempt to foreshadow the end. Other sound in the beginning of the piece consisted of mainly

chime recordings as well as the aforementioned amplified sounds in the space, but above all, only minimal notes were heard from Justin. Contrastingly, in the end, the trumpet was more dominant than the recorded sounds. As a result of the vast differences in sound and going with the idea that Justin was distinctly “placed,” I chose not to have Justin join in any movement until the end of the work. Slowly, he emerged from his position near a tree in the back of the space and moved further into the courtyard as he escalated sonically. He was actually playing the same note over and over again along with a recording of himself doing the same thing. The timing of the two grew closer together leading up to a potential synchronization of Justin with himself. I found it captivating that all the audience saw at that moment was Justin recycling those notes with increasing volume. The sound seemed to reverberate through the onlookers and outside of the space, pushing at the boundaries and at times clouding the distinction between which sound was recorded and which was live. It was a stunning musical moment in the piece for me.

When I first learned that Kyle was interested in using a trumpet for the work, I was a bit cautious. I never imagined that the sound of a trumpet would complement the type of work I was interested in creating. I assumed it would be too brash and loud, but for me, the trumpet was a sustaining element. The sound filled the space, it went beyond the space, it vibrated off of the space, and I found it truly moving. Justin played with a Harmon mute during the entire piece, which I thought made him sound vulnerable and soft, almost as if his playing came from beyond the trees and beyond the experience.

Another aspect of sound that seemed to come from beyond the courtyard at times involved speaker placement and the way in which sound was distributed out of those speakers. Speakers were placed far and near in the space so that sound intentionally came from specific ones. Sounds would start remotely and come close, sounds would play that were reminiscent of things that had happened, and sounds would echo from a side of the space making it difficult to distinguish between the real and the placed in that moment. One particular section seemed as if from another time. The trajectory of counting numbers that morphed out of the speakers was dense, eerie, and produced a shiver in me. This moment was evocative of a game of hide and seek perhaps being played at an alternate time and I enjoyed the life beyond the performance that such sound gave.

The numbers and talking evolved quite easily out of several games of hide and seek that we played during rehearsal. How can you play hide and seek without counting down to one from somewhere? We instantly converted into children in a playground to get the experience just right. I toyed with the idea of not speaking in the piece because I think speaking has to be done in a very specific way to be successful, but through encouraging the dancers to drop their voices lower in register when speaking and finding ways to make the movement and speech complement each other (movement needed to be tied to the line they spoke in rhythm and dynamic), I found a place where I felt the counting existed successfully.

Overall, I found the speaker placement very successful and enjoyed watching the audience's heads spring back and forth as intermittent sounds echoed and struck at the space changing perspective. Many times, everything would be still and

suddenly from a corner a sound would play hopefully producing in the viewers the sense of suspense and heightened awareness that comes from knowing something could happen anywhere at any second. Sound from the speakers served to bring the audience even further into the experience. Placed in such close proximity to the watchers, it held the power to spark changes in the audience's viewing experience.

Collaborating with a musician was a very challenging, yet rewarding process. I realized how very differently musicians and dancers work. I usually work on random sections of movement over a long period of time constructing things together in the end, never really knowing the structure of my work. Much of my work is also based on improvisation and is rarely done the same way every time. I learned that musicians, on the other hand, tend to plan things out and start from the beginning working until the end. Once the music is written, it is rare that the score has the same flexibility that some dance choreography does. While Kyle and I seemed to be on the same page regarding the theme behind the work and the type of collaboration we were interested in, I quickly became aware that our methods of creation were going to present a challenge. I worked constantly at a slow speed and he worked at the last minute as a fast pace. Kyle was also interested in setting a plan or schedule for when things were going to be accomplished and I felt pressured by this type of timeline. It took me a while to find a comfortable place to exist in our collaboration.

Eventually, I understood that collaboration was about trust, communication, and honesty. I needed to trust Kyle's knowledge and experience and that he was working on what he needed to do, I needed to be explicit in my hopes and directions for the piece, and I needed to be honest about my feelings regarding his work. If I had

failed to do any of these things, I could have ended up with a product I was unhappy with and ultimately failed my piece. Instead, I focused on my process, continued to work the way I needed to, kept all collaborative parties involved and informed, and I was thrilled with the end result. The sound was truly a special addition to the work.

Kyle and I originally wanted our collaboration to be what we considered “true collaboration,” where we were both working alongside each other, perhaps not always physically, but in process and thought at least. However, due to our different styles of working, the sound ended up being more of a response to the physical creation. Kyle informed me that he simply reacted to what he saw and what he heard in the information surrounding the work. While I think this worked to our advantage in the end, we are both curious about trying it the “true” way in a future collaboration.

Chapter 5: Through the Lens

I initially sought out the idea of making a film about *Place(d)* because I thought it would be the answer to potentially inclement weather. If weather prevented the showing of the live work, I still ached for the audience to see my work somehow. Unfortunately, a traditional taping of the work from one perspective, similar to the way one would videotape a work for archival purposes, would not support the type of piece that I had created. I dreamed that the audience would be able to view *Place(d)* from various perspectives. A traditional video would not capture half of that excitement! I considered that the film may end up exuding a completely different feel than the live work in the courtyard, but I had never attempted to make a dance film and thought the collaboration would be exciting and challenging. Thus, Betty and I embarked on a year of videotaping rehearsals hoping for structure to emerge out of the footage. We originally thought the end result would be similar to a process piece, almost like a documentary of the making of the work, but I also toyed with the challenge of creating a film that would stand alone as a work of movement art.

The idea behind the film quickly evolved once filming began. It was challenging to find appropriate lighting for filming the work in progress since rehearsals were at night. To solve this problem, I scheduled longer weekend rehearsals during daylight hours to tape large chunks of the work. Betty and I also found it difficult to establish continuity in terms of costuming. Rehearsal garb created too many distractions in footage so we asked that the dancers dress in a strict palette of black clothing for taping. This aided the element of continuity, but Betty and I were still at a loss for how to bring all of the information together for the film.

We continued filming the work from various perspectives, from more intimate views, and from places in the space from which an audience member would not be able to watch. Betty has a knack for composition; it was not surprising to find her underneath a bench, inside a tree, standing above the dancers, or staring into the lens for an intense close-up shot. I became interested in the intimacy that taping allowed us so we focused on filming things multiple times from different angles and different distances.

While I do not think we can replace the experience of physically seeing movement in front of us or what we feel kinetically when someone is moving among us, there is something to be said for the power of film. In creating this particular film, I was enamored with the element of mystery behind the lens and with the ability the film had to impart a different story than the one I was telling in the live show. Perhaps I also sought the creation of a film because I felt I could never achieve the same mystique through choreographing movement directly in front of me. I think I was searching for something I had yet to find through the three dimensionality of moving in space. Perhaps the lens simply has a power that we as dancers do not. Rather, with film we can construct moments that have already been constructed. This can also be done on stage in performance and in the rehearsal process, but I felt Betty and I could play with the footage like building blocks, arranging it in new ways to create new meaning or reflect upon what the audience had just seen. Seeing something a second time is always revealing for me. We could alter, shade, and maneuver to make it new, whole, and linked all at the same time.

For *Place(d)*, the film was also a more intimate look, an extension, perhaps a follow-up to the live work (or maybe even a precursor). The film also functioned as an account of the evolution of the piece considering how far the filming went back in time and it provided an alternate comment on the space and its stories.

My biggest fear was that the film would be redundant since it ended up following the live performance. Considering the amount of things going on in the live work from both physical and sonic perspectives, I think the film served the piece by allowing the audience to catch something that they may not have the first time. The film also allowed us to expand on moments that were fleeting in the outside work such as the short game of hide and seek and some of the subtle glances throughout. The film illuminated what the audience saw but allowed us to expand upon what else existed. It specifically gave the audience a glimpse of the performers entering the space which is not a part of the live work. Instead, the majority of the performers are already placed in the space when the audience is escorted outside.

I was also fearful that the film would not give the audience the freedom of discovering the space and movement, something that I so strived for in the outdoor work. I thought the audience might feel forced to look through the lens of the camera which could potentially rob any feelings of joy, excitement, or curiosity that stemmed from the outside performance. I hoped that the camera angles from under benches, in trees, and out in the open extended a fresh outlook on the work and provided the audience with a heightened sense of participation.

I think the strength of the video lies in the shift in perspective and the juxtaposition of the composition of the space with the bodies in it. In the film,

David's solo between the two benches under the trellis was shown from a peephole between two slats of wood in that bench. The various angles that this created across his body and the way it altered his solo was perhaps my favorite moment in the film. It made the movement unexpected and gave me the feeling that I was spying on the work. This section also presented the idea that the space had eyes or that the audience was viewing the work from the space's perspective at times. I found this fascinating and mysterious!

Another moment that I enjoyed was the continuum of the trumpet sound in the beginning of the film, which was also the sound the audience was left with at the end of the live portion. I felt that this particular transition blended the two parts together and focused attention on the experience of the audience. There were also some interesting parallels drawn in the film that connected the movement of the instruments with the movement of the dancers. A shot of Shelby hanging from the trellis immediately switched to a lovely shot of the chimes dangling from a tree and blowing in the wind as Laura hit them. Shelby's legs mirrored the movement of the chimes and I found this connection very powerful and eye-opening.

In terms of color, the black and white footage of the film was a stark contrast to the warm tones of the live work. Filmed in the daylight with dark costumes, the film was the polar opposite of the night performance in light clothing. For me, this made the film appear a bit lonely, something that was also reflected in the repetition of the word, "one," in the film as individuals are showcased up close. The idea that the performers were together yet alone spoke to me through the film. The sense of the ensemble was not necessarily stripped, but it was a much more distant element.

Although video can strip movement of its celebrated essence, I think *Place(d)* gained something else, something new, with the film. Perhaps it was a more solitary look at the performers or an in-depth study of certain moments, but something that remained constant in the film was the space. While the space changed physically since we taped over a number of seasons, the significance behind the space did not alter. The space maintained its meaning and integrity throughout the film. In a way, I think the film allowed the work to live outside of the space for a short time.

Chapter 6: Costume Challenges, Color, and Creativity

When I consider the evolution of the costumes for *Place(d)*, I am amazed at the end result. Costume design is not something I feel confident about and I was deeply concerned about finding and making costumes suitable for the work. Initially, I set out to hire someone who would help me make them. My only knowledge of sewing consists of sewing buttons! Unfortunately, I was unable to find assistance on that scale and decided to start shopping early for fabric, color choices, and style ideas knowing that I would be making many trips back and forth to the stores.

Simply brainstorming costume ideas, I knew I needed to layer my dancers; I was layering the space. It became apparent that the clothing needed to reflect the idea that they were human beings in the space as opposed to more traditional dance gear. I started searching for clothes that gave off an urban, street wear vibe, as if the dancers in the space were coming from their everyday lives.

The first time I had my dancers try on costumes, I was extremely frustrated. Unaware of what color and fabrics would work in the light of the night performance, I had bought a combination of pants, tops, jackets, and other accessories in rich colors of blue, cranberry, and tan. I wanted to stay away from more natural colors of the space such as green, brown, and yellow in fear that the performers would merely fade into the scenery. Disappointingly, this color choice also made the dancers disappear and the material was so heavy in appearance. I sought a change and decided to focus more on what type of silhouette I was craving, hoping it would enlighten future design choices.

Numerous searches following that first trial lead me to printed items, solid items, dresses, short pants, long pants, and a color spectrum ranging from red to yellow. Nothing was working! Then a particular rehearsal gave me inspiration. I remember watching rehearsal in the dead of winter one day seeing the dancers all bundled up in coats, gloves, and other layered winter items. I had never considered taking advantage of what was in front of me. I usually stray from bulky appearances and prefer more clean silhouettes; however, I was inspired and decided to try out a more bulky, winter-wear style instead of the stream-lined street style I had been trying. This was one step toward success!

Once I had a grasp on the silhouette that I felt worked best, I focused on color. Fearing that a lighter palette of whites and off-whites would only get dirty outdoors, I held off on trying anything in that color scheme for quite some time. One day while I was out shopping, I was inspired by a particular piece of clothing. A light tan colored jacket with a full hood and large buttons looked perfect and I started to pull pieces together with that jacket as the driving agent. From one piece, I began a search for cream, ivory, and tan colored items. After seeing the purity and simplicity they created in the space, I kept with it. I knew then that I needed to focus on fabric and texture.

I was drawn to knitted items, such as sweaters and ribbed tops. I felt they created texture, but did not distract from the already present textures of the space. Balancing those fabrics with smoother items in pants and layers, the costumes started to come together. I felt more comfortable adding in brown colored clothing, which I originally stayed away from because I was worried it would blend into the space too

much. Rather, brown provided a connection between the dancers and the elements of the space. The mulch, trees, and benches were versions of brown so I tried to complement that in color choices.

The biggest challenge with the color spectrum that I ended up choosing was the fact that the dancers were filthy after each rehearsal due to rolling in the mud in the courtyard (which used to be grass). As there were going to be two shows each night, I realized that the dancers would need double versions, if not quadruple, of their costumes. I searched long and hard for replicas and though I did not end up with exact copies of everything for everyone, I took the overall style and began to create enough clothing for everyone to have back-up items in the event that any clothing was ruined during performance.

This was my first experience with putting costumes together for such a large group as well as my first time creating costumes for males. As someone who has often disliked the costumes that were designated for my own performances in the past, I found it important to pay attention to what would complement and flatter my dancers. I wanted attractive items and I wanted my dancers to feel confident and beautiful as well.

In the midst of tackling the color and fabric issue, I was also dealing with the issue of shoes for my dancers. In my initial dream, I thought the dancers would be able to perform barefoot. Obviously, this was not possible due to the weather conditions and due to safety issues in dealing with the terrain outside. I needed a shoe that would not visually detract from what they were doing physically, that would not inhibit their range of movement, and that would be weatherproof and waterproof. I

found such an item online and purchased the shoes early so that the dancers could rehearse in them. I also found socks that were water resistant and held heat at an outdoor store. Those were quickly added to the long list of costume items I was accumulating.

Gloves also played an integral role in the piece. Early in the work, gloves were needed simply as a function. Shelby needed them for protection when she hung from the trellis. She also began to use them to scratch the trellis posts which created a small sonic score that was implemented in the work. I struggled with how to incorporate the gloves into the work from a contextual point of view. The gloves found their way to the floor and Sarah Anne introduced them into the piece when she first entered. She saw them, picked them up, and placed them on the bench to the right underneath the trellis. David and Shelby ended up sitting on this bench together in the piece so I established a slight narrative that spoke to the glove's significance. For me, the pair of empty gloves suggested that someone had been there before them. The unknown history of that time is intriguing to me so David, Shelby, and I built upon that storyline through several improvisations. We worked on the two of them pushing the gloves away so they could take a seat on the bench as well as the idea that they were trying to figure out whose gloves they were. Shelby even offered the gloves to the audience in live performance when she first sat down to see if there were any takers. I loved this moment, but it was completely performance inspired. We had never planned it though I felt it was cheeky and relatable. I felt strongly about the relationship between the gloves and Shelby (as well as David), but I still felt like the glove situation was left unfinished. What happened to them?

One day during another inspiring shopping trip, I encountered a table full of gloves in exactly the same color palette I had established. This stimulated me to investigate whether or not everyone could be wearing gloves. After all, the performers usually had them on in rehearsal anyway due to the cold weather. I bought a bunch of gloves and held on to them until the week of the performance. The significance of the gloves still had not come to me, but one night while journaling about the work, I realized that I still ached for a tangible item to be left in the space at the end of the work. I wanted something to symbolize an honest imprint on the space, something that we could literally “place” behind. This was the perfect example of an “A-ha!” moment. As the dancers finished an explosive unison phrase section at the end of the piece, they started to exit the space in preparation for a final section that is performed in the windows outside the space. I instructed the dancers to “place” their gloves in the space before exiting. It was a very heartfelt and genuine moment for me. The gloves were just waiting to be that symbol for the piece and the dancers performed that section at the end of the work with sensitivity and care.

Overall, I feel very proud of my costume journey and the result. I learned so much about fabric and color and I attempted many new sewing projects such as hemming pants, creating new fasteners for clothes, removing necklines from shirts, and adding creative detailing to items that lacked that the extra punch I desired. I think the costumes ultimately created an atmosphere for the work that I was striving for all along. The light colors were a contrast with the dark setting and they allowed what the dancers were doing to be seen. I felt they were simple, elegant, striking, and warm. They held a sense of purity, something that I was trying to pull out of the space

from the beginning. I also think that the earthy palette gave them an unearthly appearance adding to the mystique of the piece. Above all, the costumes added to the magic for me.

Chapter 7: Chaos, Control, and the Power of Asking

As I knew I was embarking on a project that might shock some and dismay others considering the location, I felt it was necessary to start communicating about the parameters I had set surrounding my work. Not only was I interested in presenting more than one show each evening of my performance dates, I was also planning to restrict the number of patrons allowed in each show. Beyond that, the patrons would be standing outdoors for the duration of the performance. Between trying to accommodate for accessibility issues, inclement weather, and informing the box office about how I wanted to build a new venue for the ticketing system, I was just as busy outside of rehearsals as I was in them.

I was able to utilize my previous publication experience to assist marketing and publications in advertising my show. As a result, my show information was submitted for all ticket brochures, it was posted online almost a year in advance, and all of my shows were sold out. I even had to convince the box office to open up more lines of tickets!

Having access to the box office and patron services staff allowed me to make very specific choices about what roles I needed the house managers to play, where and when I wanted things to happen throughout the evening, and it gave me a sense of ownership about the production. I had to consider the entire evening as a whole. This project was about cultivating an entire experience for my audience. I needed to envision how patrons arrived and how they would be guided to the courtyard, where their tickets were taken, where they were escorted, and what type of environment I wanted to establish prior to the start of the outdoor performance. It was about creating

the experience I wanted my audience to have from start to finish. Every detail was important and needed to be “placed” just as strategically as the rest of my work.

Facilities management played a fundamental role in my process. When I first started rehearsing in the courtyard, I ran into issues with pesticide treatments that were sprayed on the grass where we were dancing as well as other landscaping upkeep that prevented us from proceeding with our process. These issues caused me to worry about the safety of my dancers in the space. I had to be very clear about what we were doing in the courtyard and how important it was that I be informed of work schedules, treatments, and the like. The sprinkling systems were continually being turned on prior to rehearsal drenching the space and causing obvious problems. I finally had to request that the sprinkling system be turned off and that the pesticide treatments be removed from the schedule until further notice. I had to keep safety in mind the whole time.

Facilities was also helpful with other out of the box requests. They unbolted the benches in the courtyard so we were able to pick them up from one side. They also provided me with hard rakes to maintain the space at my own discretion; they were too understaffed to provide me with the maintenance the space needed.

Perhaps the greatest challenge I faced throughout this project involved the terrain of the courtyard. Unfortunately, the courtyard is not built for heavy traffic. Imagine ten to fifteen people tracking over the grass in that area several times a week. Needless to say, we not only ruined the grass, we turned it into mud! We experienced a nasty cycle. It would rain stirring up the mud and then the mud would freeze creating small mountains in the space. Dancers were starting slip, fall, and even turn

ankles. It got to the point where our feet would get stuck in the mud. Dancing was not an option at that point but we kept pushing through it. I had a brave and determined cast!

A week before the performance, my stress got the best of me and I considered covering what was once grass with a nice layer of mulch to create a better, safer terrain for the dancers. Aesthetically, I knew this would also be more pleasing. I asked Brad Pudner, the Center's new horticulturist for permission to lay something down on the space. He informed me that he would have a thick layer of mulch laid down days later. I never anticipated that someone would do it for me (and for free nonetheless), but I was awed by this angelic effort. Not only were the dancers safer dancing on this, but the mulch clearly defined the space, freed me from an intense amount of worry, and ultimately I think this gesture was the saving grace of my show.

Rain was another factor; any site-specific work deals with the threatening element of weather. I felt fairly confident the entire time I worked on this piece that rain would be not an issue for me. Of course, as the performance grew closer, I grew more worried about my patrons in the event of rain. As a result, I contacted Production about my options for covering at least the audience during the performance. Maureen McNary Mooney, the Production Manager, assisted me by researching tenting options for the courtyard. While this sounded like a fantastic idea, I realized it would completely change the experience for the audience to be covered. It would also block the beautiful lighting devices that had been affixed to the ceilings around the courtyard and would change the acoustics for the sound coming out of the speakers. When I decided to nix the idea of tents, Maureen quickly came up with the

genius idea to borrow mass quantities of umbrellas that the Opera had bought a few years ago. Well, those umbrellas came in handy because it did rain one night of my performance and several patrons were without an umbrella. The umbrellas blocked vision a bit for other patrons, but overall, I thought everyone involved adapted well considering the circumstances.

I must note that the dancers were a driving force of positive energy and determination even amidst the rain and muddy conditions. They embodied the epitome of “the show must go on.” They were excited about dancing in the rain and embraced it with open arms and even more expressive bodies. The rain was a bit of extra magic poured on the performance, in my opinion. Through their stained costumes and soaked hair, they made the work look like it had been created for a rainy evening. It was a night we will all remember. I am so proud of them and of the product!

It was brought to my attention one day by Alcine Wiltz, the Chair of my thesis committee, that I had little control over my performance. This was a revelation! For someone who likes to be in control, I realized just how little control I did have over certain elements of my work. I could not control the weather and therefore the conditions of the space, I could not control what the audience would do since I was allowing them to stand and be mobile, and I could not control the moving environment. Since I created this piece over the course of several seasons, I could not control what happened to the natural elements we were utilizing. For instance, the trees lost their leaves from fall to winter which completely changed the sound they made when we danced in and among them. Even the look of the courtyard kept

changing. We had to continuously adapt to the shifting conditions. It is true that the element of non-control was a part of my composition. I find this so interesting considering again how I tend to be in control of so many aspects of my life and work. Perhaps my inner conscious was aching for some freedom. Regardless, the moving audience, the varying environment, and the ever unpredictable weather were all components that were composed together to create *Place(d)*. Perhaps I planned all of the other details surrounding the performance to create an umbrella (no pun intended) of control despite the spontaneity that I knew would result.

My interactions with all of the departments at Clarice Smith reinforced to me how vital communication is, and not just because I was doing an out of the box performance. They also reminded me how important it is to be thankful and to express that gratitude. Most importantly, I learned two great lessons; I learned that surrendering control can allow magnificent things to happen and I learned that sometimes you just have to ask. I sought out help along the way with several issues that arose and was rewarded in abundance. The efforts of those on staff at the Center truly amazed and humbled me. The power of asking is an important lesson that I will carry with me not only in future projects, but in life.

Chapter 8: In the End

Somewhere in the end of my process, I was struck with the possibility that *Place(d)* was merely an addition to a piece I started long ago. The first site-specific work I ever created was performed behind glass windows; funny, considering this piece ends very similarly. What is it about a non-traditional space that attracts me? For that matter, what is it about windows and the element of watching or being watched that intrigues me? Am I simply creating the same piece over and over again? Is each work purely a continuation of the one before, or a start of the one to follow...a variation upon a variation...upon a variation of something?

Whether I go on to make a new work or an extension of this one, my process in making this work spoke to me and it will speak to my future work. In the beginning, I was interested in examining our relationships with the places we occupy, with the places in which we live, and with the places we experience. In a larger sense, I am curious about what our idea of place *is*.

In the end, I am still drawn to place and our bonds with it, but mostly I want to continue creating work that can be interactive, work that combines many disciplines, and work that stems from powerful ensemble building.

Perhaps I can inhabit another space in the future as freely as I was able to inhabit the courtyard. Maybe I will see something in that space in a new way or better yet, see something I never have. Possibly, I will never do another work outdoors again (though I highly doubt I will be able to stay away now!). Regardless, I have never been more proud of my work; *Place(d)* was a most gratifying experience. I very

honestly want to continue creating work that extends the same kind of magic back to me and to others.