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## **Movement as a Way of Knowing Earth: An Ecosomatic Approach to Developing Movement Choices**

Brittany Tolbert

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Movement as a Way of Knowing Earth:  
An Ecosomatic Approach to Developing Movement Choices

by

Brittany Tolbert

A Thesis  
Submitted to the Honors College of  
The University of Southern Mississippi  
in Partial Fulfillment  
of Honors Requirements

May 2022



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## ABSTRACT

The senior choreographic project *The Spirit of Gaia* aims to not only build awareness for individuals about the impact humans have on the climate crisis but also to inspire change in the way in which humans utilize movement practices for the benefit of Earth. As a creative process based in somatic exploration and a performance contingent on a live audience, *The Spirit of Gaia* exists as a living moment of dance. Acknowledging the power movement has to be the progenitor of a larger environmental consciousness and an eco-friendly change on the individual level, the dance acts as a means of connection between the Earth, the dancers, and the audience. This paper describes the ecosomatic movement practices utilized during the process of creating *The Spirit of Gaia* and leads the reader through the choreographer's experiences and discoveries.

**Keywords:** bodily becoming, choreography, community, dance, Earth, ecological consciousness, ecosomatics, embodied movement, Kimerer LaMothe, Sondra Fraleigh

## **DEDICATION**

I would like to dedicate this thesis to all living beings of Earth, who are daily participants in the dance of life.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Firstly, I wish to acknowledge the University's and the dance program's significant roles in aiding my ability to study at this wonderful college, in which my intellectual growth has abounded. I would like to extend my sincerest gratitude to my professors and advisors in and out of the dance program at USM, who have all given a supportive shoulder and helping hand in my growth as a human and my development as an artist. I hold a special place in my heart for my peers and everyone in my family who, throughout the tumultuous last four years, have been behind me on my journey and helping me on my way to the next epoch of my life. Additionally, the four dancers Kaylee Holley, Madison Johnson, Tim O'Toole, and Emaleigh Ousterhout have my utmost appreciation and respect for their willingness to be vulnerable and open-minded during the process and creation of my research. Without my dancers, the dance *The Spirit of Gaia* would not have been possible. Additionally, all artists who have come before me instill a lasting respect and appreciation within me for the work that has been a muse and an inspiration for the continuation of my own creativity and artistic journey. Lastly, I would like to conclude my acknowledgements by recognizing the land on which my research was conducted as the land of the Chahta Yakni (Choctaw) indigenous peoples and offer respect for the endurance of their traditional territories.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS .....	viii
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS.....	xii
CHAPTER I: CONTEXTUAL RESEARCH.....	1
CHAPTER II: THE PROCESS OF CREATING <i>THE SPIRIT OF GAIA</i> .....	12
SPVA Honors College Statement .....	12
Introduction.....	13
Process Overview.....	19
Conclusion .....	26
CHAPTER III: PRODUCTION AND PERFORMANCE ELEMENTS .....	29
CHAPTER IV: POST-PRODUCTION .....	34
APPENDIX A: Creative Process Materials .....	40
APPENDIX B: Performance Materials .....	47
REFERENCES .....	63



## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Figure 1: Kaylee Holley and Tim O'Toole performing The Spirit of Gaia. (Photo by Kelly Dunn) .....	14
Figure 2: Emaleigh Ousterhout and Madison Johnson performing The Spirit of Gaia. (Photo by Kelly Dunn).....	14
Figure 3: Emaleigh Ousterhout's written reflection from a meditative prompt. ....	27
Figure 4: Kaylee Holley's positive change in relation to Earth after the process. ....	28
Figure 5: Kaylee Holley's positive change in relation to Earth after the process (continued). ....	28
Figure 6: Madison Johnson's positive change in relation to Earth after the process. ....	36
Figure 7: Madison Johnson's positive change in relation to Earth after the process (continued). ....	36
Video links to various movement experiences: .....	40
Music Links: .....	40
Figure 8: Notes from sources read to inspire ecosomatic movement prompts. ....	40
Figure 9: Notes from sources read to inspire ecosomatic movement prompts. ....	41
Figure 10: Notes from sources read to inspire ecosomatic movement prompts. ....	41
Figure 11: Rehearsal notes.....	42
Figure 12: An investigatory reflection by Tim O'Toole.....	42
Figure 13: An image inspiring movement for the piece. ....	43
Figure 14: A written reflection from a meditative prompt done by Emaleigh Ousterhout. ....	44
Figure 15: Journal image from a meditative prompt done by Emaleigh Ousterhout.....	44

Figure 16: Journal image from a meditative prompt done by Emaleigh Ousterhout.....	45
Figure 17: Tim O'Toole's positive change in relation to Earth after the process.....	45
Figure 18: Tim O'Toole's positive change in relation to Earth after the process (continued).....	45
Figure 19: Emaleigh Ousterhout's positive change in relation to Earth after the process.	46
Figure 20:Emaleigh Ousterhout's positive change in relation to Earth after the process (continued).....	46
Figure 21: Fall 2021 RDC Concert II Program .....	47
Figure 22: Kaylee Holley, Madison Johnson, Tim O'Toole, and Emaleigh Ousterhout performing The Spirit of Gaia. (Photo by Kelly Dunn).....	48
Figure 23: Kaylee Holley, Madison Johnson, Tim O'Toole, and Emaleigh Ousterhout performing The Spirit of Gaia. (Photo by Kelly Dunn).....	48
Figure 24: Kaylee Holley, Madison Johnson, Tim O'Toole, and Emaleigh Ousterhout performing The Spirit of Gaia. (Photo by Kelly Dunn).....	49
Figure 25: Madison Johnson and Emaleigh Ousterhout performing The Spirit of Gaia. (Photo by Kelly Dunn).....	49
Figure 26: Kaylee Holley and Tim O'Toole performing The Spirit of Gaia. (Photo by Kelly Dunn) .....	50
Figure 27: Kaylee Holley and Tim O'Toole performing The Spirit of Gaia. (Photo by Kelly Dunn) .....	50
Figure 28: Kaylee Holley, Madison Johnson, and Emaleigh Ousterhout performing The Spirit of Gaia. (Photo by Kelly Dunn) .....	51
Figure 29: Tim O'Toole performing The Spirit of Gaia. (Photo by Kelly Dunn).....	51

Figure 30: Tim O'Toole performing The Spirit of Gaia. (Photo by Kelly Dunn)..... 52

Figure 31: Kaylee Holley, Madison Johnson, and Tim O'Toole performing The Spirit of Gaia. (Photo by Kelly Dunn) ..... 52

Figure 32: Kaylee Holley, Madison Johnson, Tim O'Toole, and Emaleigh Ousterhout performing The Spirit of Gaia. (Photo by Kelly Dunn)..... 53

Figure 33: Madison Johnson performing The Spirit of Gaia. (Photo by Kelly Dunn) ..... 53

Figure 34: Emaleigh Ousterhout performing The Spirit of Gaia. (Photo by Kelly Dunn) 54

Figure 35: Kaylee Holley, Madison Johnson, Tim O'Toole, and Emaleigh Ousterhout performing The Spirit of Gaia. (Photo by Kelly Dunn)..... 54

Figure 36: Kaylee Holley, Madison Johnson, Tim O'Toole, and Emaleigh Ousterhout performing The Spirit of Gaia. (Photo by Kelly Dunn)..... 55

Figure 37: Kaylee Holley, Madison Johnson, Tim O'Toole, and Emaleigh Ousterhout performing The Spirit of Gaia. (Photo by Kelly Dunn)..... 55

Figure 38: Kaylee Holley, Madison Johnson, Tim O'Toole, and Emaleigh Ousterhout performing The Spirit of Gaia. (Photo by Kelly Dunn)..... 56

Figure 39: Kaylee Holley, Madison Johnson, Tim O'Toole, and Emaleigh Ousterhout performing The Spirit of Gaia. (Photo by Kelly Dunn)..... 56

Figure 40: Kaylee Holley and Tim O'Toole performing The Spirit of Gaia. (Photo by Kelly Dunn) ..... 57

Figure 41: Kaylee Holley, Madison Johnson, Tim O'Toole, and Emaleigh Ousterhout performing The Spirit of Gaia. (Photo by Kelly Dunn)..... 57

Figure 42: Kaylee Holley, Madison Johnson, Tim O'Toole, and Emaleigh Ousterhout performing The Spirit of Gaia. (Photo by Kelly Dunn)..... 58

Figure 43: Tim O'Toole and Emaleigh Ousterhout performing The Spirit of Gaia. (Photo by Kelly Dunn) ..... 58

Figure 44: Madison Johnson performing The Spirit of Gaia. (Photo by Kelly Dunn) ..... 59

Figure 45: Kaylee Holley, Tim O'Toole, and Emaleigh Ousterhout performing The Spirit of Gaia. (Photo by Kelly Dunn) ..... 59

Figure 46: Madison Johnson, Tim O'Toole, and Emaleigh Ousterhout performing The Spirit of Gaia. (Photo by Kelly Dunn) ..... 60

Figure 47: Kaylee Holley performing The Spirit of Gaia. (Photo by Kelly Dunn) ..... 60

Figure 48: Kaylee Holley, Madison Johnson, and Emaleigh Ousterhout performing The Spirit of Gaia. (Photo by Kelly Dunn) ..... 61

Figure 49: Kaylee Holley and Tim O'Toole performing The Spirit of Gaia. (Photo by Kelly Dunn) ..... 61

Figure 50: Tim O'Toole and Emaleigh Ousterhout performing The Spirit of Gaia. (Photo by Kelly Dunn) ..... 62

Figure 51: Kaylee Holley and Tim O'Toole performing The Spirit of Gaia. (Photo by Kelly Dunn) ..... 62

## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

USM            The University of Southern Mississippi

## CHAPTER I: CONTEXTUAL RESEARCH

*Traveling over the skin, the hand brushes down the length of the opposite arm, shedding the feeling of the day. As the feet sink into the cushion of grass, the mind rests, if only for a moment, and in that second of time, no thought troubles the present. All thoughts pass as if clouds in the wind. Suddenly, there is nothing known, everything unknown. Existence is the state of being. Noticing the movement of the leaves on the trees above, the fingers twitch. The ears find the soft lull of the bumble's buzzing, and the breeze cascades over the exposed skin of the body. In response to the goading of the movement around, the feet begin pacing, rolling around, searching to blanket every inch of surface in grass. The sensation is satisfying. Now the arms are up, grasping for the leaves and desiring to know what it is like to be "moved in and by nature," what it is like to dance the movement of Earth (LaMothe "As the Earth Dances" 125). The movement continues. "What always is is always becoming, ever humming, itself overcoming, with no particular preference for human lives; oh we may come and go in time, but movement never dies" (LaMothe "As the Earth Dances" 126).<sup>1</sup>*

To be "moved in and by nature" means moving empathetically (LaMothe "As the Earth Dances" 125). Choosing to move one's body with empathetic intention holds the potential for engendering individual, positive change within the collective, destructive trajectory that is the current climate situation. My concern for the general lack of consideration and empathy within people for the issues of climate change, species endangerment, and other forms of ecological destruction is the force behind my research

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<sup>1</sup> The writing in this thesis will be framed by italicized movement description, appropriate to research in the field of dance.

and my creation of a dance piece.<sup>2</sup> In my research, the process of creating contributed a plethora of discoveries. When I refer to research, I am not only referring to my contextual research, but I am also referring to the creative activities and rigorous rehearsal processes that led to this learning and discovery. These activities include dancing, reflection in writing, reflective contemplation, and various modes of artistic expression.

Even with the awareness of various ecological issues coming to the forefront of societal thought, less attention has been paid to the ways in which people's *movement* impacts the climate crisis. For example, a simple movement such as throwing a plastic bag away has tremendous consequences on the health of Earth. When I write of "movements," I am referring to the everyday movement of people, including the items with which people interact and how that directly affects Earth. Although some may see this as a behavioral perspective, I am viewing it through the lens of movement because the perspective movement brings has the necessary insight to understand the physical practices through which behavior is informed, observed, and studied. When viewing the choice of throwing a plastic bag away as a movement, I am also considering the journey of that plastic bag as a series of movements. Beginning at its ecologically harmful manufacturing, the plastic bag starts its movement journey at creation, in which its manufacturing "contributes to acid rain and smog" (Ansari 597). In the shipment of the bag to the store, the vehicles and/or vessels "use fuels which produce high levels of pollutants" (Ansari 598). It is then *moved* to a store, in which a person *moves* the bag from the shelf of a grocery aisle to the storage of a home. The person takes the bag and seals and unseals it in swift, practiced *motions* and continues interacting with it until its

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<sup>2</sup> The word "piece" is a term used to describe a singular dance.

single-use purpose has been fulfilled. Tossed by those hands into a trash bin, the bag is then *moved* along an unseen journey, potentially making it to a landfill in which the bag joins many others like it. On average, the “plastic carrier bag is used for five minutes, but takes 500 years to decompose” (Ansari 599). Even though this exact journey is not true for all people and all homes, the enduring existence of movement in the activities of life demonstrates the need for understanding the impact of human movement on Earth. The swift, practiced motions an individual engages in everyday can have environmental consequences on a larger, more global scale. To cultivate a lasting change in the way a person habitually thinks and moves often requires daily practice of mindfully choosing to move differently in order to develop new habits. With a layer of *ecosomatic* practice, movement can play a more conscious role in leading humans toward a collective, sustainable living. Ecosomatics is a relatively new field and involves multidisciplinary approaches to healing humans’ mind/body relationship with Earth. I am specifically focusing on aspects of “bodily becoming” and embodiment to explore using ecosomatic movement practices as an approach to healing relationships between people and Earth.

Susan Bauer, the founder of Embodiment in Education, says, “We are each born of the body of another, live on the Earth through a dynamic exchange with the environment, and return our bodies to the earth at our death,” (Bauer 8). Movement is present in every aspect of the cycle of birth, living, dying, and returning. Humans are in a constant state of change, of movement, and of progression in time. From the moment of new life to the moment of relinquishing life, “one movement gives rise to another” (LaMothe “As the Earth Dances” 128).



Dance scholar and ecosomatic practitioner Kimerer LaMothe utilizes the term "bodily becoming" in her book *As the Earth Dances, A Philosophy of Bodily Becoming* to describe this continuous changing of movement in and through the human body. It is important to mention that the idea of "bodily becoming" is also a concept stemming from philosophy. To distinguish her use of the term "bodily becoming" in ecosomatics from its usage in philosophy, LaMothe describes it as the continuously changing movement of the self in relation to earth and "matter" (LaMothe "As the Earth Dances" 127). In ecosomatics, "bodily becoming" also includes a person's conscious awareness of this constant transformation. This transformation of the self in relation to movement is evident in the way in which a person actively responds to the movement present within the environment in which that person is situated, constantly forming and reforming movement patterns in "human-sustaining ways" (LaMothe "As the Earth Dances" 127). These movement patterns then become constantly available to that person, who can then repeat the movements that have sustained her, choose to repattern the movements to adapt to a new environment, or teach the movements to others, passing them on to future generations. In this perspective of "bodily becoming," tradition is an ongoing myriad of developed, embodied movement patterns which humans have practiced and evolved to respond to Earth, cultures, and communities throughout time in the name of survival. Ecosomatic practices can be used to transform movement patterns within people's bodies. By extension, this repatterning of movement within bodies has implications for the environments that are impacted by that movement. Creating conscious, ecologically sensitive movement experiences can promote healing relationships between people and Earth. Throughout this research, I use the term "experience" to describe the knowledge,

observations, understandings, emotions, senses, perceptions, and wisdom that are acquired through practice in life, specifically movement practice.

The term *somatics* expresses the complex concept of knowing one's body through the inner self. Somatic practices focus on the whole body (mind, emotional center, and spiritual self) and "teach us to become aware of, and learn to consciously repattern, habitual ways of moving," (Bauer 8). Essentially, the body is capable of learning as a center of living intelligence through the insight movement offers. For this research, I am mainly focused on movement education's role within ecosomatic practice in the development of ecological consciousness. Dr. Martha Eddy, the Founding Director of Center for Kinesthetic Education, proposes utilizing somatic movement practices to awaken awareness about the climate crisis and as a way "to appreciate nature" (Eddy 256), or foster a consideration for Earth. By utilizing ecosomatic practices, people can begin to change their movement habits into more eco-friendly movement patterns.

Another dance artist exploring these ideas is Olive Bieringa. Bieringa is an internationally recognized dancer, writer, maker, and educator. She has studied in the Netherlands, UK, Germany, and the USA and is registered and certified in Somatic fields of therapy and education ("Olive Bieringa." *BODYCARTOGRAPHY PROJECT*). In Bieringa's 2010 ecosomatic classroom, which is a "roving experimental project that intertwines the fields of ecology, biology and other sciences along with dance and the somatic practice of Body-Mind Centering," Bieringa focuses on using dance to help develop an understanding of Earth through an approach she calls "rewilding" (Duffalo "on the Ecosomatics Classroom"). In her terms, the act of "rewilding" suggests the use of movement play in natural settings that is inspired by animal and insect bodies in order to

“engage in our human wildness” (Duffalo “on the Ecosomatics Classroom”). More specifically, Bieringa’s inquiries within her movement approaches to ecosomatics are concerned with how the body’s living intelligence can help in bringing forth the healing of humans’ connection to Earth. By participating in the embodiment of perceived animal and insect movement within a natural environment, Bieringa and participants of the ecosomatic classroom intend to “discover other ways of perceiving and interacting with the commons/world,” (Duffalo “on the Ecosomatics Classroom”).

When I was a young child, I was full of curiosity, learning, growth, development, death, and new life. Not only were these concepts in me, of me, but I was also an embodiment these concepts. I embodied my understandings of existence by allowing my movement to express what I perceived in nature.<sup>3</sup> In dance discourse, the meaning of terms "embody" and "embodiment" are frequently debated. For the purposes of my research, I am using these terms to describe the physical manifesting of an idea within the movement of a human body. Looking back on my years in preschool, I can remember in my body’s senses and movement memories times in which I was embodying the animals and plants of my immediate surroundings, similar to the work of Olive Bieringa. My preschool was surrounded by wooded areas from which foxes emerged at night to hunt the school bunnies in their cages. On one night, the foxes succeeded, and one of our precious bunnies did not survive. The next morning, when my teachers discovered the

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<sup>3</sup> embodied – while I offer my definition of embodiment here, I recognize that Sondra Fraleigh has a variant meaning for the term, which stems farther into the etymology and complex history of the word, claiming specifically, “‘To be embodied’ is quite different from ‘to have a body,’ which splits sub-ject from object and indicates ‘possession’ as the outcome—hence, possessive materialism: self-mastery, mastery of others, owning bod-ies,” (Fraleigh “Existential Haircut” 21). This distinction of Fraleigh’s is also important to consider within the context of this research.

travesty, my peers and I were told of what happened. At that time, Earth felt shocking and foreign to me. I had never known of such vicious death in such a close setting, and I was intrigued by its mysteries and confounded by my newly complex emotions. As a way to understand my new jarring knowledge of the world, I chose to embody a sense of the foxes that hunted the bunnies and chase the other kids as my fox self. By doing so, I was not only playing as a child, but I was also inwardly formulating an outlet of expression with my body to find individual understanding of the Earth on which I was living with so many other beings different than myself. I would become the tree that my friends and I ate beneath and played around, mimicking with my body's movement the swaying of the leaves. Even though I was playing with my friends and curiously exploring Earth and specifically the environment in which I was being taught and living my life, my choices to move my body with Earth in order to grasp at its growing complexities ultimately drove me to learn about the unknowns I faced as a child. When we were outside during free periods, my friends and I used movement to understand the Earth, simply playing as children. The experiences, memories, senses, movements, relationships, and emotions of those times ground me in my connection to Earth, to my people, and to the understanding of how intentionally embodied movement with an ecological consciousness foster these connections.

Throughout my research process this year, I have explored ecosomatic movement practices that “could heal the separation between mind, body, and Earth,” by considering “direct sensory perception of one's body both in the natural environment, and as the natural environment” (Bcollective). Because ecosomatics is a relatively new and individualistic field of study, there is no “one” method of approaching the practice of

ecosomatics. However, the implementation of “bodily becoming” within an ecosomatic approach to movement practice suggests, “the art of sensing the 'inner body' as a way to connect to the greater social and planetary (Gaia) bodies,” in order to foster an awareness for how daily movement choices play a role in repatterning human evolution toward more eco-friendly traditions (Bcollective). Movement’s role in the cultivating of this bodily understanding and consideration for Earth lies within discoveries made through subjective human existence, and “in this rhythm of bodily becoming lies the possibility of healing, wisdom, compassion, and love” (LaMothe “As the Earth Dances 130). The deep bodily knowledge acquired from a movement practice to know the self and the self with Earth “forms the basis for personal, social, and even ecological transformation” (Gaiser 149). Ecosomatics offers profound potential in fostering movement awareness and consideration for Earth by way of “bodily becoming,” embodiment, and movement experience.

LaMothe, a dancer and author with discourse in “bodily becoming”, suggests that understanding bodily movement is necessary for human existence. In fact, she proposes that movement is “the medium of human existence” (LaMothe “Earth Within” 204). By recognizing movement's role in embodied states of knowing and becoming, one can create necessary shifts in approaches to movement. Movement has impact on the self and Earth, and Earth and movement shape the self. LaMothe also brings relevance to the assertion that making space for dance, or movement, in the daily lives of humans will engender “transformative power” of bodily becoming, empathy, sensory awareness, and embodiment (LaMothe “Earth Within” 207). Therefore, to know Earth more intimately through an ecosomatic approach could inspire a plethora of more eco-friendly kinetic

creativity within the repatterning of individual human movements. Movement is a necessity to human vitality, bodily creativity, and embodied knowledge, and as humans, “we need to give ourselves permission to explore our fundamental sensory creativity, with the support of others, in ways that attune our senses to the enabling earth in us and around us” (LaMothe “Earth Within” 207).

Dance practitioner and philosopher Sondra Fraleigh takes this permission into performance. As a dancer whose work responds to the work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Edmund Husserl, Fraleigh applies the interconnectedness of self with “world and otherness” in her dance practices (Fraleigh “Phenomenology and Lifeworld.” 11). She brings Merleau-Ponty's discourse on the interrelation of body and world and Husserl's “reciprocity of body, psyche, culture, and the natural world” into conversation with dance and performance (Fraleigh “Phenomenology and Lifeworld.” 12). When she dances, she moves with Earth. When she dances, she moves to know. In the video *ANCIENT BODY BUTOH*, her movement is gradual yet perpetual in its pace, allowing her environment to influence her actions and to develop a relationship between body and Earth. She moves with the surrounding Earth, which can be seen in *ANCIENT BODY BUTOH* when Fraleigh involves a branch and a clump of moss in her movement explorations within a shallow stream filled with water, moss, and stones (00:00:24-00:00:47 and 00:01:20-00:02:11). As she moves in this stream and in other environments later in the video, Fraleigh also engages with moss, stones, twigs, trees, and sand within her surroundings (00:03:20-00:03:38 and 00:07:40-00:08:21). Fraleigh is many things as a human, but as a dancer and mover, she is as she chooses to become. Her movement allows her to more intimately relate to the external world. By exemplifying the vital roles that movement and

dance play in the development of the relationship between the self and environment, Fraleigh advances discourse around the body as a living form of intelligence through performance practices.

I am not claiming that people exploring what it is like to move as a tree in the wind or a fox on the hunt will end climate change. However, I propose that participating in this playful movement experience can expand ecological empathy. From this cultivation of embodied knowledge of self with Earth, the separation of self from Earth can gradually heal. The result of such healing may be a transformed ecological consciousness based in “bodily becoming.” Because “our objective sciences have now provided evidence that universal patterns are right here, beneath our skin, and beneath the soil-skin of the Earth,” consciously changing patterns through movement can impact the individual, a larger collective of humans, and Earth. The movement of humans in connection to Earth can be repatterned directly through ecosomatic practice in order to engender more eco-friendly living and moving traditions on the individual level to then move as a collective over the span of time.

An embodied knowledge of “bodily becoming” and ecosomatic movement practice connects humans to the Earth, as one body. The constantly shifting nature of human movement with Earth has impact on the self and on Earth, connecting both as a whole. As observed in my life, even as a child, my human movement patterns are shaped by experience through the self, situated in Earthly environments. Humans affect each other and the Earth through the agency of actions, of movements, made on a daily basis. From my research, I know movement does serve as a way in which humans can empathize most sincerely with Earth and, “honor the Earth as a dance in whose life their

[humans'] own ongoing movement participates" ("As the Earth Dances" 139). After achieving the development of an embodied connection to Earth, the next step is evaluating how this development influences whether a person now continues to choose single-use plastic and other ecologically harmful habits or cultivates a change in his/her/their daily movement choices. The goal of an ecological transformation of self is to see the internal change influence the daily movement practices and traditions of a person and subsequently, the traditions of collectives and cultures as a whole.



## CHAPTER II: THE PROCESS OF CREATING *THE SPIRIT OF GAIA*

### SPVA Honors College Statement<sup>4</sup>

*Research in the School of Performing and Visual Arts can take many forms and utilize a variety of perspectives. Students may approach their research from aesthetic, anthropological, historical, philosophical, cultural, pedagogical, and creative perspectives, as well as a combination of these methodologies. Qualitative data collected in students' research may include information obtained from written texts, movement observation, film analysis, participant observation, and from their own creative processes. When the written component of a thesis emerges primarily from the artist's creative project, we expect that the writing both reflects and expands upon the work carried out by the choreographic or performance portion of the thesis project. Following the work of the Practice as Research in Performance initiative, which originated in 2001 at the University of Bristol, we regard artistic processes to be significant in and of themselves as well as vital approaches to learning and theorizing. As Dr. Vida Midgelow, long-term chair of the Conference of Dance in Higher Education in the UK, proposes, "practice as a mode of research acknowledges that there are fundamental epistemological issues that can only be addressed in and through practice" (Bacon and Midgelow 6).*

*Below is documentation of the dance "The Spirit of Gaia." The Dance Program regards the choreographic and performance process as half of the thesis project. This*

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<sup>4</sup> Salyers, Candice, et al. *School of Performing and Visual Arts Honors Research Statement*, 2019.

written document reflects on the dance itself and fulfills the other half of the thesis requirement. Note: Viewing this recorded documentation is not the same as witnessing the live performance; however, it is essential for the reader of this thesis to witness the recording as it will be referred to throughout the entirety of this paper.

Recorded Documentation of “The Spirit of Gaia”: <https://youtu.be/2vhWS6HR4Uw>

### **Introduction**

*Give and take, push and pull, reach and retract – a paradoxical sense of opposition and reciprocity exists within these movement ideas. In the center lies a convergence through movement. By exploring the paradoxical phenomena of opposition and reciprocity through movement, the body retains the knowledge, the feeling, the sense, the truths of the existence of paradox in life. With a pull in one direction of the body comes a directly opposing pull in another, and at the center of both forces lies that unity of relationship, connection, and steadiness. The unity, although sought to be broken by shared oppositional pulls, is strengthened by the opposition through reciprocal forces. When one side releases a pull, the other side receives the push, yet the movement experience of the former connection remains, living in the memory of the body. There is another shift, again and again, until each movement becomes a new version, a new status, of opposition and reciprocity. Then, the idea itself shifts, and the end becomes a new beginning. Paradoxically, connection lives even in oppositional movements. It is in this paradox that movement choice reveals its pertinence to the state of all life, in which the beginning acts as the end and the shared opposition effectuates the flow of reciprocal forces.*

*Figure 1: Kaylee Holley and Tim O'Toole performing The Spirit of Gaia. (Photo by Kelly Dunn)*



*Figure 2: Emaleigh Ousterhout and Madison Johnson performing The Spirit of Gaia. (Photo by Kelly Dunn)*



The research process as a whole has been an enlightening journey of learning, developing, and discovering. Throughout my journey, I have learned many things, most retrospectively. By reflecting on my creation process, I continue to learn, even after the developing of the process has passed. I make connections in hindsight and perceive my existence as I move with my body to understand my purpose, my place, and my human curiosities. I am a dancer heavily influenced by Earth. From this research, I have come to deeply understand that my purpose is to encourage others to find ecological consciousness. My place is *with* Earth rather than *on* Earth, and my human curiosities will never find an end without another beginning.

I was already aware of my accountability for how my daily movement choices might affect the environment on a larger scale. I wanted to encourage the development of environmental accountability in others through my artform: dance. Therefore, in the initial thinking of my creative process, my driving desire was to create a dance that inspired environmental activism in others. I decided to approach this developmental process using ecosomatic practices with the intention of healing relationships between people and the Earth (please see pages 4-6). Specific forms of movement practice in my dance life inherently caused sensitivity and empathy for Earth to grow in me, but that empathy did not leave me when I left the dance studio. Suddenly, my movements as a human off the dance floor held more weight. The choice of throwing the plastic bag away or choosing to reuse it became akin to the choice of listening to the alarm bells or choosing to ignore the smoke rising in the room. For me, the smoke rising in the room was actually the rising temperature of the Earth. I simply knew I couldn't be the only one choking in the fire and panicking at the overwhelming evidence of climate crisis swirling

around me. Or, maybe I hoped I wasn't alone, so I entered the process of creating a dance with the obstinate will and passionate intention of exemplifying through research and discovery the true power dance holds to be a courier of change in human life. In my purest desire, I wanted my dance practices to do for others what they had done for me in terms of developing empathy for Earth. I wanted dance to play a role in ending ecological destruction and bringing healing to the Earth.

Experience through movement is powerful; it can offer a profound way of knowing. I discovered this phenomenon of movement experience early in my college career as a dance major. I learned that the body is an extension of the mind. While I could choose to think with my mind and then move, I could also choose to simply think with my body and specifically, through the movement of my body. Instead of only thinking about how to move my body to achieve the emotion I wanted to express, I could begin to move my body as a way to kinesthetically explore how I could approach expressing myself. Not only did this movement allow for expression, but it also provided a newfound bodily understanding of myself and my relation to the external world. Thus, my body's movements on and off the dance floor grew to hold more conscious action, and I gradually became one with the idea that my body was capable of learning through movement as a center of living intelligence. Dance as a way of knowing became a way of life and a fundamental change to my learning throughout the next years of my life up to the development of my senior choreographic project.

*Breathe in and breathe out. Did I have to think before doing this, or did I simply move? As my eyelids travel toward and away from one another, I do not think; I move. There's a steady rhythm in my chest; it is always moving, pulsing, pumping – without*

*thought of action. Action becomes the thought. Gliding, the pen acts as the extension of my hand movement, which carries no preconceived thought as to each ratio, angle, change, and nuance of stroke. As my hand loops and weaves, rises up and arcs down, steadies the pen and shifts the paper, crosses the “t” and dots the “i,” there is no thinking to move in this way; there is only movement to think in this way.*

In a Modern Dance Technique class my Junior year, Professor Katherine Moore taught my peers and me advanced forms of movement techniques through the use of exploratory movement exercises. To help us better grasp the integrity or concept of a certain advanced movement technique within our dancing, Professor Moore instructed us to embody specific ideas reflecting those movement techniques in the world, such as embodying the idea of the movement of a galaxy vs. an atom to help us find a practice of spiraling technique in our dancing. By dancing in this exploratory, consciously embodied way, movement became a kinesthetic expression for my bodily understanding of how the perceived movement of galaxies and atoms exists in my body. It was important for me to explore the movement of galaxies and atoms with my body because this newfound bodily knowledge deepened my body’s ability to find the necessary spiraling for subsequent class dance phrases. I gradually came to understand that the movement patterns that exist within the natural world exist in human bodies. As dancers, people can explore those existences in their bodies not only for health and the preservation of their bodies, but also as a way to share in the movement patterns present within the natural world. This connection explicitly shows that human movements are not separate from the world with which people live. In Professor Moore’s particular exploration of embodying ideas of galactic and atomical movement, I was reminded of how the practice of dance as a way

of knowing stems back to the notion that movement is thought, and as such, I came to understand exactly how dancing is a practice suitable for researching and exploring various concepts with the body.

Professor Moore's movement explorations varied as the class progressed. For example, after the focus shifted from embodying the movement of concepts like atoms, planets, and galaxies, Professor Moore began using movement explorations to help the class find a weighted relationship with the floor, which specifically involved the idea of relinquishing a human body's weight to gravity in order to receive a felt sense of support from the floor. After a number of classes spent kinesthetically exploring ways in which to release weight into the floor of the classroom, Professor Moore held a class outside in the grass. Here, she encouraged the class to explore giving weight to Earth by embodying and kinesthetically expressing a felt sense of support from the ground on which we were moving, which had a profound, subconscious effect on me. After that semester of class with Professor Moore, I retrospectively found that the purpose of the exploratory nature of the movement practices was a mode of developing bodily understanding of complex concepts within human existence and perceived life experience. I was dancing to know, to research, and to discover. I needed to move with Earth to truly know it through my own kinesthetic experience.

The practice of moving with Earth can be seen as an ecosomatic movement practice. After participating in that particular class outside, a subtle change took root in how I viewed participating in dance. I chose to work on dance assignments outside more often in order to feel my Earthly connection as I had in that class and share with others the joys of being outside, especially during the pandemic. During the times in which I

was continually dancing outside, what I thought I knew about dance very easily dissipated in front of the plethora of possibilities it had to offer. I began viewing participation in dance as a rigorous means of learning and understanding complexities as I encountered them. After a semester of experiencing Professor Moore's layered practice of moving with embodied intention, I was subsequently grounded in my advocacy for dancing as a form of research, my considerate tie to nature, and my empathy for all things Earth. I was fueled with the passion and agency to take action in my daily movements for healing myself and healing Earth, which is what ultimately brought me to my research topic. I was aware of the importance of using my artform of dance as a research method within the process of creating *The Spirit of Gaia*. This awareness spurred my hopes that dancing with ecosomatic movement practice would engender environmental awareness and advocacy for change within my dancers, similar to how I had received change in my life through dancing with Earth. Lastly, I was also concerned with inspiring change of awareness within my audience. I understood from my movement experiences of dancing outside as strangers observed from afar that sharing *The Spirit of Gaia* as a live performance could draw an audience into an event of moving with Earth. An audience's relationship to the performance of dance is one of a dynamic exchange. Thus, I decided to involve onlookers as vital participants in the event of collective movement toward ecological consciousness.

#### *Process Overview*

Going into the process of creating, I knew I needed an open mind and a will to embrace change. Even with this wisdom, I could not help but dive into the creation process with a preconception as to how I believed the research would progress. I already



had an image of the dance in my mind and believed the broad subject of energy was the answer to my inquiry about what could connect humans to each other and to Earth. Because I understood that energy comprises all matter in the universe, including humans and Earth, I believed that I would find the answers I was looking for by using the practice of dance to research various forms of energy in relation to Earth and humans. I began my creation process with movement investigations of different forms of energy, like kinetic vs potential energy, energy of the self, environmental energy, and biological energy with the expectation of making discoveries that would substantiate my hopes immediately. With the answers then realized, I thought I would surely be able to bring this realization of the universality of energy to others. When those preconceptions and images were not coming to fruition in a way that I could accurately portray for an audience and for research purposes, they started to become hurdles to jump and walls to block the progression of the piece's fulfilment and the research's integrity. I knew it was time for a change in perspective. As my focus shifted, I reflected often on my contextual research and discussed much with professors and peers. With every step out toward the unknown, the answer became clearer and clearer. The answer was movement. While movement is a specific form of energy, the perspective of viewing movement as the daily course of human existence and development was the necessary delimitation for clarity in research and for deeper, more actualized discovery during the process. I realized that by shedding what I thought I knew and opening my mind to other possibilities, I allowed room for growth and discovery.

After my focus shifted from energy to movement, the ways in which I was directing movement exploration in rehearsal also shifted. One of the first movement

explorations involved the combination of dancing to know and embodied movement, similar to the movement practices from Professor Moore's class. The prompt involved using the body as a center of knowing in order to kinesthetically, artistically, and reflectively explore the self in relation to Earth. For example, instead of focusing the intention of my movement prompts on using the body to learn more about energy, I shifted my attention to investigating the movement of Earth in relation to humans. I knew I had four dancers, so I decided to assign one main element of Earth (fire, water, earth, and air) to each dancer. After informing the dancers of their respective element, I instructed them to shed who they were as humans for one moment and explore what it meant to become and move as fire, water, earth, or air. The dancers used the movement innate to their bodies to explore exactly how their respective element existed within them, around them, and through them in order to find an intimate sense of bodily understanding and discovery. The Earthly element assigned to each dancer became understood and clearly manifested by the expressive qualities of his/her/their body's movement during the conscious, intentional movement investigation. Once each dancer had finished his/her/their investigation, I recorded their explorations, and as a group, we discussed discoveries made during the research (see Appendix A).

This way of researching through movement extended into every investigation in the process, including other exercises of reflective writing, contemplation, and painting. These prompts provided each dancer with profound comprehension of his/her/their own sense of Earth as it existed in their bodies and in the external world. The shift in my focus from energy to movement is what truly allowed me to approach my process through an ecosomatic lens. My initial concern about kindling environmental consideration

within my dancers and the audience of my research remained, so I used the preceding movement prompts as an approach to helping my dancers begin developing ecological empathy through movement experience with Earth. At this point of my process, I was able to travel deeper into the possibilities of ecosomatics as a practice capable of inspiring positive change in individuals toward the healing of Earth through building connections with the body.

By instilling my dancers with the intention of consciously focusing the movements of the body on expressing Earth, I applied embodied movement as the research tool necessary for my dancers. To consistently practice embodying a certain movement of Earth with the body, I started each rehearsal by inspiring embodiment through music. I dimmed the lights and played a piece of music that I felt encapsulated the idea of a certain element, and the dancers warmed up for the rehearsal by exploring in their bodies what it was like to physically express a sense of the Earth as it existed within them and from their own perceptions. (See Appendix A for reference to song titles and artists).

*Fire, the source, the heart, the “Inner Flame” (Kratz). The body cracks and swells, wet with steam, becoming a force of chaotic, untamable ferocity. The legs are taking to the ground in a powerful bound of horizontal energy, propelling forward in a direct, fortified line of targeted passion until, with no hesitation, there is an uninhibited redirect of rushing energy into the ground. The legs are now pressing down, propelling against the ground and soaring the body upwards, quaking and threatening implosion, explosion. Landing, there is a quick, smooth back roll to send the momentum elsewhere. Tense, the fists ball in response to the feeling of the vacuum of air, swirling in pressure*

*and building for release. The intense heat spills forth in a mad rage of quickness and fury, sending the arms around the body, down, around, and back up. The body follows the direction, finding a spiral of fumes as the gaze follows their path, up and away from the confines of the physical body and to the sun, becoming the sun.*

While most investigations included movement research, they also involved auditory, visual, meditative, and reflective examination of relationships between humans and the natural world. Throughout the process of creating movement for this dance, my performers explored in solo, duet, and group practices. Any and all investigations were given and approached with almost no expectations in terms of the dancers' subjective bodily expressions, but for me, there was more to my intentions than movement invention to set for a dance. In addition to working through these ecosomatic practices as a way to choreograph movement for the dance itself, I was hoping that the dancers would experience an evolution in their relationships with the Earth.

While engaged in dance-making as creative research, I was simultaneously pursuing text-based research as well. The majority of those sources were written by Sondra Fraleigh and Kimerer LaMothe, who are both dancers and advocates for the healing of Earth. In Fraleigh's *Dancing Identity: Metaphysics in Motion*, Fraleigh adds words from dancers involved in her various processes, which not only gave me necessary insight into the complex subjects I was reading about, but it also exemplified the importance of the dancers' voices in these processes of discovery. Involvement of performers' voices became necessary in my process. I suddenly became aware of how my dancers' feedback and reflections during the process were vital to the making and understanding of movement discoveries, especially for an observing audience. Because

the voices of the dancers were so pertinent to the process, I will be sharing materials from the process in this paper. (See Appendix A).

Further into the process, when I was met with the reality of having to set movement, I encountered unknowns, fears, anxieties, and struggles. I knew I had to allow myself to remain neutral in these states of being, to accept them for what they were – human. If I allowed the fears to consume my thinking, I intuitively understood that I would become stagnant in my process and miss opportunities to grow. Trying to create a dance based on a topic that feels so large and urgent like climate change can feel intimidating. By choosing to approach rehearsals with some emotional neutrality, I was able to make each choreographic decisions with confidence in learning.

*The storm returns – the rain as sweat and the thunder as the cracking of bones and rolling of muscles. But the day is different, and the air, the breath, blows in the opposite direction. The storm is meant to be the same. Yet, the lightning strikes in the west, not the east. The movement persists. This time, the arm reaches as it did before, hoping to bring to life the storm of ole, but the thunder does not repeat itself in the same way. It calls for change. The day is different, and the breath's cadence does not play the same song in this storm. The day is different, the storm returns, but the movement knows nothing new, seeking to repeat what has already been performed.*

Like a lightning strike that never hits the same place, the movement experiences of the dancers never repeated themselves exactly. The very first time the dancers responded to an ecosomatic movement prompt, their movements were the most connected to their embodiment of Earth, and this strength of connection was evident in their intense expressiveness and bodily familiarity to their movements. Once their

original movements became set choreography for *The Spirit of Gaia*, the dancers' movements gradually lost connection to their original embodiment of Earth, and this lost connection became evident in the spiritless qualities of the dancers' rehearsed movements. They also voiced their struggles to me once the movement became difficult to repeat comfortably. At this point in the process, not only were the movement investigations acting as a form of research, but I was also learning how to choreograph sense and embodiment in the performance of movement. After much discussion and deliberation, I made the decision to not only choreograph a dance, but also to choreograph the original movement experience in order to help the dancers reconnect to their respective embodiments of Earth. I took the various prompts, videos, and song inspirations from the process and compiled them all into an individual document for each dancer to reference during rehearsals and before performances. These research handbooks helped inspire the dancers' connections to bodily memories, states of being, and cognitive understandings that positively impacted their ability to perform the same choreography with new life.

Even after the dancers were given the tools necessary to consistently re-embody a sense of the original moments of their research for each performance, subtle differences in their movements would appear each night. Because movement experience is ever-changing, each individual performance of the piece reflected the uniqueness of the dancers' re-embodiment of the piece itself. In addition to the nuances in movement, the lighting and costuming during the performances also carried slight, sometimes unintentional changes from the original set, mimicking the existence of constant transformation in movement and nature.

### *Conclusion*

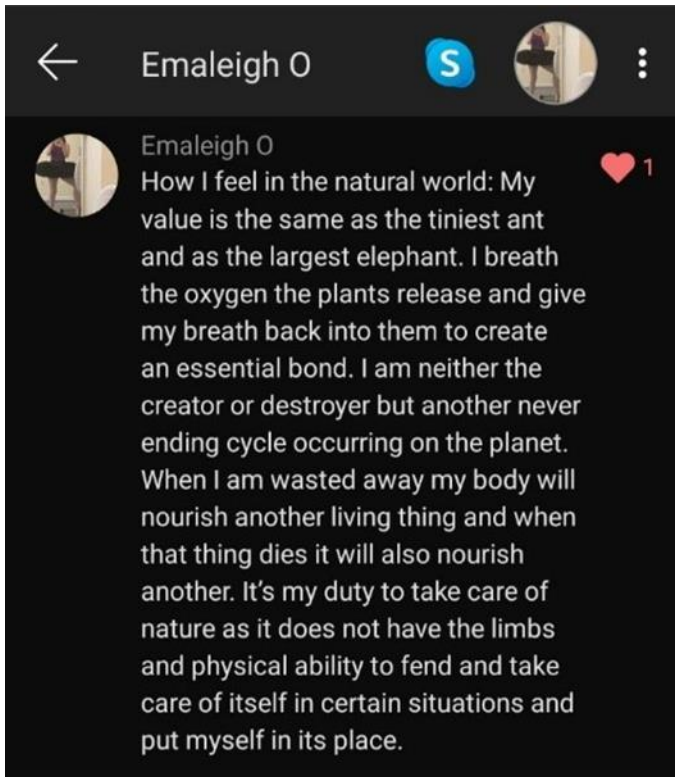
In my project proposal for creating this dance piece, I spoke about my preliminary journey of deciding on a topic to explore creatively and experientially. My purpose of researching the connection between people and Earth was to inspire an ecological consciousness within others. I always found myself circling back to the subject of energy. The use of the word “circling” is important. Circling implies movement, and while movement is a form of energy, I realized during the process that seeing movement as a natural state of human experience, rather than as energy, offers a very necessary delimitation to my work. Circling also implies perpetuity and reciprocity, which I can now also conceptually link to experiential and creative discoveries in this process. The understanding that movement exists in and synergizes everything has remained constant through this research journey. I now understand that movement is humans' connection to the planet and to sustainability.

From the ecosomatic, embodied movement investigations and experiences, much excitement for discussion would arise from the dancers. They experienced an overwhelming sense of awe concerning the depth of conceptual and bodily understanding of environmental concepts gained through movement. The discoveries made by the dancers through their movement experiences and reflective exercises are the moments in which the dancers' connections to Earth grew both bodily and emotionally. It was satisfying to see others connect to and deeply understand the beliefs and visions that were integral to my understandings of humans and of Earth. These humbling moments of exploring experientially and discussing discoveries with others greatly contributed to the learning process and to building positive relationships among the dancers. Movement

relationships within the performance became living proof of the dancers' connections to not only each other, but also to the concepts of Earth and nature within the piece.

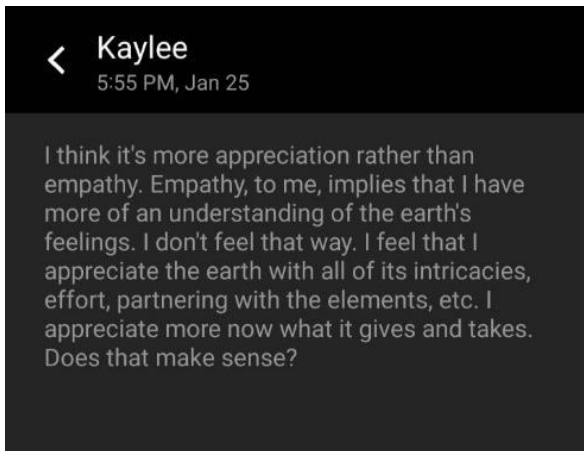
Movement worked to connect the people to each other and to the natural world.

*Figure 3: Emaleigh Ousterhout's written reflection from a meditative prompt.*

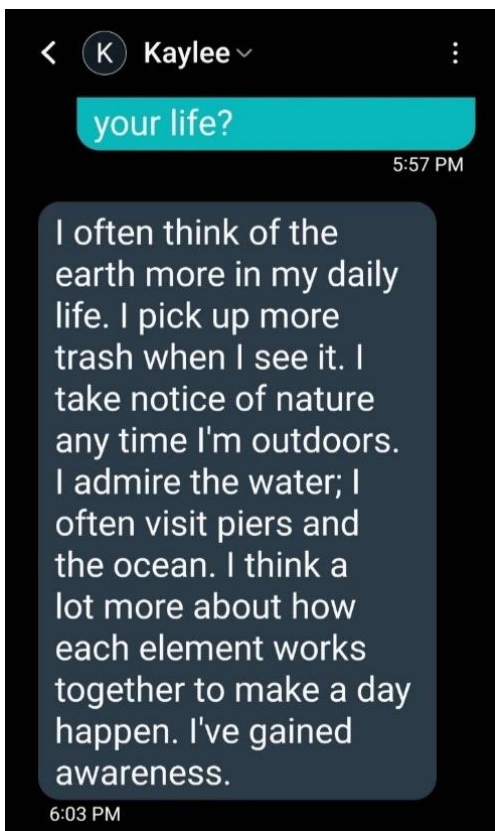




*Figure 4: Kaylee Holley's positive change in relation to Earth after the process.*



*Figure 5: Kaylee Holley's positive change in relation to Earth after the process (continued).*



### CHAPTER III: PRODUCTION AND PERFORMANCE ELEMENTS

Live performance is important in the world because it offers a dynamic exchange between the performers and the audience that is unavailable in other formats. By bringing people together in a shared space, live performance insists on presence, as each moment will never unfold in the same way again. In these moments, the sounds of the performers' breath, bodies, and movements become the rhythm of the space, pulling and tugging at the felt senses of those observing. The energy of the audience then falls into a reciprocal relationship with the performers' energy. In *The Spirit of Gaia*, the audience propels the life of the moment, shares space with the performers, and instills a passionate will within the performers to showcase their precious, nurtured work. The event of a live performance aids in the building of community, directly involves the human senses, and encapsulates the moment of a performance in the fleetingness of time, which are all aspects important to the life of *The Spirit of Gaia*. In this chapter, I discuss production design element decisions that both furthered discoveries made in the process and prepared *The Spirit of Gaia* for live performance in a stage setting.

A section featuring successive solo dances began the piece. When deciding lighting cues with the lighting designer Emily Coley, I decided to have no color on the backdrop, leaving the lighting neutral. Although I did not initially have a definitive reason for this choice, after watching the dancers perform with the neutral lights on stage, I understood its necessity. If I picked one color for the lights over another, this would not be inclusive of each element and therefore not align with the essentiality of each element to the dance and to Earth. By the end of the lighting process, my dance had instances of red, green, and blue tones as well as spotlights, gradual shifts in intensity, and rows of

warm light—all reflecting hues of nature that would be important for a live audience to view.

By considering nature in my production design choices, I maintained an ecosomatic lens throughout preparing *The Spirit of Gaia* for a live audience. In my years as a performer, the procedure of putting my costume on and painting my makeup became a ritual before every performance that helped me embody the intention of the dance I was to perform. For the costumes in *The Spirit of Gaia*, I wanted to offer my dancers a similar opportunity, but I added a layer of ecosomatic investigation to inspire and inform their creative play with the individualization of their clothing, which involved painting and crafting. This element of costume play became personal to the dancers and an additional investigation and expression of their relationships with nature. For example, Kaylee Holley’s ecosomatic play with her costume encouraged her to contemplate her own nature self with Earth, and from her subsequent embodiment, she embellished the pants of her costume with leaves as a form of expression for her perceived connection with Earth. For the live performance, my dancers wore their costumes as additional expressions of their nature selves in order to share with an audience the existence of nature in human creativity.

The music for the first section directly stemmed from the ecosomatic movement explorations in the rehearsal process. For example, Emaleigh Ousterhout’s movement exploration of the element earth involved stomping, and Kaylee Holley’s exploration of air involved the sliding of her feet across the floor, which made a *swooshing* noise. After the four dancers’ solos became layered, these noises suddenly made an impromptu music score as they moved through the choreography. The dancers based their relationships to

one another's movements off of these noises, as if they were listening to music cues in a dance piece. Because each of the dancer's solos were embodiments of their respective element, the noises made by their movements were sounds they associated with their individual element. Therefore, the noises altogether became the underlying music score for the beginning, and later in the creation process, I added a soft, ambient storm recording to supplement the idea of combining all the elements.

During the entire piece, the dancers' movements were accompanied by two pieces of diaphanous fabric that developed conceptual significance during the process. Each strip became its own embodiment of an idea of energetic connection. The fabric was the physical line of energy that connected the dancers in a cycle of back and forth, a circle. It physically represented the spirit of the dancers' bodies moving in the space. With this intention, I observed the dancers' interactions with the fabric and each other as it came time for making staging decisions. In a choreographic setting, staging involves making decisions about where dancers will be located on stage or in the performance setting. After making connections and discoveries during the process, I decided staging directives based on conceptual understandings of connection and community in *The Spirit of Gaia*. During the last section of the piece, both strips of fabric were laid on the floor, and the dancers took pieces of their costumes from themselves and placed them on the fabric, symbolically giving back to Earth what they had received. Choreographically and personally, I intuitively knew this represented the giving and taking present within humans' inherent relationships with Earth. Madison Johnson then rotated a strip of fabric toward the audience, offering connection and empathy for Earth to the audience. This ending to the dance opened up the space and the energy for the collective to merge as one

and for the dance to fall into the hands of humanity as a new beginning. Audience participation was necessary for the simple purposes of supporting inclusive community, bringing energy to the space of the performance, and sharing in the individual moment of dancing for the Earth as humans, not just as dancers.

From my artistic perspective, *The Spirit of Gaia* involves all humans. As I write now, I am realizing that while *The Spirit of Gaia* was a dance involving four dancers and a choreographer, it was also a live, dynamically exchanging movement experience meant to involve the audience as part of the community of Earth. While the performance itself was an ecosomatic experience for the dancers, the conclusion of the piece was the act of transferring that ecosomatic experience to the audience. For me, the end created a new beginning for the members of the audience in their relations to Earth.

The performing of the dance was an embodiment of the theory that ecosomatic movement practices have the power to help heal the relationship between humans and the earth. The entire dance itself became a moment in which the dancers led the audience through an ecosomatic movement experience. For my research, this moment of shared movement experience was highly significant, for it allowed *The Spirit of Gaia* to offer opportunity for change to others. *The Spirit of Gaia* became my way of encouraging others to develop an ecological consciousness through movement practice.

Retrospectively, the importance of a directly live and energetically present audience for *The Spirit of Gaia* can be indicative of the importance of a collective participation of all humans in the sustainability of Earth. While I do not know what happened for my audience in terms of finding connection with Earth, I do know that this process has taught me ways in which to approach any future audiences, such as encouraging active

participation in the movement practice of the performance in some way. My hopes for future audiences will remain the same: encouraging change.

*Hands holding in connection to the spirit, the fabric is cradled like a precious life. Slowly, the body descends to the floor as if melting into Earth, relinquishing the life. The fabric lies on the floor, stretched parallel to the onlookers along the path in which the feet of countless others have danced. The energy of the space buzzes with life. Softly, the same hands press into the ends of the fabric as the head bows to the onlookers, and its parallel line is intentionally rotated into one of perpendicular orientation to the onlookers. The life and spirit of Earthly healing is passed on, lying as an offering with no end. The offering silently beckons the onlookers, whose feet are capable of dancing with Earth.*

## CHAPTER IV: POST-PRODUCTION

My research process has been an incredibly enlightening journey as an academic, an artist, and a human being. Throughout my growth within the process, I have learned much in moments of active work and in retrospect. I seek to continue researching and creating in the future, and from the lessons and wisdom I've gained from my research as an undergraduate, I can take more prepared steps into my next journey. These steps include, but are not limited to, keeping an open mind that allows for learning through change, pacing myself within a frame of time that works best for who I am as an artist, maintaining better journaling habits, trusting and listening to my intuition more readily, and delimiting myself further in the beginning of the process by doing more preliminary exploration into my intended topic.

At the start, I envisioned *The Spirit of Gaia* as an outdoor performance, since its main muse was Earth. While I was considering creating a dance outside, I was also battling with the knowledge that I had missed my opportunity as a junior to produce a dance piece in a stage setting. When I was a junior, the dance department had to navigate COVID-19 safety protocols, which halted all indoor performances. Our junior dance pieces had to be produced outside to ensure everyone's health and safety. While I wanted *The Spirit of Gaia* to also be an outdoor performance, I also didn't want to miss my last opportunity to formally produce a work on the stage setting as a senior. I knew I needed to produce a dance piece on the stage before I graduated in order to be prepared for my work as a choreographer in my professional career. Amidst this indecision, I was open to listening to my dancers' opinions as an inherent part of my choreographic ethic to include the dancers' thoughts in my decision-making processes. After asking if each of my

dancers would mind dancing outside, I received tentative responses from them that seemed to reveal their conflicting desires to please me by dancing outside or to enjoy the comfort of dancing on a stage. I knew they would feel more comfortable on the stage, so I took their responses as a directive that led me to the decision of ultimately practicing and producing the work on the stage while still holding most of the movement explorations and meditative/reflective experiences outside. Because I had been open to this change in my original desires for the piece, I realize now that my dancers' reluctance to dance outside but willingness to try new things offered the opportunity to implement ecosomatic practice as an approach to bringing positive change to their respective relationships with Earth. From the ecosomatic movement experiences within the process, I have undergone transformation in my relationship with Earth by gaining a deeper understanding of my bodily movement connection to nature and by receiving a stronger will to take greater eco-friendly steps in my life. My dancers have also experienced positive change and growth in their respective relationships with Earth. For example, the images below describe how one dancer perceived herself changing during the rehearsal process.



Figure 6: Madison Johnson's positive change in relation to Earth after the process.

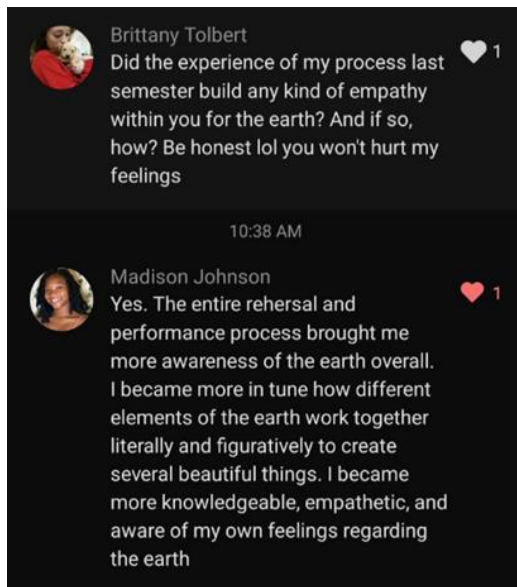
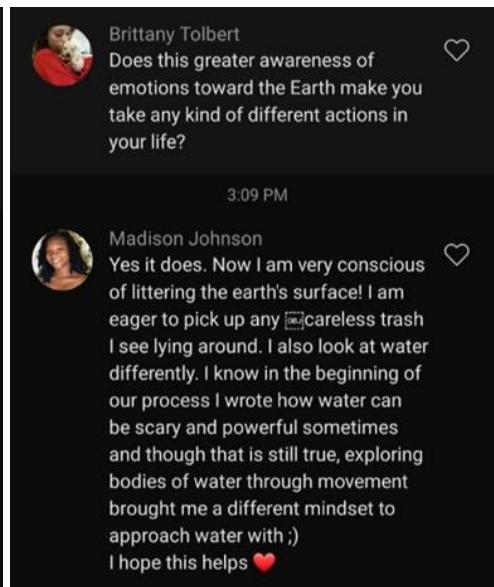


Figure 7: Madison Johnson's positive change in relation to Earth after the process (continued).



With this project being my first true research endeavor, I began the journey knowing nothing of what I know now. I thought I had limited myself well enough to have a good focus on my topic: movement, energy, and sustainability. But as I progressed, I realized just how broad my subjects were, and I was faced with more questions than answers. Now, I know to limit myself more in the beginning, in order to maximize my time for extensive and thorough research, especially contextual research. By narrowing my scope, I can experience a greater depth in the conceptual understanding of the context of my topic in order to be able to apply this understanding during the movement experiences. Finding greater specificity in my research question is something I wished I had done before going into my process. Due to my original expectations for the trajectory of my research and process, I tried to take on too much at once. With hindsight, I now see the remaining depth I still have yet to explore within certain aspects of my research. For example, I could simply take the topic of “bodily becoming” and have an entire, separate

research process just on that subject. Of course, I know this now and am thankful that this was a lesson I could learn through this research project and the creation of *The Spirit of Gaia*.

In the future, I will also keep a more comprehensive artistic journal to document my research processes. While I do have many journaling materials from my creation process, such as dancers' reflections and journal images (see Appendix A), I needed to write more specifically about movement experiences, my decision-making process, and my own discoveries. I should have kept more of the reflections from my dancers and recorded more of our discussions together. I found in my writing about the process that my mediocre journaling habits created challenges in fully depicting details of the process and the research. In order to inform my writing more thoroughly, I will go into creative processes understanding the necessity of good journaling habits.

This process has taught me that my best thinking often happens after I have taken action in rehearsal. I work this way because I seek to trust my intuition as another way of knowing within the rigorous structure of a creative process. When I trust my intuitive knowledge, I am able to make choices within the creative process that exceed a predictable outcome. By choosing to approach the unknown with humility, knowing that I do not know everything, I am open to discovery and to the use of imagination and trial and error as parts of a rigorous creative process. However, trust can evoke a sense of fear. I trusted my intuition when initially deciding to not have recorded music in the first section of *The Spirit of Gaia*, even though I feared that the absence of music would make my audience uncomfortable. I eventually caved to my fear and ignored my initial intuition to challenge my audience's expectations. I added the storm ambience to

accompany the dancers' noises for that section. The decision I made about the music was to fit a standard of dance production that is not my own, and I ignored the discoveries made in my process to fit this standard. This decision is something I want change, but I have learned to let it remind me to always trust what I know, despite my fears. When I am faced with my fears during creative processes, I want to look back on this process and remember that I will always have fears, even when I am where I am meant to be, and that my fears are what make me human. My fears are not what stop me from creating and moving forward; rather, they show me how or how not to move forward. They are indicators of a shift. It is in the dark of facing fear and the unknown that I want to more readily listen to my intuition and know my truth. Things happen for a reason in order to help me progress on my journey. To know this is to be comfortable with fear and with what I may perceive as mistakes, which are only opportunities to learn.

By trusting my intuition and making connections both actively and retrospectively, a more defined relationship with how I approach the process as a whole has grown throughout my first research project. For example, I now know boundaries I can set in the future for how much time per day I spend on the research and the process, allowing myself to take my time in order to not feel overwhelmed or pressured for answers. From this research and other moments in my life as an undergraduate, I know that I am not a person who works for deadlines. I prefer to allow the research to take its own course of time and prefer to have patience with discovery. For example, some discoveries within my research journey were almost immediate during the creation process, but some discoveries are still taking place even as I write this chapter. I am almost certain that years after this moment, I will be looking back on this

process fondly and discover even more from the research. In my life, I am still learning from moments that happened in my childhood, especially my memories as a child at play with Earth. This existence of perpetual discovery is the beauty of learning and of the evolving, ever-changing phenomenon of human movement.

This process as a whole has reminded me of the joy in not seeing mistakes as signs of failure but as signs of change, learning, and discovery. In the future, I feel this perspective on mistakes will be a defining quality of my artistry and will directly translate into my love for humanness and for the uniqueness of all things Earth. From the learning in this process, I have a more intimate sense of who I am as an artist, and this deeper understanding of myself will inform the choices I make in my life after college. These choices not only concern my future in performance, choreography, or in dance as a whole, but they also involve my life as a human in the context of community, in relation to the Earth, and in my daily movement. I have never been filled with such a sense of purpose and activism as I am now. From this research and the resulting creative process, I can go into my future with a renewed sense of self, passion, purpose, and advocacy. I can go into the future as a human aware of how her movement affects the Earth and how it can inform her and others who are willing to move into the unknown.

## APPENDIX A: CREATIVE PROCESS MATERIALS

Video links to various movement experiences:<sup>5</sup>

<https://youtu.be/xVyz2whr5s4>  
<https://youtu.be/0je1QMUQwqI>  
<https://youtu.be/vA3LVkYfodc>  
<https://youtu.be/VUhUOesv3Jk>  
<https://youtu.be/Ass3wZRdz7Q>  
<https://youtu.be/sV0Zb5sbvKU>  
<https://youtu.be/RpMhKU3STiY>  
<https://youtu.be/K63ip9DNqPQ>  
<https://youtu.be/pDeZD6Xe62U>  
<https://youtu.be/fia-8lNKoE4>  
<https://youtu.be/sBpvJKbVidQ>  
<https://youtu.be/jq2IYnyMT0Y>

Music Links:

Fire: [Inner Flame](#)

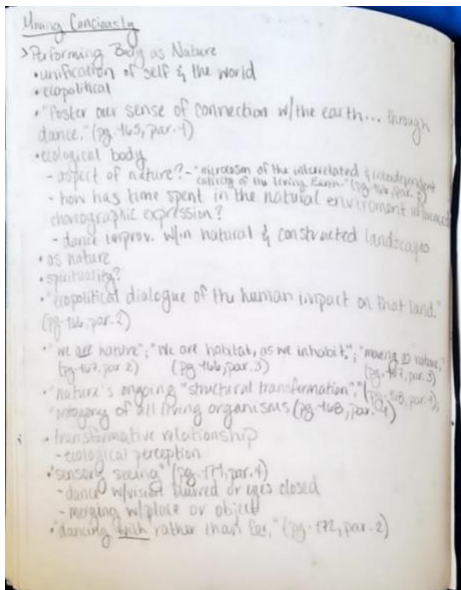
Water: [Tarja Turunen - Oasis \(HQ\)](#)

Earth: [Osi and the Jupiter - Ulv Kult](#)

Air: [A change in the wind - Emotional Music](#)

A culmination of the elements: [Life Is but a Dream](#) and [Evanescence - Eternal \(HQ\)](#)

Figure 8: Notes from sources read to inspire ecosomatic movement prompts.



<sup>5</sup> I never recorded the movement prompts explored outside because those were individual and personal to the dancers.

Figure 9: Notes from sources read to inspire ecosomatic movement prompts.

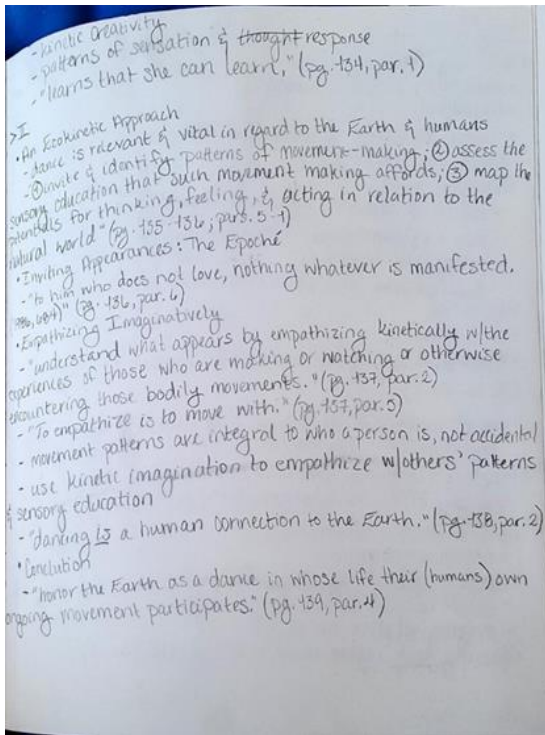


Figure 10: Notes from sources read to inspire ecosomatic movement prompts.

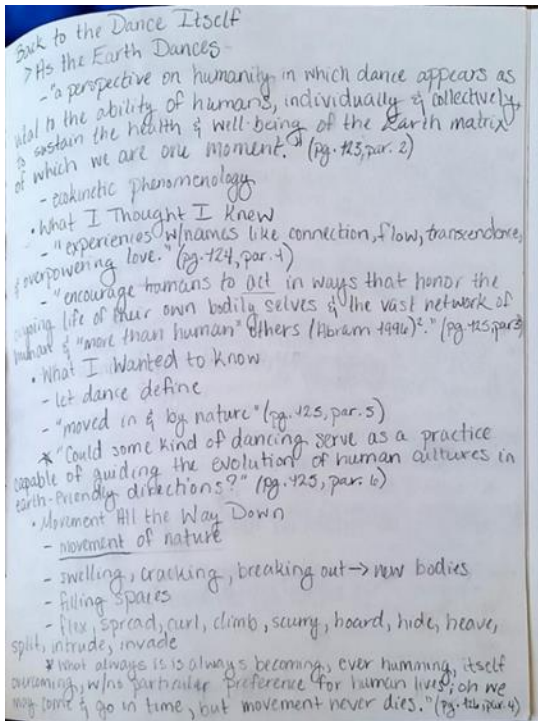


Figure 11: Rehearsal notes.

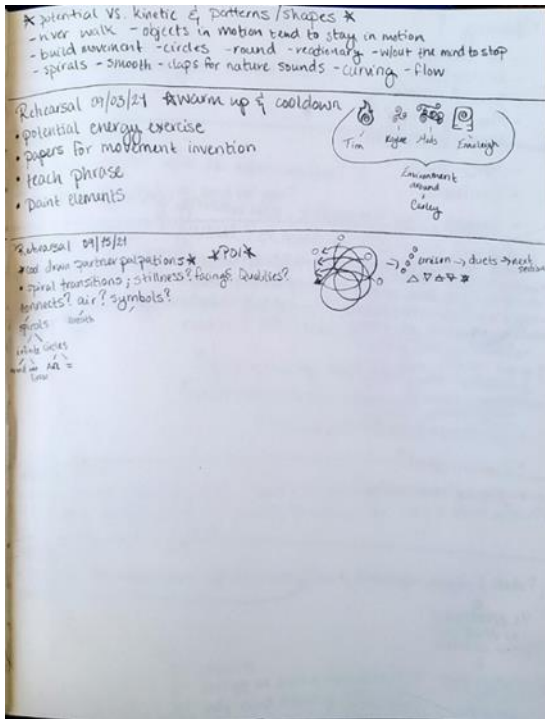
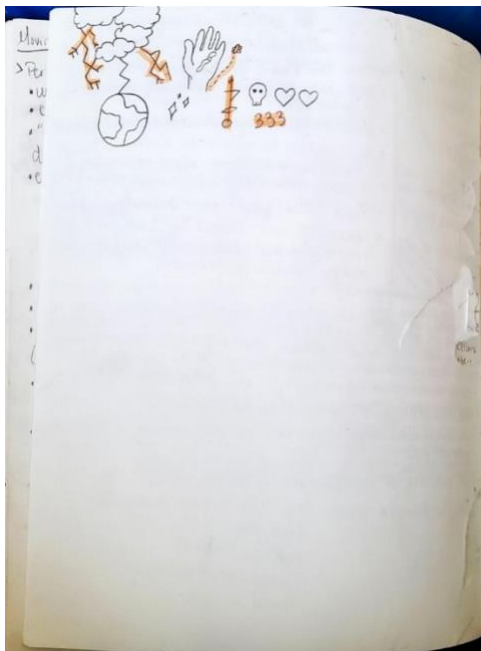


Figure 12: An investigatory reflection by Tim O'Toole.



*Figure 13: An image inspiring movement for the piece.*





Figure 14: A written reflection from a meditative prompt done by Emaleigh Ousterhout.

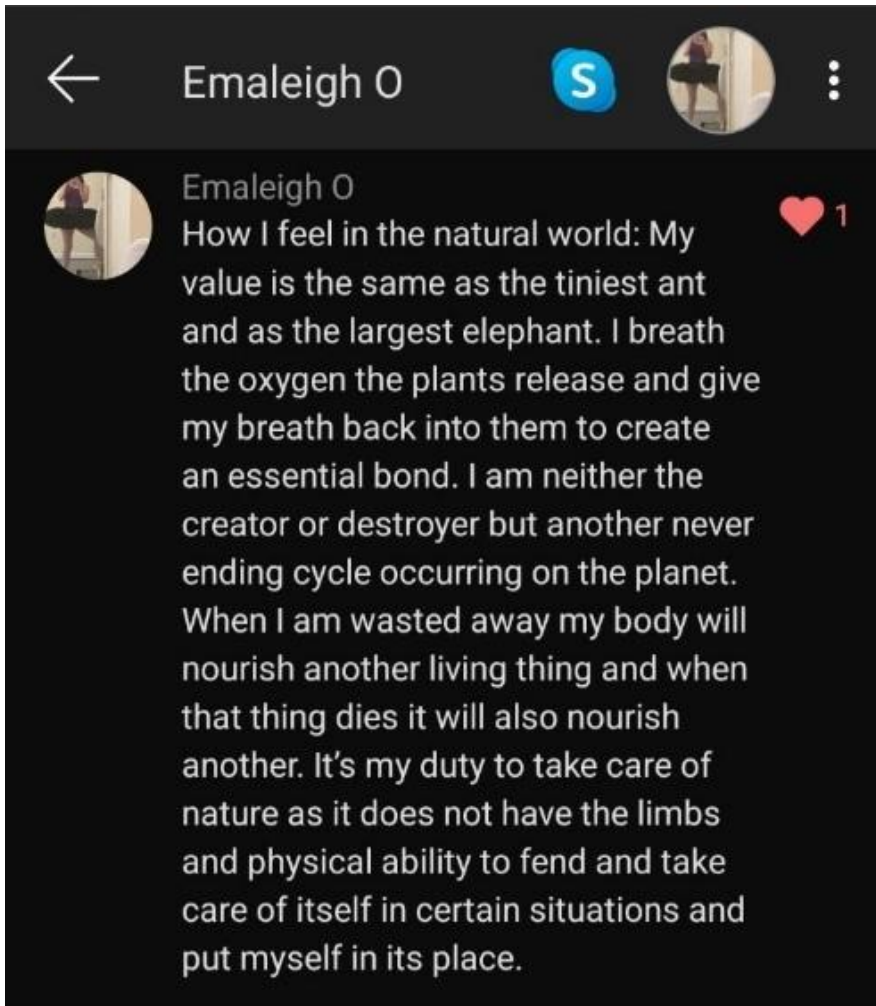


Figure 15: Journal image from a meditative prompt done by Emaleigh Ousterhout.



Figure 16: Journal image from a meditative prompt done by Emaleigh Ousterhout.



Figure 17: Tim O'Toole's positive change in relation to Earth after the process.

< Tim  
7:24 PM, Jan 25

(No subject)

Oh absolutely! I already had empathy for the earth, but the experience of your process really ignited that fire again. I think it did more than you intended even, like outside of the earth too. Your creative process felt like a heating core, vibrating dimly at first, but it gets more excited by the minute. (Re)Awakening discoveries of what we don't always see with our eyes.

How did you do this? I feel like a bring a fresh warm blanket to any rehearsal. The warm space you provide opened me up. It also taught me valuable lessons and allowed me to make my own connections spiritually, physically, and emotionally with the earth.

Literally I'm being so honest right now, like I feel like I would pay to attend a panel that discusses this process and it's content. There were definitely some days in rehearsal where no words of the English language could explain how discoveries were being made in our group and how they felt to us. It was so energetic

Figure 18: Tim O'Toole's positive change in relation to Earth after the process (continued).

< Tim  
8:22 PM, Jan 25

(No subject)

Hmm.. i don't know about different actions, perhaps? This fire was another round. This added fire (along with other spiritual synchronicities at the time) ignited the next step to diving even deeper and learning more and growing. This round of flow was about feeling the power, gaining more, and having the space within myself to harness it. Being more ready- idk it's hard to explain in words. Does that make sense? 😊

Figure 19: Emaleigh Ousterhout's positive change in relation to Earth after the process.

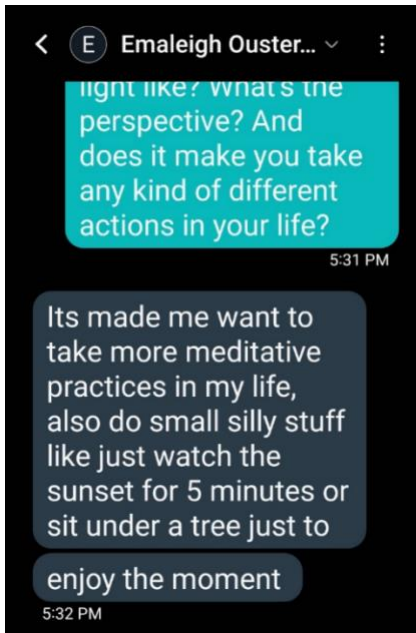
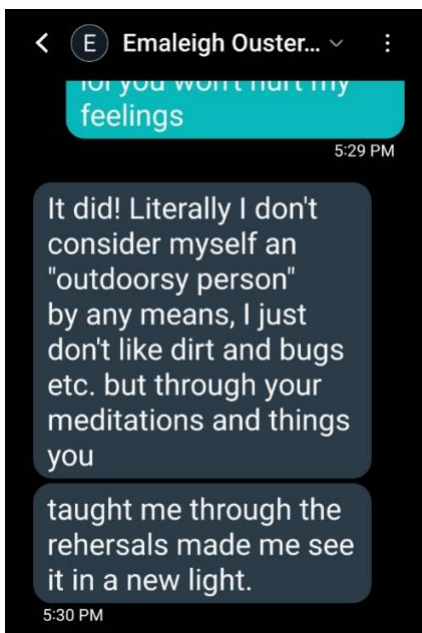


Figure 20: Emaleigh Ousterhout's positive change in relation to Earth after the process (continued).



# APPENDIX B: PERFORMANCE MATERIALS

Figure 21: Fall 2021 RDC Concert II Program



THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN MISSISSIPPI  
**SOUTHERN MISS DANCE**  
**FALL 2021**  
 REPERTORY DANCE  
 COMPANY CONCERT  
 December 1-2, 4, 2021

### NOTE FROM THE DIRECTOR

Welcomed The Southern Miss Repertory Dance Company (RDC) to present its annual the second of two Fall dance concerts. Our concert this evening features dances choreographed by senior dance majors and guest artists.

We hope that tonight's performance engages you to attend more of our events this year. Look for the upcoming season on our website or with announcements and follow us on Facebook and Instagram!

*Lauren Scudetto Smith*  
 Repertory Dance Company Director

### PROGRAM NOTE:

Look, the Earth trembles, the earth is unsteady, the earth is in pain.

When humans are long since a thought of the Earth, movement artists, their consciousness.

The movement of a collection which builds movement.

Move with the Earth, of which you are one, not on the Earth, disconnected, fragmented.

Stay a while in a moment.

Do the spirit of which you move with.

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### TECHNICAL DIRECTION AND COSTUME DESIGN FOR ALL DANCES BY JAMES GILLEY

### BELONGING (GUEST ARTIST)

**CHOREGRAPHER:** Megan Lopez and Lauren Harris  
*Mus. edited by Hugh Leitch*

**MOOD:** "Belonging" by Heeseock, with text by the choreographers, dancers and collaborators

**DANCERS:** Nicole Davis, Kayla Kelly, Brooke Collier

**PROGRAM NOTE:** This piece was made in collaboration with students from MISS Holbrook Dance, a nonprofit dance studio in Nashville, Tennessee. Their program is designed for individuals of all abilities and their goal is to make dance more accessible to all. To learn more, visit [www.missholbrookdance.com](http://www.missholbrookdance.com).

### SPIRIT OF GAIA

**CHOREGRAPHER:** Brianna Tolbert in collaboration with dancers

**MOOD:** "Spirit of Gaia and the Spirit of Earth" by Gaia and the Spirit of Earth

**CHOREGRAPHER:** Brianna Tolbert in collaboration with dancers

**COSTUME DESIGN:** Created with dancers in previous discussions and rehearsal experiences.

**DANCERS:** Kayla Kelly, Maddox Johnson, Tim O'Toole, Emerald Boudier

### THESE DELICATE TIMES

**CHOREGRAPHER:** Nicole Davis

**MOOD:** "It's and life moves along in another world" by Dr. Gary "La Vie En Rose" by Louis Armstrong  
*"I've Got a Feeling" by Lambert Horne*

**DANCERS:** Laddy Davis, Megan Clark, Francis Davis

### TO MISCONSTRUE

**CHOREGRAPHER:** Rebecca Washington

**MOOD:** "Nothing Left" by Carl Tann

**DANCERS:** Madison Johnson, Tim O'Toole, Emerald Boudier

**APPROPRIATE:** Laddy Davis

### SILHOUETTES OF UNSPENT LOVE

**CHOREGRAPHER:** Lauren Scudetto

**MOOD:** "Nothing" by Lauren Scudetto and David Hoar

**DANCERS:** Abby Adams, Madison Johnson, Kyla Williams, Nicole Smith

**APPROPRIATE:** Rebecca Washington

**PROGRAM NOTE:** "Silhouettes of Unspent Love" is a piece about love, it's all the love you want to give but cannot. It's a love that you put up on the corner of your eyes, the love to your friend, and to that hollow part of your chest. (Silhouettes of Unspent Love) by Lauren Scudetto

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### PRODUCTION

**REPERTORY DANCE COMPANY DIRECTOR:** Lauren Scudetto Smith

**STAGE MANAGER:** Casey Robinson

**ASSISTANT STAGE MANAGER:** Caitlin Davidson

**CHOREGRAPHER/ARTIST:** Nico Ferris Lopez

**PRODUCTION ADVISOR:** Brianna Jahn, Kelly Ferris Lopez

**LIGHT BOARD OPERATOR:** Sara Grace Dupuis

**SOUND BOARD OPERATOR:** Tim Knight (Student)

**BACKSTAGE RUNNER:** Sarah Jones

**BACKSTAGE RUNNER:** Kelly Davidson

**HOUSE MANAGER/BOX OFFICE:** Mary Austin-Casper

**HOUSE & STAGE STAFF/STUDENT WORKERS:** Emma Davis

**HOUSE & STAGE STAFF/STUDENT WORKERS:** Madison Clark

**VIDEOGRAPHER:** Liberty Set-Up (Student)

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### DANCE PROGRAM FACULTY AND STAFF

**Arnette Caulty:** Associate Professor, Interim School Director

**Monica Lutz:** Associate Professor, Dance Program Coordinator

**Kathleen Moore:** Assistant Professor, Center for Faculty Development

**Dr. Carolee Seibert:** Assistant Professor

**Lauren Scudetto Smith:** Assistant Teaching Professor

**Jade Henselwood:** Professor

**Sandra Washington:** Administrative Specialist

**Catherine Henry:** Administrative Specialist

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The University of Southern Mississippi is an accredited institution member of the National Association of Schools of Dance.

For more information about the University of Southern Mississippi Dance program, visit [www.usm.edu/dance](http://www.usm.edu/dance) or call (601) 762-4181.

[www.usm.edu](http://www.usm.edu)

*Figure 22: Kaylee Holley, Madison Johnson, Tim O'Toole, and Emaleigh Ousterhout performing The Spirit of Gaia. (Photo by Kelly Dunn)*



*Figure 23: Kaylee Holley, Madison Johnson, Tim O'Toole, and Emaleigh Ousterhout performing The Spirit of Gaia. (Photo by Kelly Dunn)*



*Figure 24: Kaylee Holley, Madison Johnson, Tim O'Toole, and Emaleigh Ousterhout performing The Spirit of Gaia. (Photo by Kelly Dunn)*



*Figure 25: Madison Johnson and Emaleigh Ousterhout performing The Spirit of Gaia. (Photo by Kelly Dunn)*



*Figure 26: Kaylee Holley and Tim O'Toole performing The Spirit of Gaia. (Photo by Kelly Dunn)*



*Figure 27: Kaylee Holley and Tim O'Toole performing The Spirit of Gaia. (Photo by Kelly Dunn)*



*Figure 28: Kaylee Holley, Madison Johnson, and Emaleigh Ousterhout performing The Spirit of Gaia. (Photo by Kelly Dunn)*



*Figure 29: Tim O'Toole performing The Spirit of Gaia. (Photo by Kelly Dunn)*





*Figure 30: Tim O'Toole performing The Spirit of Gaia. (Photo by Kelly Dunn)*



*Figure 31: Kaylee Holley, Madison Johnson, and Tim O'Toole performing The Spirit of Gaia. (Photo by Kelly Dunn)*



*Figure 32: Kaylee Holley, Madison Johnson, Tim O'Toole, and Emaleigh Ousterhout performing The Spirit of Gaia. (Photo by Kelly Dunn)*



*Figure 33: Madison Johnson performing The Spirit of Gaia. (Photo by Kelly Dunn)*



*Figure 34: Emaleigh Ousterhout performing The Spirit of Gaia. (Photo by Kelly Dunn)*



*Figure 35: Kaylee Holley, Madison Johnson, Tim O'Toole, and Emaleigh Ousterhout performing The Spirit of Gaia. (Photo by Kelly Dunn)*



*Figure 36: Kaylee Holley, Madison Johnson, Tim O'Toole, and Emaleigh Ousterhout performing The Spirit of Gaia. (Photo by Kelly Dunn)*



*Figure 37: Kaylee Holley, Madison Johnson, Tim O'Toole, and Emaleigh Ousterhout performing The Spirit of Gaia. (Photo by Kelly Dunn)*



*Figure 38: Kaylee Holley, Madison Johnson, Tim O'Toole, and Emaleigh Ousterhout performing The Spirit of Gaia. (Photo by Kelly Dunn)*



*Figure 39: Kaylee Holley, Madison Johnson, Tim O'Toole, and Emaleigh Ousterhout performing The Spirit of Gaia. (Photo by Kelly Dunn)*



*Figure 40: Kaylee Holley and Tim O'Toole performing The Spirit of Gaia. (Photo by Kelly Dunn)*



*Figure 41: Kaylee Holley, Madison Johnson, Tim O'Toole, and Emaleigh Ousterhout performing The Spirit of Gaia. (Photo by Kelly Dunn)*



*Figure 42: Kaylee Holley, Madison Johnson, Tim O'Toole, and Emaleigh Ousterhout performing The Spirit of Gaia. (Photo by Kelly Dunn)*



*Figure 43: Tim O'Toole and Emaleigh Ousterhout performing The Spirit of Gaia. (Photo by Kelly Dunn)*



*Figure 44: Madison Johnson performing The Spirit of Gaia. (Photo by Kelly Dunn)*



*Figure 45: Kaylee Holley, Tim O'Toole, and Emaleigh Ousterhout performing The Spirit of Gaia. (Photo by Kelly Dunn)*





*Figure 46: Madison Johnson, Tim O'Toole, and Emaleigh Ousterhout performing The Spirit of Gaia. (Photo by Kelly Dunn)*



*Figure 47: Kaylee Holley performing The Spirit of Gaia. (Photo by Kelly Dunn)*



*Figure 48: Kaylee Holley, Madison Johnson, and Emaleigh Ousterhout performing The Spirit of Gaia. (Photo by Kelly Dunn)*



*Figure 49: Kaylee Holley and Tim O'Toole performing The Spirit of Gaia. (Photo by Kelly Dunn)*



*Figure 50: Tim O'Toole and Emaleigh Ousterhout performing The Spirit of Gaia. (Photo by Kelly Dunn)*



*Figure 51: Kaylee Holley and Tim O'Toole performing The Spirit of Gaia. (Photo by Kelly Dunn)*



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