

The Wail of the Whale: Artistic Collaborative Sustainability

Earth Day is an annual event that takes place every year on April 22. Its purpose is to demonstrate support for environmental protection anywhere in the world. First held on April 22 of 1970, it now includes a wide range of events coordinated globally by EARTHDAY.ORG. This includes the mobilization of 1 billion people in more than 193 countries. The official theme for Earth Day 2023 was Invest in Our Planet. On Friday 21st, 2023, members of the University of Miami's community planned to line the shore of Lake Osceola, the heart of the Coral Gables campus, and linked hands to participate in the event Hug the Lake, which commemorates the celebration of Earth Day. However, as a prelude to UM's Earth Day events, art professor Billie Lynn created a gigantic inflatable sperm whale. The art piece was displayed on the Lakeside Village green, right across the lake, on Thursday, this April 20, from 2:30-3:00 pm. On this day, thirty Modern Dance students from the Frost School of Music's Dance Program united with Lynn's whale to mourn the extinction of whales through a performance art piece. The intent was to bring awareness to the extinction of whales all over the world.

Keywords: *sustainability, rite of passage, kinesthetic-loop, knowledge acquisition, ritual performance*

Introduction

Celebrated annually on April 22, *Earth Day* demonstrates society's support for the protection of our environment. The 1969 Santa Barbara Oil Spill had only one good result, *Earth Day*. In 1970, when it was first established by Senator Gaylord Nelson (1916 – 2005), *Earth Day* became a reminder of how much needs to be done to protect our environment. Besides being a politician, Nelson was an environmentalist; as such, he launched a new wave of environmental activism. The Santa Barbara Oil Spill killed over 10,000 seabirds, dolphins, seals, and sea lions. As a world event, *Earth Day* has included a wide range of activities coordinated globally by EARTHDAY.ORG. Currently, the event includes 1 billion people in more than 193 countries. The official theme for this year was *Invest In Our Planet*.

On Friday 21, 2023, members of the University of Miami community, in commemoration of *Earth Day*, planned to line the shore of Lake Osceola, the breathing heart of the University of Miami's Coral Gables campus, and link hands through the event *Hug the Lake*. For 18 years Random Acts of Kindness, a UM student organization, has presented its idea of surrounding Lake Osceola to celebrate *Earth Day*. Katrin (2018) explains how *Hug the Lake* became an annual event, where approximately 700 members of the campus community gather for a symbolic hug, while simultaneously singing the UM Alma Mater. Since around 2011, the tradition has grown to also include an educational component. This year, the Office of Sustainability, the College of Arts and Sciences and Frost School of

1 Music collaborated in the production of “The Wail of the Whale,” a ritual
2 performance.

3 4 5 **Literature Review** 6

7 Guy Debord’s *Society of the Spectacle* is used here to explain how some
8 authentic performances are turned into spectacles due to the demands of the
9 moment. His 1967 theory of the spectacle refers to the moment when the
10 commodity achieves the total occupation of life. It is a useful theory when
11 understanding how the rush to perform for *Earth Day* turned “The Wail of the
12 Whale” into a spectacle. The desire to make the event a visible statement ignored
13 the creative process to which any artistic endeavor truly compromised with true art
14 within the education realm should adhere. Halprin (2019) in *Making Dances that*
15 *Matter: Resources for Community Creativity* highlights the different aspects of the
16 creative process that artists need to address, mainly: what is the “common
17 purpose” of the ritual performance? (208). Despite the spectacularization of the
18 ritual performance, the redeeming aspect of the way in which “The Wail of the
19 Whale” was performed is precisely its purpose. To bring awareness to the
20 extinction of whales within the frame offered by two important events *Earth Day*
21 and *Hug the Lake*, became the bigger objective. Neidhardt (2013) in *Dancing from*
22 *The Inside Out* corroborates the importance of expressing non-verbally based on
23 feelings, ideas and lived experiences, as opposed to, outside stimulus. She
24 understands the importance of pushing students to go beyond imitation in order to
25 own their dance. Our students internalized this process based on the work they did
26 in class. Their solos were created by undertaking the concept of the inside out
27 dancer, who tells a story through the body. Brehm and McNett (2008) in *Creative*
28 *Dance for Learning: The kinesthetic Link*, explain the creative cycle of sensing,
29 feeling and expressing, which is at the core of creative output not only in dance art,
30 but also in all the arts. Finally, UNESCO’s Education for Sustainability (2020),
31 which promotes the contribution of learning content for the survival and prosperity
32 of humanity, serves as a frame in which to discuss the relevance of “The Wail of
33 the Whale” as an example of how to turn knowledge acquisition about
34 sustainability into an artistically creative embodied process.

35 36 37 **Methodology/Materials and Methods** 38

39 Three main partners have become essential in the expansion of *Hug the Lake*:
40 The Butler Center for Service and Leadership, the Green U and the University of
41 Miami’s Student Government’s Energy and Conservation Organization Agency.
42 The Butler Center for Service and Leadership, created to develop students who
43 cultivate positive social change within their communities, supported the original
44 idea from the time it was conceived. The Green U or Office of Sustainability,
45 which focuses on integrating environmental sustainability through its Green Lab
46 Program, has actively created more green spaces throughout the university.

1 Finally, UM Student Government’s Energy and Conservation Organization
2 Agency, which has the purpose of serving the student body and better the student
3 experience, has also been an important partner. The three organizations have
4 brought into the event various community businesses and local agencies that
5 support the inclusion of sustainable practices as their mission. Thus, these local
6 businesses and agencies come together on the Lakeside Patio in conjunction with
7 *Hug the Lake* to greet the students, engage them in their cause, and invite them to
8 take further action towards a sustainable future.

9 This year, *Hug the Lake*, as described above, never happened; instead, groups
10 of students along the lake shore handed t-shirts allegoric to the event. In previous
11 years, perhaps before the pandemic, *Hug the Lake* did take place as suggested.
12 Students circled the lake and held hands symbolizing their plight to collectively
13 protect the environment. As someone who has participated in previous *Hug the*
14 *Lake* events, I can say that the embrace of the lake felt real, meaningful and
15 purposeful. It would be interesting to find out why it did not happen this year.
16 Perhaps, the leadership of the event has changed, which often happens when
17 students graduate. Perhaps, the forces that held the logistics of the event together
18 have lost their aim and purpose.

21 Results

23 Yet, something uniquely different happened this *Earth Day*’s celebration that
24 was absent from previous events, that is the interdepartmental collaborative art
25 making between the College of Arts and Science, Frost School of Music and the
26 Office of Sustainability. As a prelude to UM’s *Earth Day* 2023, art professor Billie
27 Lynn created a gigantic inflatable sperm whale. An Associate Professor of
28 Sculpture, Lynn is known for her kinetic, interactive and socially-engaged art.
29 Lynn’s Whale is a three-dimensional sculpture made out of fabric. Physically
30 presented in the dimensions of height, width and depth, the sculpture was
31 displayed on the Lakeside Village green. On April 20, the green, perhaps one of
32 the spaces promoted by the Green Lab Program, right across the lake, became the
33 stage for “The Wail of the Whale.”

34 Frost School of Music’s Department of Vocal Performance hosts a Dance
35 Program. The Program is led by Senior Lecturer Carol Kaminsky, a veteran
36 educator and dance/movement therapist who has taught at UM for over three
37 decades. Under her leadership, the program frames dance education within the
38 tenets of dance/movement therapy. It is no surprise that Kaminsky accepted
39 Lynn’s invitation to collaborate with her project. Creating awareness about the
40 need to protect ocean life on *Earth Day* not only complements the cultivation of
41 ecological empathy among students in the program, but the concept of kinesthetic
42 empathy, the keystone of the psychotherapeutic field Kaminsky has contributed to
43 for so long. During the ritual performance, as the music permeated the space, the
44 students would mirror each other in their attempt to attune themselves to the
45 symbolic cry of The Whale, which was in and of itself, an expression of embodied
46 empathy.

1 Part of the responsibility of the event fell on the shoulders of Teddy
 2 Lhoutellier, University of Miami's Sustainability Director. Lhoutellier and his
 3 team help initiate, monitor, track, promote, and advertise sustainability initiatives
 4 across divisions, schools and campuses. Green U, as the office is commonly
 5 known, is spreading sustainable development values everyday among UM
 6 community members. Lhoutellier's involvement with "The Wail of the Whale"
 7 project as well as his support throughout the collaborative process were decisively
 8 necessary. Lhoutellier held together the elements that made the event possible,
 9 from the speaker that amplified the music to the reservation of the green space that
 10 framed the collaboration. This paper is precisely about the role the arts can play,
 11 in conjunction with Sustainability experts, in fomenting a culture of responsible
 12 active empathy about our planet and its future. More than money, what Higher
 13 Education needs to invest in is, its students' environmental empathy, active
 14 solution oriented propositions and sustainable mind set building.

15

16 **Embodied Demonstration**

17

18 Thus, on Thursday, April 20 from 2:30-3:00 pm, thirty Modern Dance
 19 students from the Frost School of Music's Dance Program met with Lynn's whale.
 20 The objective was to mourn the extinction of whales through a performance piece.
 21 Facilitated by Kaminsky, movement analyst Nicole Perry and dance researcher
 22 Jorge Morejón, the piece, titled "The Wail for the Whale," recreated a ritual
 23 performance of spectacular proportions. Bringing awareness to the extinction of
 24 whales, Earth's largest mammal, became an embodied demonstration. Lynn's
 25 Whale stood in the middle of the green, in the middle of the students and the
 26 campus as a calling-attention-to strategy. Its presence became site and at the same
 27 time effigy, a ceremonial reminder of the tragic death of whales and the role
 28 humans can play in saving them from other humans.

29

30 The performance was accompanied by Frost music student Jacques Yarris'
 31 first movement of *Desolation*, which is part of a large piece recorded by Frost's
 32 Trombone Choir, under the direction of Professor Timothy Conner. The piece
 33 allowed dance students to first connect collectively through a circular formation
 34 that resembles that of dance/movement therapy. *Desolation's* first movement
 35 echoes the sound of a whale in its many facets, but also The Whale's cry for help.
 36 Payne (1983) explains how whales use a variety of sounds for communication and
 37 sensation. Whales, among other marine mammals, are much more dependent on
 38 sound than land mammals are due to the limited effectiveness of other senses in
 39 water. Through the sound of the music selected by Kaminsky, The Whale
 40 communicated with us. A complicit sudden breeze, slightly rocking the inflated-
 41 fabric-sculpture from side to side, brought The Whale to life. Through the
 42 common space, as they circled The Whale, students were able to ground
 43 themselves in thought, purpose and intent.

43

44 Dressed in white, their own choice of costume, dance students signaled their
 45 wish to preserve the integrity of a cleaner, healthier and unpolluted planet. As they
 46 walked towards the whale in unison and lift their arms towards the highest parts of
 its shape, to then pause, one could feel the connection with a higher sense of

1 collective consciousness. Their movements symbolized their empathy for The
2 Whale’s cry. The solemnity and depth of their pause transitioned into the dance
3 that followed. Each student performing their own choreographed solos, as they
4 also kept track of each other’s moves to arrive to another pause, filled the green
5 with an honest, genuine and authentic expression of compassion. Walking
6 backwards towards The Whale, now facing the lake and the rest of campus, they
7 extended their arms from low to high as they ran towards the ages of the space,
8 this time signaling the freeing of the whale from its stagnating sculpted shape.

9 A second iteration of their solos brought climax to the piece as the dancers
10 expanded their bodies in the heat of Miami’s Spring, under the burning April sun.
11 A coordinated stop brought the group to its final dance move as they walked
12 around The Whale, counterclockwise. The circle, symbolic of a smaller universe
13 of environmental concern, re-connected those who were present, to the community
14 of wailers the dancers were able to create. As they ended the ritual performance,
15 beyond the applause of the audience, a real sense of meaningful accomplishment
16 could be felt among the students. These, their last solo pieces for their dance class,
17 more than a final exam, became something far bigger, more important and
18 significant. Their ritual performance hinted at how dance can also be a source of
19 awareness in relation to the type of advocating that society at large could
20 implement to advance environmental sustainability. As a farewell to the art piece,
21 the audience and the team involved in the production of the event slowly exited the
22 green. The following link shows the ritual performance “The Wail of the Whale.”
23 <https://youtu.be/u9iKe8TUT08>

24 25 26 **Discussion**

27
28 When one discusses the role of dance in the advocacy for sustainability, one
29 has to refer to sustainability within the frame of environmental awareness through
30 the arts. In 2007, The United Nations developed the Climate Neutral Strategy
31 (CNS) project. Part of that project entailed the articulation of what became the
32 Millennium Development Goals. Millennium Goal 7 of the Climate Neutral
33 Strategy is precisely “Ensuring Environmental Sustainability” (World Health
34 Organization, 2018). However, the articulation of Goal 7 needs to also be part of
35 the way creative output is addressed in Higher Education. Goal 14 of the
36 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), for instance, refers to “Life Below
37 Water” and the need to “Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine
38 resources for sustainable development” (UNESCO 2017). Yet, when one reads the
39 four targets set in the Millennium Development Goals to be achieved back in
40 2015, one realizes something was missing then and is missing now. The
41 Millennium goals address country policies and programs, biodiversity, sustainable
42 access to water and basic sanitation, improvement of life for slum dwellers, but not
43 the role the arts can play in creating awareness about the need to develop a
44 sustainable environment.

45 This erasure of the arts as a means for sustainability awareness is
46 contradictory, since the United Nation Education, Science and Culture

1 organization (UNESCO), which is the branch of the UN that deals with the arts,
 2 has articulated that one of its priorities is educating for sustainability. This,
 3 UNESCO (2020) explains, is a key issue for bringing about the changes in the
 4 knowledge, values, behaviors and lifestyles required to achieve sustainability and
 5 stability within and among countries, democracy, human security and peace. Thus,
 6 according to UNESCO, sustainability is a high priority to reorient educational
 7 systems and curricula towards addressing global problems relevant to sustainable
 8 development. However, one challenge worth addressing from the arts' point of
 9 view, among those identified by UNESCO, is knowledge formation. It is the only
 10 problem remotely related to the role that the arts and education could play in the
 11 restoration of our environment through consensus-building.

12 One of UNESCO's action themes is Local & Indigenous Knowledge, in the
 13 fields of education, science, culture and communication. UNESCO's focus
 14 remains to be the possible creation of an international normative instrument on the
 15 protection of folklore and traditional culture, at the regional level. However, there
 16 is little awareness about the importance of knowledge formation in regards to the
 17 impact folklore and traditional cultures can have, through the arts, on
 18 environmental ecology. Aside from mentioning culture and folklore as part of its
 19 action themes, there is no allusion to the arts, especially contemporary arts, in
 20 regards to protecting the environment. Developing awareness about how to
 21 achieve sustainability through the arts could aid students to sense important
 22 information coming from the environment, feel it and express it in dance, music,
 23 visual and theater arts. This embodied process is what Brehm and McNett (2008),
 24 referring to creative dance, defined as the kinesthetic loop.

25

26 **Kinesthetic Loop**

27

28 Through their senses, students notice movement sensations in an objective
 29 manner. Through their senses they can establish a relationship of support between
 30 inner and outer body systems and how themselves, as living bodies, can negotiate
 31 relationships with their environments: the cultural, the natural, the political and the
 32 socioeconomic. Although these relationships in dance can be framed in terms of
 33 (1) creative practices, (2) dance making techniques and/or (3) sustainable living, it
 34 will be pertinent to discuss them within the context of environmental ecology and
 35 the intersections that affect their balance. Two important intersections relevant to
 36 this balance are: (1) the arts from a purely economic stand, what we may be
 37 describe as the use of the arts and their exchange value and (2) the arts from a
 38 communicative, aesthetic, or transcendental stand, what we may refer to as the
 39 arts' instrumental and inherent values.

40 Closely related to the arts' inherent value is the artist's ability to "sense," but
 41 also "feel." In dance, for instance, feeling derives from the subjective associations
 42 triggered by the movement sensations experienced by the dancer. These two
 43 movement perceptions, sensing and feeling, "happen almost simultaneously" (7).
 44 Developing highly skilled kinesthetic awareness requires for the dancer to sense
 45 and feel body movement. To express feeling, the dancer has to produce movement
 46 expressions that stimulates the production of more kinesthetic sensations. These

1 kinesthetic sensations are experienced by the brain. This cycle generates a loop of
2 communication between the different parts of the body and the brain that
3 constitutes an important aspect of knowledge formation in art-making.

4 Awareness of objective and subjective movement-experience along with
5 expressions based on such awareness are the two phases of the kinesthetic
6 experience. When this awareness is heightened the kinesthetic process becomes
7 available to consciousness. The massive size of *The Whale*, its color, the space, the
8 music, the present students' bodies, all were part of the objective sensing of outer
9 body systems. The subjective associations triggered by these systems allow dance
10 students to feel and express dancing images and movement metaphors that have a
11 connection to the thoughts generated in their brains about the sculpture, *Earth*
12 *Day*, the ritual, the music, etc. The kinesthetic sense derived from this loop of
13 communication allows dancers to control their body's response.

14 Beyond the kinesthetic and communicative aspects of expressive movement,
15 framed through the lens of dance/movement therapy, Frost's Dance Program is
16 interested in advancing dance from a communicative and aesthetic stand, but also
17 from a healing perspective. The instrumental and inherent values of dance practice
18 can be translated in the studio as inside-out dance. Frost's dance methodology is
19 invested in developing inside-out dancers who are able to use dance as a way to
20 express important issues affecting them, society and the planet. Neidhardt (2013)
21 defines dancing inside-out as being authentic about the way in which one's body
22 moves. The inside-out dancer makes movement choices based on feeling rather
23 than on music, what may be considered visually appealing or judged as technically
24 accurate. When it comes to Frost's Dance Program, sensing and feeling may be at
25 the root level of a kind of creative process that opens the door to all human bodies
26 without exclusion. For instance, the day of the performance, our modern dance
27 class had students who had dance training and students who had never trained
28 outside of our class. However, they were all capable of sensing, feeling,
29 expressing, communicating and thinking about the event that occupied their bodies
30 and minds. This process, as a whole, serves as an outlet for issues that, once
31 danced-out, heal the body, the mind and consequently, the environment.

32 33 Ritual Performance

34
35 From a philosophical point of view, the structure of the ritual performance,
36 common to most cultures, followed the phases of a rite of passage in accordance to
37 Van Gennep (2019): separation, margin and re-aggregation. Subsequently, the
38 ritual began in the dance studio where we all gathered to get ready to go to the
39 green. The *separation* phase was the actual walk from our studio to the green, a
40 statement in and of itself, where all the elements of the performance (sound, space,
41 and sculpture) were already set. The margin, or liminal phase, was the actual
42 performance through which students were able to experience the "in between and
43 betwixt" phase coined by Turner (2017). Outside of their own ordinary lives and
44 that of audience members, students created a micro-sustainable subjective reality
45 that invited all who witnessed the ritual performance to reflect on whales and

1 sustainability. The re-aggregation phase took place when students stepped out of
2 the performance space to re-incorporate back into their student life.

3 As discussed previously, Brehm and McNett (2008) explain knowledge
4 acquisition through the “kinesthetic loop,” a concept that refers to the sensing, the
5 feeling and the expressing that takes place as part of the creative process (7).
6 Sensing, sometimes used interchangeably to express feeling, is the first reaction
7 the body has to outside stimuli. On the other hand, feeling is the recognition, the
8 conscious realization of what one is sensing. Feeling becomes the raw material
9 used by the inside-out dancer to express non-verbally. However, for an inside-out
10 dancer interested in supporting a cause such as the sustainability of our
11 environment, the kinesthetic loop is not enough; there has to be added thought and
12 agency to feeling. The thought is the propelling idea behind the event as a whole.
13 The agency is the use of the dance as a catalyst for a change in consciousness.
14 When the dance becomes a ritual, as it happened with “The Wail to the Whale,”
15 there has to be also a clear intention.

16 Halprin (2019) suggests for the dancer to ask: What intention is motivating
17 me? What do I hope to accomplish? However, these questions, as it happens when
18 the dancer performs a solo, only focus on the individual. The “central intention,”
19 in this case the intention of the leader, is to create dances that affect the dancer’s
20 own personal, social and cultural life (3). Then arises the question of the intention
21 of the performance as a whole, including all dancers, which is based on an analysis
22 of the movement scores produced during the creative process. Assuming that
23 everyone agrees, the movement scores should support the performance’s intention.
24 When not everyone agrees with the intention, dancers have to address whatever
25 issues they may have before moving forward.

26 27 **Reflections**

28
29 None of what has been explained above happened when dancing “The Wail
30 of the Whale.” The concepts described by Neidhardt, Brehm and McNett, or even
31 Halprin are the ideal. However, it is hard to get our students to agree on
32 performing publicly. There was some degree of bribery involved in persuading
33 them to participate in the event. Their solos, rather than being performed in class
34 as part of their final, was going to be performed, all at once, during the event. This,
35 to them, was a preferred option because it would avoid them the stress of
36 performing one by one in front of their peers. Subsequently, we all sacrificed one
37 of the most satisfying, enriching and fulfilling moments of the course, which
38 unfortunately, for this group, only those who agreed on performing their solos
39 again, during our next and last class meeting, got to experience.

40 The performance of their final solos would have been the moment when their
41 creativity and risk-taking abilities would have been validated by their classmates
42 and their professor. Their final solo and ensemble performances have proven to be,
43 from a dance/movement therapeutic sense, one of the most important interventions
44 my modern dance class has implemented. The level of validation that our students
45 experience during the showcasing of their solo finals is unmeasurable. Some of
46 them, who never danced before, begin to develop a relationship with their bodies

1 and dance which they had not experienced before. For those who had training,
2 dancing authentically also puts them at the level of a first time experience. They,
3 like the rest of the class, feel empowered, for the very first time, to express their
4 own ideas, feelings and traumas using their own movement vocabulary and
5 choices.

6 The kinesthetic loop was ignored in function of the ritual performance since
7 the students' solos, had already being created in studio through sensing, feeling
8 and expressing. Each solo was communicating an individual story created
9 gradually throughout the semester. Each student was telling a personal story
10 through a dance that had its own title, its own music and its own synopsis, all a
11 product of the student's own creation. The program for the recital to take place that
12 day, as opposed to "The Wail to the Whale" performance, was in its rough draft
13 stage. Thus, the eventual solo recital was thwarted to benefit the performance on
14 the green.

15 Although my colleagues and I had created a preconceived choreographic
16 phrase that resembled the movement of the waves expressed through human
17 bodies, it was never addressed with the students. Despite explaining the size of the
18 whale and where it would be placed, etc., students never saw it until they were on
19 site. The music, though a good match for the piece, was never heard by the
20 students until we had a quick rehearsal, right before the performance. The urgency
21 of delivering a quick choreographic arrangement right and there, made us choose
22 to move in ways that were disconnected from a collective agreement on the
23 intention. Although, I, as one of the leaders communicated to the group what we
24 were going to do and what it represented, the mere attempt at informing students
25 the general intention, without their creative participation, made it inorganic and
26 imposed. They did not complain nor were fully conscious of the degree to which
27 our whole semester of careful, gradual and patient work was compromised.

28 Their support was well earned given the rapport we had developed at that
29 point. To their credit, I think they also understood how important performing "The
30 Wail to the Whale" for the bigger event *Earth Day* was supposed to be. However,
31 it was I who felt and knew we were sacrificing precious creative output to serve
32 the purpose of the spectacle. As posited by Debord (2012), the spectacle is not
33 identifiable with mere gazing even combined with hearing, it is that which escapes
34 reconsideration and correction, in other words, it is the opposite of dialogue. My
35 students and I had a dialogic impasse right when it would have been most
36 necessary. Without a second trial, without reconsidering nor correcting my
37 impromptu movement choices, my students and I performed the piece.

38 Once we saw the video recorded by the drone, a few minutes after the
39 performance, it was obvious that reconsideration and correction would have added
40 new elements to our ritual piece. For instance, we realized that, visually, the best
41 part of the dance was the beginning. From the drone's perspective, the moments in
42 which the circle of dancers gets closer to the whale is the most choreographically
43 interesting. The same happens when the students get away from the whale. We
44 understood that locomotive movement, as opposed to static, was a better choice
45 when recording with a drone's camera. Yet, the performance was not solely for the
46 drone, it was really for the present audience. From their perspective, it was

1 probably the solo dances, performed simultaneously, that got more attention.
 2 Compared to the pedestrian nature of the collective walk toward and from the
 3 whale, the solos were diverse, abstract and uniquely expressive depending on the
 4 dancer's own story.

5 These possible reconsiderations and corrections would not have added to the
 6 organicity and authenticity of the piece. They would have been cosmetic
 7 alterations to make the dance look better from a very superficial point of view, in
 8 this case the audiences' and the drone's gaze. In other words, it would have
 9 probably enhanced its spectacular quality as the kind of "hollowed out"
 10 performance, borrowing from Debord, it had already become. Its original capacity
 11 to resist the forces that threaten nature had been co-opted. It had lost its
 12 authenticity, right from the moment we accepted to participate in the event. By
 13 displacing our students' work, we had given into "the gigantic expansion" of
 14 modern society's mindset, which the piece, in its lacking of authenticity and
 15 originality represented. The piece had become what Duchamp defined as retinal
 16 art, the art that is pleasant to the eyes, but lacks the depth and substance conceptual
 17 art could add.

18 The ritual aspect of the piece, this idea related to the protection of whales and
 19 by extension the preservation of the planet, just the day before the celebration of
 20 *Earth Day*, was explained to the students briefly. However, it was not
 21 workshopped in the way it could have been given the sudden proposition brought
 22 to us by Lynn, to choreograph something in relation to her big sculpture.

23 I believe that at our students' academic level, we need to push for a kind of
 24 college dance that is meaningful to them and to the audience, that which Halprin
 25 described as a dance with a purpose. In this case, the purpose was bringing
 26 awareness to the importance of keeping a sustainable planet. In that sense, the end
 27 justifies the means; violation of the creative process is justified by the outcome.
 28 Sustainability was truly the one aspect of the work that brought all the parts
 29 involved together and made it a valid choice. Despite the lack of time to deeply
 30 understand the message and how to deliver it in a way that equally included the
 31 intentions of students and professors involved, the idea and the purpose, to bring
 32 awareness to the need to embrace sustainability, redeems it all.

34 **Survey**

35
 36 A brief survey among my students after the performance added clarity to the
 37 process from a students' perspective. To the question of whether they perceived
 38 the performance as a ritual performance, student Joy Wang answered "Yes." Due
 39 to the students standing in a specific position and moving in an orderly manner she
 40 saw it as a ritual. Wang added that what made her feel the performance was a
 41 ritual was "the combination of the event and *Earth Day*, which gave the
 42 performance a special meaning." Wang's idea of a ritual is "to give a better
 43 meaning to an action." She identified 4 stages in the performance: going towards
 44 The Whale, dancing solos, repetition of solos, walking around The Whale. For
 45 Wang, walking around The Whale 3 times made her feel the piece was about
 46 sustainability. She thought that the performance was "an amazing experience."

1 She feels they committed to the event voluntarily and that it was a “really
2 meaningful performance.”

3 Student Miquela Montana also perceived the event as a ritual given the way
4 they raised their hands to The Whale forward and backwards. She felt she was
5 worshipping The Whale as a sign of respect due to whales becoming an
6 endangered species. For Montana, it would have been more empowering if they
7 each did a 10-20 seconds individual dance in a chronological order, then come
8 together and dance surrounding The Whale to symbolize how we are individuals
9 who come together to help protect the whales. As she explains, “education of the
10 species is one thing, but implementing an art form can help build a core memory
11 for those who witnessed it, which could promote sustainability.” She considers the
12 experience as fun and interesting. She did not expect it to be as big as it was. She is
13 glad their performance made an impact on the spreading of awareness.

14 Yoosub Kim did not perceive the event as a ritual, but as a celebration of
15 *Earth Day* and the beauty of nature. Kim identified three main stages in the
16 performance: the awakening of nature, the living and the farewell. For him, a
17 possible alternative choreography could have been for all students to dance
18 separately (their solos) followed by all coming to meet the whale together as one.
19 Kim admits he felt a little nervous performing, but that he, nevertheless, had a
20 goodtime.

21 22 23 **Conclusions** 24

25 On *Earth Day* 2023, the ritual performed by modern dance students became
26 the only actual collective performative homage to the suffering of our
27 environment. Caused by pollution, contamination and neglect, our natural
28 resources demand our advocacy and protection. As they ended the ritual
29 performance, students danced individually and simultaneously, to then re-connect
30 as a community of wailers. Lynn’s 65-foot replication of a sperm whale became
31 the center piece, the agora, around which the dance students gathered to perform
32 what was also their final solo for their *Modern Dance* class. After a whole
33 semester of creative body work, they offered their solos to the ritual performance.
34 Their gesture signaled awareness about the need to invest in a sustainable planet.
35 Given more time, we could have produced a ritual performance capable of
36 remaining an authentic statement about sustainability. However, given the
37 circumstances, the adaptation of their solos to the ritual and their collaborative
38 contribution to the collective dance made the bigger statement possible. It was
39 evident the role the arts can play, in conjunction with Sustainability experts, in
40 fomenting a culture of responsible active empathy about our planet and its future.
41 Art, dance and music, along with the larger frame provided by *Earth Day* and *Hug*
42 *the Lake* became an example of how collaborative work among university
43 departments can engage students to embody knowledge acquisition about
44 sustainability and the protection of the environment.

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