

Intersections of Anna and Lawrence Halprin's Collective Creativity:
Using Site-Specific Dance to Engage Post-Industrial Flint with Riverbank Park

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First Reader

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be "J. Halprin", written over a horizontal line.

Second Reader

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be "Anna", written over a horizontal line.

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Introduction

In the heart of downtown Flint rests a threatened but important part of Michigan's modernist architectural heritage. Riverbank Park is one of several city-initiated projects that aimed at attracting people to the city during the beginning of Flint's severe economic downturn and post-industrial challenges. In the 1970s, the office of Lawrence Halprin and Associates was commissioned to design Riverbank Park along the Flint River, based on flood control requirements. The park won several architecture awards, and became a space for the community to gather and create memories. However, even the park's unique design couldn't overcome the economic consequences of Flint's decreasing population due to the declining auto industry, including issues of safety, maintenance, and negative perception. Today, Riverbank Park is threatened in multiple ways including empty water canals and long-term deferred maintenance. Elements of the original park design are also threatened by revitalization efforts, with concrete portions of the park demolished by the city in 2015 in attempt to increase accessibility.

Riverbank Park was created to challenge the public's idea of aesthetic and spatial beauty, and Lawrence Halprin's designs considered movement patterns and human interaction. Lawrence often collaborated with his wife, Anna Halprin, who's process-oriented approach to dance inspired Lawrence to develop the RSVP Cycles, a collaborative creative process. RSVP stands for Resources, Scores, Valuation and Performance, and together each step provides a transparent process for diverse groups

working together towards common goal. In return, Anna applied the collective process to her work with dance and communities, pioneering the postmodern dance movement on the United States west coast from the 1950s to today.

Anna Halprin's revolutionary approach to dance values individuals as they relate to the community, forging a democratic method that echoes pragmatist John Dewey's aesthetic philosophy of experience. Halprin's teacher, Margaret H'Doubler, worked closely with Dewey and his philosophy to outline a curriculum for dance and movement in higher education, one that encouraged dancers to make their own choices based on the natural experiences of the body. Anna Halprin was subsequently influenced by Dewey's philosophy, particularly the notion that aesthetic experiences are made of individual self-sustaining qualities that contribute to a whole. The pragmatic approach to dance led Anna Halprin to develop a practice that used improvisation as a method for dancing oneself in collective creativity.

Anna Halprin's 1969 dance *Ceremony of Us* illustrates Dewey's philosophy in practice because the process reflected on everyday experiences by addressing prevalent social issues of gender and race in postwar America, contained self-sustaining qualities through organized movement by embodying cultural conflict between conformity and individualism, and involved a creative process that was open to the experience by using improvisation as a democratic method for dance, illustrating the value of pragmatism on Halprin's work dancing with communities facing social issues.

Likewise, Anna and Lawrence were interested in discovering how bodies and environments influenced and interacted with one another, specifically in urban environments. Through their Take Part Process workshops, based on the RSVP Cycles,

the Halprins worked with communities facing social and environmental issues by engaging them as individuals and communities through discussion, reflection, and movement scores.

When Riverbank Park was designed, the process was similar, and included Lawrence's team discussing ideas with the Flint community and asking what they'd like to have at the park. The five-block design included waterfalls, an amphitheatre, farmers' market area, and fountains. When the park first opened, the response was positive, but it immediately faced challenges of safety, blight, and maintenance. The closing of most of General Motors' factories sent Flint's economy into a spiraling depression. Since the early 1980s, Flint's 80,000 GM employees plummeted to just over 6,000 GM employees by 2009 (Gonyea). As a result, the city's population decreased drastically, and during this time Riverbank Park grew blighted and underutilized, becoming a symbol of Flint's class and racial boundaries.

Walking to and from the University of Michigan-Flint dance studio as a student, and then later as a faculty member, I didn't pay much attention at first to the desolate, below-street-level park. The university campus is directly downtown, and my first experience with Riverbank Park was in the winter of 2008, but I don't even remember it specifically. The park can be easy to miss or pass by because it's down at the river level, rather than the sidewalk or street level. Not being from Flint initially, the strange concrete park seemed like the rest of the city's worn and hidden spaces. It was old and run down, but eventually, as I kept walking to the dance studio just north of the park, I became more familiar and comfortable with its abstract features. Ironically, the dance studio, like the park, is located away from the main pathways south of the river when compared to the

central campus and city buildings, so there was a spatial connection that felt similar with both the park and dance studio being on the north side of the river.

In 2009 the park received some media attention when the Grand Fountain was partially restored by a city employee, sparking questions about its future. Progress didn't budge during the next few years, but I continued my route to the dance studio, walking by, through, and over the park, during rain, snow, and sunshine. By 2012 the park was as familiar to me as my own home, having moved to the city that same year. It was also when I first learned simultaneously of the Halprin connection to the park, and the city of Flint's intentions to remove portions of the park's concrete features as part of a larger interest for downtown revitalization.

Sorrow, excitement, grief, motivation, confusion, and a call to action - rushed through my body all at once. How much time would be left before Riverbank Park was just another memory of Flint's failed attempt at a brighter future, demolished and forgotten by future generations? Learning about the park's history and intentions created a stronger connection to the space for me, and I wondered if it would have the same effect on others. Prompting the questions, how would the Flint community respond to Riverbank Park following the participatory dance methods of Anna Halprin in a space designed by the firm of her husband and collaborator, Lawrence Halprin? And, by actively engaging the community with the park as it was originally intended, does the experience create a connection with the park, while inspiring increased appreciation and cultural awareness for the community?

To answer the question of how does Flint respond to Riverbank Park today, I examine Anna Halprin's approach to dance through the lens of pragmatist John Dewey's

philosophy of art as experience, in order to outline a framework for Anna and Lawrence Halprin's collaborative process for working with communities facing social and environmental issues. Then, I discuss the results of applying Anna Halprin's dance philosophy and method at Riverbank Park, a space designed by Lawrence's firm, with the Riverbank Park Dance Project, which engaged the Flint community with Riverbank Park through a series of site-specific workshops and performances.

In order to test this theory, three workshops were held in 2014 that provided participants a hands-on experience with Anna's methods at the park, while discussing park history and creating an opportunity for community members to share their experiences of the park through dance, visual art, and the written word. The workshops were based on the Halprin's Take Part Process, which provided a process for community's to explore and envision public spaces. As the second phase of the research, in 2015, the community responses were developed into an interdisciplinary, site-specific performance at Riverbank Park, which followed a collaborative creative process like Halprin's RSVP Cycles. The rehearsals and performances aimed to provide a powerful aesthetic experience in hopes to increase park education and awareness, while creating an opportunity for dialogue and building a sense of community. Together, Both phases of the project are known as the Riverbank Park Dance Project and are the basis for this paper.

The project discovered that while there were a lot of different experiences with the park, there were also many reoccurring themes. The 2014 workshops identified that the community is unaware of the park's history, and that they had a greater appreciation for the park when they knew the history and intentions while engaging with the space. In

2015, community members reflected on memories, issues of blight and safety, and a desire to see it maintained more regularly. Artists involved in the rehearsals gained new experiences working with the collaborative process and the site-specific environment while feeling a greater sense of community and park awareness. Overall community responses to the Riverbank Park Dance Project demonstrated a change in negative perceptions about the park, increased cultural awareness, and a sense of community between diverse populations.

The Halprin's work demonstrates there is a need for communities affected by their environments to come together and reflect. Anna's methods involved addressing community issues through the power of dance and movement, solving problems through an embodied experience that is continuously growing. Likewise, dance and the arts can play a powerful role in cities like Flint facing post-industrial issues, particularly through site-specific dance. Applying Anna Halprin's dance method at Riverbank Park, a space designed by her husband and collaborator, resulted in a greater sense of community in the post-industrial environment of Flint, a ultimately, the Riverbank Park Dance Project provides a framework for community-engaged site-specific dance in the post-industrial environment.

Theory

Flint, Michigan is an hour's drive north of Detroit, and its residents take pride in its industrial history, earning the nickname "Vehicle City," for the carriage factories that grew into the booming General Motors auto town. The city first became prosperous for its fur trading and logging industries along the banks of the Flint River during the mid-nineteenth century, but the economic benefits didn't come without consequences. Citing a lack of conservation and overconfidence held by Americans at the time, Carl Crow, author of *The City of Flint Grows Up*, states, "after bringing great wealth and prosperity to Flint for almost exactly a quarter of a century, the lumber industry died of malnutrition just as it did in many other parts of Michigan" (24). By the United States centennial anniversary, logging depleted Michigan's white pine resources and the end of the business brought a decrease in population and real estate values. Eventually, Michigan oak trees became in high demand because oil was best shipped in oak containers for leakage protection. Carriages developed as a natural progression from oak and oil, and by 1870, there were half a dozen carriage builders in the city, including the Durant-Dort Carriage Company (Crow 27).

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the automobile threatened Flint's carriage industry. Many were skeptical of the horseless carriage and its ability to change an entire market. Few people were willing to invest in the auto industry due to the uncertainty of the new product. However, competition developed rapidly as David Buick worked in Flint, Henry Ford developed an automobile in Detroit, and R.E. Olds worked on the Oldsmobile in Lansing. Eventually, Flint marked history in 1908, when William Durant organized General Motors, and "by the end of 1909...General Motors had

complete control or substantial ownership in twenty automobile or accessory companies (Crow 77). Automobiles developed rapidly, leading to more than half a century of immense prosperity for Flint, but like logging, no one imagined the consequences of an economy without the auto industry.

By the late 1960s and early 1970s, Flint started experiencing the effects of a declining auto industry and developed an increase in crime and poverty, and a decrease in population due to suburban 'white flight.' The oil crisis of the early 70s hit Flint hard and as population shrunk to the growth of the suburbs, the city made many attempts to compete with the loss of residents and revenue. Steven P. Dandaneau, author of *A Town Abandoned* states, "expectations concerning the city's future were hedged simply in the transformation of 'Flint' into the 'Greater Flint Community,' which appears as an effort to reclaim a fleeing population, if only in words" (195). To attract residents and consumers, the city turned towards urban renewal projects that included highway expansions, the Doyle housing project, and a \$13.6 million 5-block park along the banks of the Flint River for flood control and beautification, according to *The Flint Journal* (Gustin B1).

As part of the city's large-scale revitalization efforts, in the mid-1970s, the city commissioned the office of Lawrence Halprin & Associates to design Riverbank Park along the banks of the Flint River, based on Army Corps of Engineers' flood control project requirements. The Army Corps of Engineers originally proposed a sloping seawall design, like what currently exists at the former General Motors factory site, known locally as 'Chevy-in-the-Hole,' a one-mile radius, empty lot just west of downtown. However, in 1976, the U.S bicentennial anniversary, Linda Tapp, Executive

Director of the Flint Environmental Action Team, otherwise known as the FEAT Foundation, helped win a court injunction that kept the downtown park from just being a big “ugly ditch,” according to *The Flint Journal* (Dolan). After the court injunction, the money was free to be used for an urban park, which also solved the flood control issue.

When the park was still a concept on paper, Tapp led the fundraising campaign to secure its completion. The funding for south of the river was secured, but 112,000 square feet was platted on the north side of the river for an additional fundraising campaign (Dolan). The Mott Foundation helped fund the North bank project, on two conditions - that the city give \$500,000 and that the community raise at least \$100,000 from 5,000 people (Riha A1). Community support was essential, and for every \$1 donation received, donors sponsored a square foot of that side of the park, and their name was marked on a map displayed in city hall’s lobby. FEAT ended up raising more than \$125,000 for the park from 9,700 people, of which 3,000 of the donations were from school children (Riha A1). During the park’s groundbreaking ceremony, Tapp, was crowned “Queen of the River” for her efforts, giving over 170 speeches to community members asking for their support (Cummins A4). The overwhelming response for the park demonstrates the community’s pride in Flint and their belief that the park would address issues of crime, poverty and shrinking population caused by deindustrialization. Unbeknownst to citizens at the time, the park would continue to experience and symbolize a snowball effect of the same post-industrial issues during the next thirty-five years.

Lawrence Halprin and his team would often go to the locations of proposed projects and use community based workshops to understand how people wanted to use their new parks. This process was used in Flint and included traveling the river space and

envisioning it with city employees and community members. Riverbank Park was designed based on ideas from the community and was nicknamed the “people’s park” when it first opened, covering a third of a mile of the downtown banks along the Flint River (Dolan). Small cities like Flint usually wouldn’t have a park designed by Halprin’s firm, but the ‘70s was full of optimism and their hope was that this park could rejuvenate downtown, and be the crowning jewel for the entire county.

Lawrence Halprin was one of the defining modernist landscape architects of the 20th century, and his designs range from the F.D.R memorial in Washington, D.C., to a series of fountains in Portland, Oregon. According to Anna Halprin’s biographer Janice Ross in the book, *Where the Revolution Began*, “Lawrence’s designs focused on stimulating social interaction and creative behavior to make the usual ‘mindless’ walk a feast for the senses ...” (Beardsley, et al. 20). Much of Lawrence’s process was inspired by his wife, Anna Halprin, who revolutionized American dance by incorporating authentic movements into process-oriented performances, pioneering postmodern dance. The two would often collaborate together to design and explore spaces with communities.

Valuing each individual’s experience, Anna developed a pragmatic method to dance that proved useful for working with communities facing social issues. Anna Halprin’s 1969 dance *Ceremony of Us* inspired Lawrence to develop the RSVP Cycles and the Take Part Process workshops. The dance addressed prevalent issues of race and gender in postwar America, while embodying cultural conflict between conformity and individualism, and used improvisation as a democratic method for discovering oneself. Ultimately, examining *Ceremony of Us* from John Dewey’s aesthetic philosophy of

experience provides a framework for engaging the Flint community with Riverbank Park through the practice of Anna Halprin's movement philosophy.

Following the end of WWII in 1945, American culture emphasized a return to family, community, and an overall sense of normalcy. However, by the 1960s, baby boomers were growing into a new generation of individuals who questioned the largely conformist culture of the previous decade. *The Norton Anthology of American Literature* states, "The passage from the 1950s to 1960s marks the great watershed of the postwar half-century" and displayed many "conflicts between conformity and individuality" (Klinkowitz and Wallace 2257). Likewise, modern dance in the sixties echoed American culture by celebrating the individual expression emerging at the time, creating a rebellion against traditional modern dance conformity of the 1940s and 1950s.

By the sixties, modern dance confronted dueling ideals between East and West coast techniques, ultimately resulting in the development of American postmodern dance. Marcia B. Siegel explains in the article, "What Has Become of Postmodern Dance?," that, "...when the historical (original) modern dance was running out of steam...a number of people – like Merce Cunningham, the Judson dancers, Anna Halprin – set out to distinguish their dance from modern dance in a number of empathetic ways" (Daly et al. 50). For Halprin, American dance up to this point was an imitation of someone else's experience.

During this time, traditional modern dance forged by pioneers like Martha Graham and Doris Humphrey, at one time a new art form, now seemed conventional to Halprin. Anna Halprin states in her book, *Moving Toward Life: Five Decades of Transformational Dance*, "you looked like the person who was leading the company,

who in a sense was a guru. Your movement style, your philosophy, everything,” Halprin stated (6). For example, in New York, Martha Graham company dancers all had sleek, long black hair like Graham, wore dramatic floor-length dresses, and moved in the same choreographed style. “All the Graham dancers looked alike,” Halprin said, “And that became very much a conformity” (*Moving Toward Life* 6). Martha Graham’s technique is an example of how East coast modern dance generated uniformity and also serves as a representation of 1950s American conformist culture.

In an early 1990s interview with dance historian Janice Ross, Halprin defines postmodern dance “...a freeing of the stylized movement inherited from those three early modern dancers, Martha Graham, Doris Humphrey, and Hanya Holm” (Daly et al. 53). Postmodern dance, in essence, did not just form independently, but rather, it developed from modern dance. In addition, the documentary, *AW-55 Artists in Exile: A Story of Modern Dance in San Francisco*, describes Halprin’s contrast with traditional modern dance as a way that “engenders a sort of individualism to try and push the envelope.” Halprin’s postmodern dance philosophy broke free from the uniformed choreography of Martha Graham’s technique and focused instead on dance’s ability to transform individual growth from within.

Halprin rebelled against modern dance conformity and focused instead on developing a process that emphasized the individualist culture emerging on America’s West coast. After receiving her dance education at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, Halprin “moved to California in 1945 with her husband, Lawrence Halprin, making a career as a New York dancer virtually impossible,” Sally Banes wrote in her introduction to Halprin’s book, *Moving Toward Life: Five Decades of Transformational Dance* (2).

Having danced for a year in New York, Anna left the East coast to explore new opportunities in the West. Janice Ross states in *Experience as Dance*, that, in a letter to a college friend, Halprin expressed excitement to “see the wild open spaces” of California, while also describing New York modern dance as “neurotic, eccentric, and in many cases stale and in most cases uninspired” (69). For Halprin, San Francisco was a Wild West of opportunity to develop new creative thoughts, and was a contrast to the mindless, East coast conformity.

In addition to a changing cultural environment, much of Halprin’s approach to dance was informed by her education with Margaret H’Doubler at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, who, in turn, was directly influenced by American pragmatist philosopher, John Dewey. Between 1916 and 1917, H’Doubler met Dewey during her graduate studies in philosophy and aesthetics at Columbia University. According to Ross’s book, *Moving Lessons: Margaret H’Doubler and the Beginning of Dance in American Education*, H’Doubler developed her dance education philosophy from Dewey’s principles of removing dualisms, linking the scientific method and invention in the arts, and most importantly, “valuing the process over the product” (129). Following the notion that ballet “was the dance form of outdated European aristocracy as far as most Americans at the time were concerned,” H’Doubler developed her dance philosophy during a time when there was a push for a new method (Ross, *Moving Lessons* 134). H’Doubler’s principles were the basis for Halprin’s education while studying at University of Wisconsin-Madison in the 1940s, where Dewey’s aesthetic philosophy ultimately informed Halprin’s work thereafter.

Interestingly, neither Dewey nor H'Doubler were performing artists or trained in dance, something that proved useful for the development of dance in academia. As a basketball coach and physical education instructor, H'Doubler focused more on the process of dance education, rather than the product of dance performance. Likewise, Dewey valued the process of learning through experience more than reflecting on a passive object. Dewey influenced H'Doubler, "particularly in regard to the notion of how action must precede ideas" (Ross, *Moving Lessons* 129). According to Helen Poyner's article, "Anna Halprin and the Sea Ranch Collective, an embodied engagement with place," H'Doubler followed Dewey's philosophy to create the first dance major in the world at the University of Wisconsin-Madison in 1926 (122). She based the program on ideas of creative expression, human behavior, and self-reflection. Overall H'Doubler saw dance as a method for understanding a philosophy of life generated through a unified mind-body connection.

H'Doubler's classes were experimental environments that incorporated improvisation as a method for gaining experience in movement. Students "came to understand themselves and their surroundings...making meanings through sensory information" (Ross, *Moving Lessons* 130). With H'Doubler's guidance, students found movement solutions by repeatedly testing them in the studio. H'Doubler's implementation of improvisation in her classroom links the actions of dance to Dewey's process of experience. Improvisation would also prove useful for Halprin's process-based approach for working with communities and specifically in *Ceremony of Us*.

John Dewey's philosophy made way for Anna Halprin's to create a democratic approach to dance. "I wanted to do a production *with* a community, not *for* them," Anna

Halprin said in an interview about her 1969 dance, *Ceremony of Us (Moving Toward Life 152)*. The performance was a direct response to the 1965 Watts Riots in Los Angeles, California. Viewing through the lens of John Dewey's aesthetic philosophy of experience, *Ceremony of Us* reflected on everyday experiences by addressing prevalent social issues of gender and race in postwar America, contained self-sustaining qualities through organized movement by embodying cultural conflict between conformity and individualism, and involved a creative process that was open to the experience by using improvisation as a democratic method for dance, ultimately illustrating the application of Dewey's philosophy to Anna Halprin's work dancing with communities facing social issues.

Conflicting and complex, the American character is often caught in a constant game of tug-of-war. Definitions of freedom, equality, and individualism prescribed by the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution of the United States have been repeatedly interpreted by generations of Americans in order to fit the experiences of their time. In *Democracy in America*, French philosopher Alexis De Tocqueville, one of America's first social critics, wrote during the 1830s that "the social condition, the laws, the opinions, and the feelings of men is still very far from being determined, yet its results already admit of no comparison with anything that the world has ever before witnessed." The American character was still developing at the time, but the country's revolutionary beginnings planted seeds of individualism that were uniquely American. While touring the country around 1835, De Tocqueville formed a sense of the American character, stating, "there is less perfection, but more abundance, in all the productions of the arts. The ties of race, of rank, and of country are relaxed; the great bond of humanity

is strengthened” (*Democracy in America*). Here, De Tocqueville recognizes American ideals for freedom and equality, ultimately suggesting America to be a pluralistic society. Erik Aker, author of “The Changing Face of American Pluralism,” states that “pluralism [is] the notion that the state is less an association of individuals than an association of co-equal and cooperating groups.” Driven by a combination of new world individualism and old world conformity, the American character encompassed a multitude of ideals that work best when kept in balance.

The decade of the 1960s exemplifies American pluralism by rejecting 1950s conformity. “Postwar existence revealed different kinds of men and women, with new aspirations among both majority and minority populations” (Klinkowitz and Wallace 2255-2256). Rebelling against 1950s culture, which elevated community prosperity, the 1960s forged an alternative ideal that recognized the improvement of individuals within a society, creating an example of pluralism demonstrated in the American character. Likewise, American modern dance serves as an example of American pluralism. In the book *Reinventing Dance in the 1960s*, Mikhail Baryshnikov states that in the sixties modern dance “was about pluralism and democracy, or our hope for those things, a hope that’s as strong today as it was in the 1960s” (xi). Modern dance in the sixties celebrated the individual expression that was emerging at the time, while also creating a rebellion against dance conformity emphasized by the end of WWII. The conflict between modern dance conformity and individualism is a representation of American pluralism.

The sixties “really began with the assassination of [President] John F. Kennedy on November 22, 1963” (Klinkowitz and Wallace 2258). The years that followed produced some of the most influential legislation against racial discrimination since the era of

Reconstruction after the Civil War. Political and social progress was achieved by many civil rights acts, including the monumental Civil Rights Act of 1964, which prevented major forms of discrimination in public accommodations and federally assisted programs, extended the Commission on Civil Rights, and established a Commission on Equal Employment Opportunity, among many other reforms (“Civil Rights Act of 1964”).

However, social progression wasn’t achieved without a struggle, and there were “many outbreaks of violence,” including massive campus disruptions, political assassinations, and urban riots (Klinkowitz and Wallace 2258). An example of direct action exhibited in Sixties counterculture, social and political change took shape in the form of protests, sit-ins, and demonstrations. Citizens took action for what they believed in and art became the preferred medium to create a social renaissance. Janice Ross states in the article, “Anna Halprin’s Urban Rituals,” that actions were more persuasive than words during this time period, and were “also deemed by many to be more trustworthy” (53). The notion that action precedes idea is prevalent in Halprin’s work, and can be traced back to Dewey’s philosophy of experience.

For John Dewey, an aesthetic experience moves beyond our day-to-day interactions and contains a fluidity of emotion, intellect, and long-term response. Dewey states in his book, *Art as Experience*, that everyday experiences are not significant because they “occur continuously,” but *an* experience is something that creates a whole, carrying its “own individual quality and self-sufficiency” (37). Experiences are always happening, but *an* experience is definitive in a sea of continuous experience because it is not lethargic, drifting in time, or mechanical. Each individual part flows freely and comes together to form a whole.

Anna Halprin's *Ceremony of Us* demonstrates Dewey's notions of reflection on the every day experience by addressing 1960s west coast social and racial tensions. An aesthetic experience must contain interaction between a living being and an object, and consists of a series of doings and undoings throughout the relationship. Emotion is the moving force that qualifies the experience as unified (Dewey, "Having an Experience"). Likewise, Halprin's *Ceremony of Us* exemplified 1960s struggles of racial prejudices between blacks and whites, and sexual tensions between men and women, and created an environment for the dancers to physically and emotionally explore these issues.

In July 1968, Halprin received a phone call from James Woods, director of the Studio Watts School for Performing Arts in Los Angeles, California. Woods was inspired by Halprin's statements on process and experience, and asked her to create an event that would bring people from the black community of Watts into the prestigious theater, the Mark Taper Forum. With the theater opening the previous year, Woods wanted to provide black performers with an opportunity they may not have received otherwise, and believed the theater itself was a status symbol for affluent whites and served as a "tool for social change" (A. Halprin, *Moving Toward Life* 152). The act of bringing together whites and blacks at the Mark Taper Forum paralleled American civil rights movements and social change in the 1960s.

Over the course of a year, Halprin worked separately, yet simultaneously, with a group of white dancers from her San Francisco Dancer's Workshop and an all-black company from Studio Watts. The San Francisco dancers were already trained in modern dance, but Ross states that the Watts performers were not "trained dancers or movers per se" (*Experience As Dance* 267). Traditional training wasn't important to Halprin because,

to her, authentic movement was essential for discovering true experience through dance. At the same time, the idea behind a group of untrained black dancers performing with a group of trained white dancers might be symbolic of how racial inequalities created by segregation were prevalent in American modern dance before and during the 1960s.

In 1969, after one year of training separately, Halprin brought the two groups together for the first time. She rehearsed with the dancers for ten days using a process that eventually developed into the material they performed together in Los Angeles. Halprin worked with dancers during the rehearsal process for *Ceremony of Us* through “improvisational structures, rather than by imposing her own movement preferences,” which encouraged “a deeply personal, individual approach to making and performing dances,” according to Jessica Berson’s dissertation from the University of Wisconsin-Madison, *Building Bodies Politic: Community Dance in the Contemporary United States* (109). Exploring the same movement rituals as when separated, the dancers produced new responses and discoveries when working together, demonstrating a transformational interaction indicative of Dewey’s aesthetic philosophy of experience.

In a work of art, according to Dewey, “different acts, episodes, occurrences melt and fuse into unity and yet do not disappear and lose their own character as they do” (Dewey, “Having an Experience”). Improvisation as a method in *Ceremony of Us* illustrates Dewey’s philosophy that an experience is comprised of freely flowing parts that do not sacrifice self-identity because the piece celebrated each dancer’s individuality while creating a sense of community between a group of white dancers from San Francisco and black dancers from Watts.

An aesthetic experience overcomes dichotomies in ways that shakes us from our very being. Dewey states, that, “nothing takes place in the mind when there is no balance between doing and receiving” (“Having an Experience” 67). An experience contains the creation and reception, or the theory and practice. With both elements, the experience changes who we were and influences who we are going to be. This could be as simple as making the effort to recycle more after viewing a documentary on pollution, or a larger change in race and gender perceptions after viewing Halprin’s *Ceremony of Us*. Artistic works that contrast sharply with what we consider to be our daily norm, and that have satisfying emotional and intellectual qualities, are considered to be an aesthetic experience.

The arts are the best method for overcoming dichotomies of perception and social value. Throughout his writings, Dewey rarely cited specific examples of art, because, “like H’Doubler, [Dewey] was creating a theory of art in a historical moment saturated with new models of what art and its role in society should be” (Ross, *Moving Lessons* 142). Perhaps a product of their time and environments, Dewey, H’Doubler, and Halprin were each interested in overcoming social dualisms through art, movement, and dance, respectively. However, H’Doubler’s interest was more focused on student artistic development through the learning process rather than analysis of a stage performance. This may be why the “one dualism H’Doubler tried to split, but never really succeeded in, was that between movement training in dance and the performance of dance” (Ross, *Moving Lessons* 130). Unlike H’Doubler and Dewey, and mostly likely because of her background as a dancer, Halprin created an approach that blends the dichotomies between dance process and performance product.

The San Francisco Bay Area environment was central to cultivating Halprin's influential improvisational dance methods. "In New York, they used to call me the touchy-feely dancer from California," Halprin said during a 2010 interview with the *Houston Chronicle* (Glentzer). A new concept even for dance in the sixties, Halprin experimented with improvisation in order to connect dancers with their true selves and to prompt authentic responses. Through the use of scores, as she would eventually call them, Halprin told people what to do, but not how to do it. With this form of structured improvisation, Halprin created an environment similar to H'Doubler's classroom while illustrating Dewey's process-based philosophy of experience.

Through the use of dance improvisation, Halprin's score tells dancers the task at hand, but remains open for them to decide how they want perform the movements. Each dancer is dancing themselves while contributing to the aesthetic of the entire piece. This idea defies the traditional idea of dancers needing to look and feel like the other dancers on stage. It is not a dance in which dancers perform dance movements. With dance improvisation, dancers also become the creators in a sense because they are making conscious choices about the work while performing in front of an audience. The dancers become an important part of the process to transmit messages between choreographer and audience.

"Rehearsals were highly charged emotional encounters," Liam O'Gallagher later recalled, artist and flyer designer for *Ceremony of Us* ("Performance Art"). An observer of the rehearsal process, O'Gallagher witnessed a range of feelings that included intense anger, jealousy, sadness, competitiveness, acceptance, cooperation, individuality and community, among others. Worth and Poynor state in their book, *Anna Halprin*, that,

eventually, “the real and volatile process of the two groups learning to work creatively together became the new material of *Ceremony of Us*” (25). Most likely influenced by societal conflicts, the dancers discovered their authentic feelings as they worked-out racial and sexual tensions through movement.

Working with these improvisations, or structured movement responses, Halprin noticed a difference between the groups that paralleled race relations in American culture. Halprin noticed that the San Francisco dancers had a difficult time working as a unit. Yet, “the Watts people seemed to have a built-in loyalty...they really had a sense of unity – perhaps because they were unified by the Watts riot,” Halprin said during a 1969 interview with Erika Munk (Halprin, *Moving Toward Life* 154). Halprin’s observation of the Watts group’s unity shows how personal experience is embodied in physical actions and responses.

The 1965 Watts Riots were a “violent confrontation” that lasted six days and showed the “realities of race and class relations in America...during which 34 persons were killed, 1,032 were injured, and 3,952 were arrested,” Bayard Rustin wrote about his first-hand account in *Commentary Magazine*. Before the riots, Watts faced issues of gang violence, crime, and poverty, yet afterwards, the community united with a spirit of brotherhood. Four years later, Halprin witnessed this same sense of post-riot togetherness from the Watts dancers in rehearsal. Her observation seems to suggest the Watts group had embodied their personal experiences of racial tensions, segregation, and inequality in American pre- and postwar culture.

Racial tensions between dancers emerged during one of the initial rehearsals together. At first, the black men emitted a sort of sexual prowess when dancing with the

white women, which left the white men feeling jealous, and the black women on their own. The next day the white men came back to rehearsal ready to confront their issues. However, instead of interacting with the white women, the white men focused on formulating a relationship with the black women. “All of these real-life things came out as rituals in the dance,” Anna Halprin said (*Moving Towards Life* 156). In addition, Ross states in the article, “Anna Halprin and the 1960s: Acting in the Gap between the Personal the Public, and the Political,” that, “the focus was on building a community among the performers in rehearsal as a metaphor for social rebuilding” (41). At this moment, the two groups directly exhibited racial tensions in American culture, confronting issues and aspiring for social progression, overcoming dichotomies of race, gender, and traditional notions of what the dancing body should be. Moreover, the discoveries found throughout the rehearsal process illustrate Dewey’s philosophy valuing process over product.

After ten days, both the Watts group and the San Francisco group had broken through barriers together that alluded to a process of transformation. “Everything was deteriorating” as both groups “destroyed familiar configurations” (A. Halprin, *Moving Toward Life* 158). The act of dancing together directly questioned the status quo that separated blacks and whites in society, and by working together, the two groups started to embody 1960s hope for racial equality. By the time of the performance, the dancers had transformed so much beyond their initial barriers that it quickly affected the audience as well.

The relationship between the artist and viewer is also an important role in Dewey’s philosophy of experience. Throughout the dance process, the choreographer,

dancers, and audience each have different roles that contribute to the process, where each individual part is related to the experience of the dance. The members of the process carry it forward, and the performance is only similar to the final sentence in the chapter of the dance experience. The perception of *Ceremony of Us* involved a process that remained open to the experience while recognizing its character and communicating that through art, illustrating Dewey's final requirement for an aesthetic experience.

According to Dewey, experience is emotional, but there are no separate things called emotions in it. Fright or shame is an emotional reflex, but to become emotional they must become parts of an inclusive and enduring situation that involves concern for objects and their issues. When creating art, the artist embodies in herself the attitude of the perceiver while she works. The artist and the perception sustain each other, they are not separate. The viewer does not have to approve of the art, and the performer or choreographer does not have to be technically skilled. There is an element of passion in all aesthetic perception, but extremes are not passion because they are unbalanced. Because an experience involves doing and undoing, there is an immediate sense of things in perception as belonging together or as jarring, as reinforcing or as interfering. Doing and undoing can be acute or energetic, but must relate to each other to form a whole. The real work of the artist is to build up an experience that is coherent in perception while moving with constant change in its development. To perceive, a beholder must create his own experience, and this must include relations comparable to those that the original producer underwent (Dewey, "Having an Experience").

Audience members entered the Mark Taper Forum by either walking past a line of all white dancers or a line of all black dancers. Ross states, "the intention was that each

viewer would publicly register consciousness of his or her skin color, his or her social community” (Ross, “Anna Halprin and the 1960s” 42). Worth and Poynor further suggest that the audience members experienced “the process of contribution and reconciliation that the group had” during the rehearsal process (25). The relationship forged between the audience and performers was similar to the initial separation experienced by the two groups of dancers in rehearsals, and ultimately by blacks and whites in American society.

The performance material was a series of instructions outlined by Halprin which left interpretation open for improvisation, telling dancers what to do, but not how to do it. Walking around the lobby, the performers were instructed to record what they saw. After hearing the word “Paul” shouted, the score directs the dancers to go to the platform, remove outer clothing, then sit, stand, or lie down (A. Halprin, *Moving Toward Life* 161). The instructions divided the groups into two, where each dancer took a turn leading group movement, followed by a “crouch and stare at the other group” when finished (A. Halprin, *Moving Toward Life* 161). Next, the dancers were directed to “YELL, DO IT!” and then to find ways to merge the two groups (A. Halprin, *Moving Toward Life* 161). Following this section, they were instructed to separate by male and female, with both sexes performing another version of leading the group movement one by one. The dancers were then instructed to wash themselves, take a candle, and wash a member of the audience.

Following this opening ritual, *Ceremony of Us* unfolded into a series of activities such as Red Light-Green Light, Tug of War, Silence, Horse Race, and Disappear, among approximately twenty others used for the performance (A. Halprin, *Moving Toward Life* 162). The attendant, Halprin, would point to which activity the group was to do, and the

first person to notice had to initiate. The Procession was always performed last and dancers were instructed to strongly encourage audience participation out into the plaza. Stacey Prickett states in the article, “San Francisco Innovators and Iconoclasts: Dance and Politics in the Left Coast City,” the lines of dancers, initially segregated by race, “crossed in a ‘snake dance’ that the audience joined,” evolving into a culminating community dance (243). This moment unified both performers and audience through movement, similar to the coming-together the Watts and San Francisco groups first experienced. The social transformation experienced by participants in *Ceremony of Us* parallels the progression of 1960s social change generating political legislation like the Civil Rights Acts. Overall, the performance of *Ceremony of Us* illustrates John Dewey’s aesthetic philosophy because it challenges mid-twentieth century Western society dance conventions and changes our perception of what dance is, should, and can be.

However, despite the heavy political and social implications reflected in *Ceremony of Us*, Halprin had no intentions to focus on such issues. “In fact, had she pointedly tried to be political, her art probably would not have been as affecting” (Ross, “Anna Halprin and the 1960s” 36). In 1955, Halprin started to experiment with improvisation and was already developing the techniques that permeated the social change found in her dances the following years. Essentially working before the era of 1960s social progression, Ross describes Halprin as “an artist who was not so much politically as stylistically in tune with her times” (“Anna Halprin and the 1960s” 35). Interestingly, Halprin’s apolitical intentions may suggest that she was not concerned about changing society, but rather, transforming the individuals it’s comprised of. Berson states in her 2005 Ph.D. dissertation that, “although Halprin took on issues such as race

and gender in her work, it has always been with an eye towards personal growth rather than political activity” (111). Anna Halprin’s *Ceremony of Us* was not created to produce intentional political change, but instead, focused on individual transformation as a part of a community experience.

An experience can be identified by what came before and what comes after. For Dewey, the point is not about whether the viewer finds this to suit their tastes, but rather, if it shakes their understanding of meaning in our lives. An experience “runs its course” by working towards a succession of the process “until fulfillment, ” ceasing only when the energies active in it have done their proper work (Dewey 60). In Halprin’s *Ceremony of Us*, the transformation experienced by the dancers and the audience as they danced the snake dance together demonstrates how the experience ran its course. Whether it was the dancers rehearsing separately at first, or the audience entering the theatre segregated from one another, by coming together, the people involved demonstrated the growth of the experience.

As a result, Anna Halprin’s 1969 dance *Ceremony of Us* illustrates Dewey’s philosophy of art as experience because it the dance reflected on everyday experiences by addressing prevalent social issues of gender and race in postwar America, contained self-sustaining qualities through organized movement by embodying cultural conflict between conformity and individualism, and involved a creative process that was open to the experience by using improvisation as a democratic method for dance.

Likewise, in response to *Ceremony of Us*, and also a larger public demand for social and political participation, Lawrence Halprin created the RSVP Cycles to articulate a collaborative creative process for groups to work together democratically and

developed the Take Part Process workshops to stimulate community response through environmental participation. By engaging communities with public spaces, Halprin developed a process to help urban planners and residents come together to explore spaces in ways that values the individual experience as it relates to the community. This method which was similar to the process held with the Flint community when Halprin's firm was designing Riverbank Park in the mid 1970s.

Lawrence Halprin's RSVP Cycles created a collaborative process that helped diverse people come together and confront issues of community importance. Anna Halprin states in the article, "Community Art as Life Process: 'The Story of the San Francisco Dancers' Workshop," that because they were "working with communities of many different racial, social, and economic backgrounds, it became clear there was an "urgent need to clarify a process of creativity" that allowed for "many different people with different lifestyles to come together and create collectively" (71). The racial and social tensions confronted in *Ceremony of Us* inspired Lawrence to articulate a specific process that could help bring people together while honoring their individual identity, much like Dewey's philosophy that an aesthetic experience is comprised of individual self-sustaining qualities as a part of a whole.

The RSVP Cycles work together to create a balanced system where all parts constantly relate and interact, and where each part is visible in order to avoid manipulation and secrecy. According to Lawrence Halprin's *The RSVP Cycles: Creative Processes in the Human Environment*, "Resources" are what you have to work with; "Scores" describe the process leading to the performance; "Valuation" analyzes the results of the action; "Performance" is the result of scores and style of the process (2).

The process is cylindrical and does not have to be done in a specific order because each collective activity has a different purpose. Each part of the RSVP cycles works together, yet each can remain isolated for its own sake, freeing the creative process and making it visible.

Likewise, Anna's dances were deeply influenced by the process of scoring, illustrating the role of scores in transforming individual experience. Central to the RSVP Cycles, a score can be anything from a grocery list, poem, or dance, and can be open or closed, direct or indirect. In dance, open scores make it more possible for collective interaction, in which "each person contributes and from which a final performance then emerges" (L. Halprin, *The RSVP Cycles* 4). As a facilitator, Anna's role relied heavily on the construction of the score, which could then be re-worked through reflection, or valuation, with the participations. "I was not interested exclusively what the score-performance relation was," Anna states, "...but how the process of arriving at it came about" (A. Halprin "Community Art as Life Process" 71-72). This process-oriented approach is found in *Ceremony of Us* as the two groups of dancers went through a transformation during the rehearsals. When working with dancers, Anna Halprin states in her article, "Planetary Dance," that, "it's crucial that the purpose of the score is clearly stated so that each performer can agree to the purpose and can determine whether the score realizes that purpose" (58). The score makes it possible for the performers to see and understand the task at hand, an example of how isolating the scoring process can lead to greater transparency and inclusion in the process.

The RSVP Cycles provided a framework for Lawrence Halprin to develop the Take Part process, a method for working with communities facing issues in urban

environments to collectively explore and discuss public spaces. In the book, *Taking Part: A Workshop Approach to Collective Creativity*, Lawrence Halprin describes that in the late 60s and early 70s, people were becoming less inclined to turn over decisions to elected officials because they didn't feel like they were being listened to, and the only way to influence decisions effecting our own lives is to participate in the decision making process, and "we must do this as a collections of individuals working together toward achieving our objectives" (10). During the 1970s, cities like Flint were developing projects to address issues of post-industrializing, primarily aimed at attracting residents and visitors, but the efforts changed the city's architectural landscape by demolishing historic neighborhoods, often owned by people of color, leading to polarization as a direct result of oppression. As such, the Take Part Process provided a democratic method for mid-century cities facing issues of deindustrialization to work together in addressing environmental needs.

One of the main purposes of utilizing the RSVP Cycles during the Take Part workshops was to allow for the expression of diversity so that individuals feel more a part of the community decision-making process. Lawrence developed the Take Part Process from the point of view that "when people find themselves deeply involved in working things out together, they also become committed to the implementation of the solutions they generate," (L. Halprin, *Taking Part*, 13). The physical act of working towards a common goal as a community, with the value placed on the individual, helped make citizens better aware of community problems and feel connected to the outcome because they were a part of the process, similar to the connection and transformation felt by the performers in *Ceremony of Us*.

Developing a Take Part workshop involves many levels of pre-planning and implementation, resource gathering, creative activity, and reflection. When planning a workshop, Halprin and his team identified participants who would benefit from the most change. Interviews with community representatives held important information for the facilitating team to identify the process objectives, and to also gain community commitment to the process. The scores and reasons for performing them are then presented to the community. As the group's performance is monitored, there is a need for the facilitators to hold "vigilance all through the process for group feelings and inputs and on-the-spot changes of cores is necessary, as is close cooperation will encourage" (L. Halprin, *Taking Part* 271). Valuation should always be present and Lawrence cites video recording has great potential for documentation "so that people who were not in the process can gain insights into what occurred and how decisions came about" (L. Halprin, *Taking Part* 299).

The activity of the Take Part workshops involved participants taking awareness walks in the environment, solving their own objectives, and sharing experiences as they move, draw, write and communicate. The workshops were an exploration of individual awareness and their own interaction with the environment, while developing ideas through group interaction with the environment to understand the larger community. Halprin would distribute a master score, or map, that planned an order for in which each participant would visit, when they would get there, and stay for how much time.

Individual and group scores were performed over the course of the workshop so that the group could develop a common language and to progress collectively. A warm-up activity introduced participants and workshop organizers to each other and energized

the process of sharing immediate feelings and expectations. Alison B. Hirsch, author of “Scoring the Participatory City: Lawrence (& Anna) Halprin’s Take Part Process,” by asking for a kind of “primal or ‘gut-level response’ to situations, participants could directly confront their environment on common ground, and forced participants to confront the cause of their unease by facing situations directly” (128, 135). For example, one of the activities asked participants to join hands and perform a movement score blindfolded, adapted from Anna Halprin’s passive/active score. The purpose of awareness activity was to create a heightened kinesthetic experience and sense of space.

Following the awareness activities, participants responded by sharing or recording their experience through visual art, the written word, or performance. During a Take Part workshop with the community of Charlottesville, Virginia, Halprin emphasized the value individual experience over artistic technique, stating that the “aim of this session is to make everyone’s experiences, observations, and feelings visible to the group...” (Hirsch 137). When the participant draws a portrait, they have a dialogue with themselves, and are reporting on what they see. The artwork becomes the score when each person performs the portrait they have drawn, or the poem they have written, similar to Anna’s process working with dancers in *Ceremony of Us*. Statements from the Charlottesville participants reported that the workshop “uncovered profound feelings of discovery” (Hirsch 137).

Likewise, this process was also used in Flint and included Halprin’s designers traveling the Flint River banks and envisioning with city employees and community members. Currently, there is a lack of public information available about the involvement of the community in the process of designing Riverbank Park. Locating the specific

method used by Halprin's team and the community's response would require extensive research of Flint city planning paper archives, which are currently unorganized in boxes at City Hall, or visiting the Lawrence Halprin archives at the University of Pennsylvania. Unfortunately this project does not have the resources to conduct this type of research at the moment. Regardless, it's safe to imagine that the process in Flint involved many of the same aspects articulated in the Halprin's work with communities.

The final design for Riverbank Park included an amphitheatre, farmers' market area, fountains, a water wall, and the Archimedes Screw block. When the park opened in 1979, there was a big weekend festival where 2,000 balloons 5,000 pigeons were released. Country singer Rick Nelson headlined the weekend festivities, arriving to the island stage by boat on the Flint River. The opening festival was the beginning of many music festivals throughout the park's history, becoming one of the memorable activities.

Even though the park has faced challenges since opening, it also has experienced many successful moments including music festivals, community barbeques, fishing, skateboarding, and parkour. In the 80s, River Fest concerts brought household names such as Dizzie Gillespie, the Kingston Trio, and The 5th Dimension. The fountain was a popular place for children to play in the water, and many people would launch paddleboats in the canals and river. Today, the Flint Jazz Fest and Juneteenth event celebrate over thirty years of performances at the park' Amphitheatre Block.

The park brought a new energy downtown including new public art, a 40-foot tall yellow aluminum sculpture that weighed 25,000 pounds, described by *The Flint Journal* as "a key artistic element in Flint's riverfront beautification project" (Gustin B1). The sculpture was created by Buffalo, NY artist named Duayne Hatchett, of which the city

secured a \$50,000 NEA grant to pay for most of the \$100,000? (Gustin B1) sculpture it but the NEA disputed the choice of Hatchett over what they thought to be more qualified artists, so they only offered \$25,000. Unfortunately, five months after installation the sculpture fell into the canal and broke after a windstorm. The sculpture was reinstalled two years later, in 1982, but steel cables were needed for reinforcement from swaying in the wind. Eventually, in 1984, the city decided to remove the sculpture, citing safety and lawsuit concerns, and when a buyer was unable to be found for an indoor setting, the metal was eventually scrapped. Today the sculpture serves as a symbol of the park's successes and challenges – an exciting beginning with a shaky start, followed by some success with budding issues, and the eventual onset of disappointment.

To parallel public art in downtown Flint, in 2013, the Flint Public Art Project held a \$25,000 contest for a temporary sculpture in a downtown Flint parking lot, or “the flat lot” as it's locally known. Flint Public Art Project was created by Brooklyn, NY artist Stephen Zacks, who in 2012 received a \$250,000 ArtPlace grant to create public art in Flint. The flat lot contest resulted in the choice of a sculpture that looked like a floating house. A concept design was released and was impressive enough to get even the skeptics on board with the idea. But once the sculpture was built, it was clear that concept to practice was an issue. The house was covered with Mylar to create a reflection, and images submitted by community members would be visible on the ceiling, and lit up at night. However, pieces of Mylar were seen flapping in the wind and the materials were poorly assembled and subject to the weather elements. In reality, the house looked nothing like the design concept. Many residents responded critically on the grounds that a residential house in Flint could be bought for less money than it cost to build the

sculpture. They had a point, and Mark's House, just like Hatchett's modernist sculpture shows a continued distrust between Flint residents and outside artists making extravagant art to renew the city.

After opening, Riverbank Park faced many practical problems on the ground-level, but was receiving architectural attention on a national level. In 1982, the park received an American Society for Landscape Architects Honor Award for Parks & Recreation Planning ("1982 ASLA Professional Awards"). At the time, it seemed no one foresaw, or even considered the environmental, political, and social consequences related to the future decline of Riverbank Park, the city of Flint, and the American auto industry.

Riverbank Park has experienced ongoing issues of crime, maintenance, and blight. Late-night partying, vandalism, vagrancy began soon after the park open, and the architectural design led to safety concerns as well. For example, a businessman was walking along the Waterwall Block boardwalk and tripped in one of the gaps in the concrete. Soon after, the city covered the gaps with steel plates, also covering the ability to connect directly with the river. Also, despite having an extensive maintenance plan outline by the Army Corps of Engineers, the city was unable to afford park maintenance over time, losing features like the Archimedes Screw.

Today, the integrity of Riverbank Park is threatened in multiple ways. First, the Hamilton Dam at the head of the park is at imminent risk of collapse. Consequently low-flow river conditions leave the park's canals dry and overgrown. Second, long-term deferred maintenance has left the park in disrepair, losing iconic features like the Archimedes Screw. Part of the problem is the Hamilton Dam is endangered of collapsing, there can't be too much pressure put on the aging dam, so the Flint River water level

must remain lower than the park's canals. Due to declining population, the city has also been unable to afford park maintenance and facilities.

Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, Flint has made an effort to once again look towards city planning efforts for revitalization. In the early 2000s, the Mid-West region experienced another wave of factory closings and Flint was no exception. Property values declined as residents left the city and state in search of new job opportunities. Many properties, like Riverbank Park, remain empty and unattractive. However, Flint is a symbol of many post-industrial cities and as a result, there has been much interest in urban planning for the area, just as there was in the 1970s.

Resultantly, elements of Riverbank Park's original design are threatened by revitalization efforts. The city of Flint received a \$300,000 grant in 2012 from the Department of Natural Resources to remove portions of the park's concrete walls, city planner Kevin Schronce said in a personal interview. Work began in the Amphitheatre Block in summer 2015, removing some trees and the western concrete bridge leading onto the stage. For better accessibility, a new ramp will be built in place of the demolished bridge, in addition to adding a kayak launch. When the park was first built, it wasn't required to follow accessibility laws because the Americans with Disabilities Act wasn't mandated until 1990, making some of the park's architectural features undesirable today.

Originally the city planned to fill in the canals in both the Amphitheatre and Market Stall Block, covering both sides of the park on south Saginaw St. However, due to not using the funds until three years after the grant was awarded, construction prices increased and the city could only afford to make changes on the Amphitheater side for

accessibility. However, the city will inevitably need to finish filling the canals or else the concrete walls will begin to crumble and cave without a lack of water pressure.

The original park was meant to bring together people in the community, but in more recent times it has represent Flint's class divisions and racial tensions. A product of the 1970s, the park was designed optimistically but maybe not very realistically. Talking with people over the last few years, I've discovered there's a disconnect between what the park is and how people perceive it. Some of the problem is that there is a lack of information available about the park

Learning about the history and intentions of Riverbank Park created a stronger connection to the space for me. I wondered if it would have the same effect on others, prompting the question, how would the Flint community respond to Riverbank Park following the participatory dance methods of Anna Halprin in a space designed by the firm of her husband and collaborator, Lawrence Halprin? Moreover, by engaging the community, does the experience create a connection with the park, while inspiring increased appreciation and cultural awareness for the community?

John Dewey presents an aesthetic philosophy that values everyday experiences, contains individual self-sustaining qualities, and is displayed through art in a way that results in personal growth. Likewise, Anna's *Ceremony of Us* and Lawrence Halprin's RSVP Cycles and Take Part workshops provide examples of Dewey's philosophy in action by working with communities facing social issues. Anna implemented movement scores and improvisation to work in a collective process with groups experiencing racial tensions, while Lawrence designed awareness walks and opportunity for artistic response during environmental workshops with city planners and residents to explore public

spaces. Together, the Halprins used a collective creative process that valued the role of the individual in order to create a sense of community. Meanwhile, Riverbank Park was designed with similar process and intended to beautify downtown and attract visitors during the beginning of Flint's deindustrialization, but the economic depression continued to worsen and so did the park. Today, little information is available about the park, revitalization efforts have removed some of the concrete architecture, and the park remains a symbol of the city's class and racial boundaries.

Considering the intersections of Dewey's philosophy, the Halprin's methods, and Riverbank Park, a site-specific workshop and performance at the park, based on a collaborative process, would engage the community with Riverbank Park in order to better understand what the park means to the community today, while increasing awareness, changing negative perceptions, and providing a sense of community between diverse populations. By applying Anna's method to the park with the Flint community, the project seeks to understand the collective experience with the park's past, present, and hopes for the future through a site-specific workshop and performance that values the individual in relation to the whole. The theory also provides a unique opportunity to find the outcomes of applying Anna's dance method in a space designed by Lawrence's firm, of which little research currently exists.

Practice

In order to understand what the Riverbank Park means to the Flint community today, I developed the Riverbank Park Dance Project, a two-part project that took place over the course of two years and included a series of history/art workshops, community dialogues, rehearsals with artists, and a site-specific performance that included audience members traveling throughout the park while engaging with the space and experiencing history, theatre, music, and dance performances.

During part one of the research, three workshops were held in 2014 that provided participants a hands-on experience with Anna's methods at the park, while discussing park history and creating an opportunity for community members to share their experiences of the park through dance, visual art, and the written word. The workshops were based on the Halprin's Take Part Process, which provided a process for community's to explore and envision public spaces. As the second phase of research, in 2015, the community responses were developed into an interdisciplinary, site-specific performance at Riverbank Park, which followed a collaborative creative process like Halprin's RSVP Cycles. The rehearsals and performances aimed to provide a powerful aesthetic experience in hopes to increase park education and awareness, while creating an opportunity for dialogue and building a sense of community. Together, both phases of the project are known as the Riverbank Park Dance Project and are the basis of research for understanding how the Flint community responds to Riverbank Park using the methods of Anna Halprin.

Community responses from the 2014 workshops show that the community has little access to information about the park, and that there was an increase in park

appreciation when engaging with and responding to the space through the methods of Lawrence and Anna Halprin. Likewise, responses from the 2015 performance illustrate the community holds fond memories of the park, has current concerns about safety and maintenance, and hopes to see the park functioning again in a way that makes sense for the community today.

Overall, by engaging Flint with Riverbank Park through the methods of Anna Halprin's dance philosophy, the Riverbank Park Dance project provides a framework for community-engaged site-specific performance in environments facing post-industrial challenges.

Riverbank Park Site-Specific Workshops 2014

In 2014, part one of the Riverbank Park Dance Project held four workshops at Riverbank Park in order to engage the community with the park in hopes to instill greater awareness and appreciation. The workshops followed Anna's movement philosophy that reflects on everyday experiences while valuing individual identity as it relates to the community, while applying Lawrence's methods for interacting with the urban environment by engaging participants with the site in a collaborative creative process that shared history, explored the space through the use of movement scores, and asked participants to respond to Riverbank Park by drawing a picture, writing a poem, and creating movements. The workshops, titled, the Riverbank Park Site-Specific Workshops contained three goals. The first goal was to educate community members on the cultural history of the City of Flint's Riverbank Park. The second goal was to engage community members with the park through a hands-on experience using the modern dance

techniques of Anna Halprin at the park. The final goal of the workshops was to create opportunity for community members to share their own stories and experiences of Riverbank Park through the mediums of poetry, dance, and visual art. By applying a collective creative process in ways that echo the Halprin's Take Part workshops, participants expressed gaining a new perspective, knowledge and appreciation for Riverbank Park, including a desire to share the experience in the future with friends and family.

Pre-planning for the workshops involved assembling the organization team, identifying and marketing to the population effected most by the park, and developing the content, or writing the score, for the activities best suited for the community to engage with Riverbank Park. The organization team consisted of myself, Cade Surface who was working with the Flint River Corridor Alliance, and Melanie Schott, a recent UM-Flint dance graduate and my long-term collaborator. Marketing was solicited through flyers, social media advertising, and word of mouth, to the downtown Flint and campus populations, specifically targeted due to their proximity to the park. The score for the workshop was created in response to my direct experience learning from Anna Halprin in 2013, with many of the scores specifically based on that experience, because it is the most authentic method for testing the community's response to the Halprin process and to Riverbank Park.

Four workshops were held at Riverbank Park on July 27, August 17, September 20, and October 11, 2014, lasting two hours each. In total the workshops had 60 participants that included members of the Flint community, UM-Flint students, faculty and staff, and members of the Greater Flint Creative Alliance and Flint Dance

Collaborative. The September and October workshops had the greatest attendance, with many UM-Flint students. The July workshop worked with 10 community members and the August workshop was canceled when only two community members arrived and it was agreed upon by all to postpone.

The workshop began on the Amphitheater Block stage, where participants stood in a circle for a name game movement activity to introduce participants and organizers while breaking down barriers, and is similar of the warm-ups utilized in the Take Part process. Each person said their name and performed a movement, then the group repeated the name and movement while adding it to the next, eventually creating an original group dance. Despite nervous look on some faces, everyone participated by dancing their own personal response to the activity, contributing their individual self to the creation of the whole dance. One surveyed participant found “dancing on the stage in the beginning” to be the most enjoyable aspect of the workshop. It was a great icebreaker and created a sense of community from the start.

Next at the amphitheatre block, participants followed a sensory awareness score that instructed them to explore the area using four senses: sight, smell, touch, and hear. Taste was an option, but no one chose to utilize it. This score was similar to the awareness walks used in the Take Part workshops. The circle disseminated as people explored the levels and layers of the amphitheatre block. Most people explored independently, but some chose to walk with friends. Participants walked up and down the stage’s three bridges, across grassy concrete stairs of lawn seating, and next to the overgrown and marshy canals. After five minutes of sensing the space, volunteers shared their responses with the group, revealing contrasts between nature and urban

environments, comparing to past and present. Unpleasant smells, blight and litter were also mentioned. Many people were eager to share their findings.

Following the discussion, the workshop continued to the next area of the park, with participants learning the history of the park and Halprin process en route. While leading the group under the shady Saginaw St. bridge, Surface described the intentions of Lawrence's design and the collective process utilized in Flint to arrive at that design. Walking next to the empty canals provided an opportunity to discuss the original intentions of the park's waterways and why they are now empty and overgrown with grass and sprouting trees. One participant surveyed on September 20 said that "the tour guide seemed very knowledgeable," while another on the same day said they, "gained the history of this park and it gave me a new perspective."

As the Halprin process was explained, so was Anna's role in generating human interaction throughout Halprin's collaborative creative processes in the environment. The second workshop area was held at the Market Stall Block located south of the river between Saginaw St. and Harrison St. In order to gain heightened kinesthetic awareness, participants interacted with the site through two of Anna Halprin's dance scores: "The Golden Positions" and "Passive/Active." These scores were also chosen because I learned them directly from Anna Halprin when I took her summer workshop in June 2013, creating an embodied connection with Anna that was transmitted through myself to the participants through the method of her scores.

The Golden Positions were explained by Schott and myself in the context that the score was originally developed by Anna as a way for dancers and architects to explore spaces. The reason we were choosing to perform the score with workshop participants

was the same intention, to explore the space in a new creative way that might develop a new perspective or create a connection with the space. The golden positions are sitting, standing, walking, and lying down and the key idea is that the score tells you *what* to do but now *how* to do it. The results were positive, as participants interacted with the site in ways that they hadn't before, providing new experiences with the park. For example, one participant on October 11 felt a "reigniting of memories [and a] new imagining of what could be done with the space."

The second score, Passive/Active, echoes the blindfold activity described in Take Part workshops, and was explained by Schott and myself. Instructing participants to find a partner, one person is "active" and the other is "passive." Each person takes turns in both roles. The passive person closes their eyes while the active person leads them through the space, up and down stairs, across grass and concrete. The activity required participants to listen to the park and communicate through movement. In my experience, the score causes the passive person to open up to trust the environment around them as well as their partner, while the active person has to be responsible and survey the landscape to find the best route for their partner. Participants responded similarly, illustrated by a survey from October 11 stating, "the partner section allowed us to experience the space without judgment and without concern for reputation. It let us enjoy the area." The important part of the score was the process and the relationships developed between the subject and the object, the people and the park, as they were in constant communication with one another.

Following the passive/active activity, participants reported feeling more connected to the park, to their partner, and to themselves. A July 27 participant felt "the

closed-eye activity was intriguing, communicating without language.” The activity was a significant moment in the workshop, one that broke down barriers, as an Oct 11 participant reported enjoying “escaping the world two minutes at a time. Trusting my friend to think and lead,” and another participant stated, “I’ve had a really hard past two weeks and today just refreshed my soul.” In general, responses to the score show a change in attitudes and perceptions about the park while creating a sense of community among the participants as shown in *Ceremony of Us* and the Take Part workshops.

The final section of the workshop led participants across the boardwalk to the Grand Fountain Block, north of the Flint River, meaning the group had to travel across the bridge on Harrison St. Walking along the Water Wall Block boardwalk was an ideal moment for visual reflection on where we just came from across the river and to where we were headed at the Grand Fountain. This physical reflection provided a symbolic segway for discussing more about the park’s past and current challenges. This section was often ripe with questions as Surface spoke about the Hamilton Dam’s effect on the park, issues with safety and the park’s design, and the city’s proposed plan for the park’s future, which would require some alterations to the concrete aesthetic. Many participants asked how to get involved with helping keep the park clean and to improve its condition. They were guided to the Flint River Corridor Alliance and local legislators, in addition to utilizing the park more and bringing others to visit. Participants received a handout with park historical facts and a link to Surface’s 2012 Share Art Flint project, a website that documents some of the park’s history: <http://flintsmartart.org/riverbank-park.html>. As of 2015 the website is no longer available because there is no current funding to continue rights to the domain.

Reaching the Grand Fountain, participants were invited to draw a picture of the park, then write a story or poem, and create at least three movements that expressed their experience. The score involved taking a moment to explore the fountain and claim a spot that speaks to them. Each person then received a large sheet of paper, oil pastels, a piece of cardboard surface, a snack and water. Some participants chose to branch out on their own to spots in creative places with daring heights, while other participants stayed on the ground level in a closer group of people. Filling the space with so many people was a pleasing sight to see as they looked like sculptures placed throughout the fountain. While creating, drawing, writing, dancing, and reflecting, there was a sort of presence that could be felt, a sense of energy that stems from collective creativity and shared experience.

Volunteers shared their stories through art, poetry and dance, with mixed responses reflecting on the park's past, present, and future. Much of the artwork showed the park in a positive light, with multiple shades of green grass and blue water flowing through the modernist canals and fountains. Others, usually poems, articulated the challenges experienced at the park. For example, one poem written by a participant speaks from the perspective of the park and says, "I am not very old, but I feel like it. I used to feel much stronger now, but I've fallen ill recently." However, another participant's poem demonstrates the hope they felt in response to the park, stating, "The glorious plan for the space has been lost, but, it still has a purpose. It's part of the earth and as the trees shelter the walls, it continues to exist to the world, wants to be seen." These poems were donated to the Riverbank Park Dance Project archives and can be found on the project website.

Movement responses embodied the participants' experiences with the architecture and their hopes for the future. Many people utilized their movement response to express types of activities that could be done at the park, including boating, walking, and canoeing. Another popular response was a desire to see water, in which participants performed by moving their arms in a fluid motion, resembling popular dance move, "the wave," in their own ways. By providing an opportunity to respond to the experience, the workshop was designed similarly as the Take Part workshops, valuing each individual response as it relates to the whole. Participant responses largely showed that engaging with the park created a connection with the space and sense of community. Ultimately, their artistic responses directly informed the creation of the 2015 performance at the park.

As an extension of the project, students from my Modern 2 class at UM-Flint developed solo work in response to the park. Using the information they received from the workshop, students produced creative responses that combined local history with the art of dance and movement. Their experiences sustained through the following summer when two students from the course participated in the 2015 performance.

A written survey was solicited at the end of each workshop and received 49 responses total. In general the responses showed that participants greatly valued learning the history while engaging with the park, and that both experiences combined contributed to having a greater appreciation of the park and a willingness to return in the future. 30 people had visited the park before while 19 people had not visited the park before. The workshop was an overall positive experience, as 40 people rated the workshops as (5/5) "strongly agree," that they 1) found the event to be enjoyable and educational, and 2) were presented with useful information/feedback throughout the workshop. 7 surveys

were a combination of “agree” and “strongly agree.” However, 2 surveys rated the workshop as (1/1) “strongly disagree,” but based on the positive written comments, it is thought this may have been an error when circling the number on the scale. Zero surveys selected 2 or 3 on the scale of 1 (strongly disagree) through 5 (strongly agree). Of the 49 people surveyed, 30 people had been to the park before, 19 people had not been to the park before, and everyone said they would be likely to visit the park again.

Workshop participants reported gaining a new perspective, knowledge and appreciation for the park, including a desire to share the experience in the future with friends and family. Additionally, participants found it beneficial to learn about the park by engaging with the space through the movement scores, as well as the ability to share their own artistic responses, both of which experiences contributed to a greater appreciation for the park and a willingness to return in the future. Most importantly, the responses articulated by participants shows that they felt a transformation throughout the process.

Overall, the workshops showed the community was unaware of the park’s history, and that they had a greater appreciation for the park when they understood the history and intentions while engaging with the space. The methods of Anna Halprin’s scores helped create awareness of the space while valuing the individual contributing to a sense of community. Lastly, the artwork, poems, and dances created by participants reflected on the past, present, and future, and showed a desire to see the park’s water features working again, specifically the Grand Fountain, in addition to imaging different activities that could be done at the park. By providing a positive experience in the park, participants

connected these positive thoughts with the space and ultimately led all surveyed participants to say they would return in the future.

To view photo and video from the workshop visit <https://youtu.be/N3vT0ktT02E> or <http://www.riverbankdanceproject.com>

2015 Story Circles

In 2015, part two of the Riverbank Park Dance Project set out to create a site-specific performance that would engage audience members with the park while learning park history through theatre, music, and dance. Building from the information received in the 2014 workshops, the performance aimed to reach a wider number of people over the course of one weekend in September 2015. While funding is never certain, it was always the intention to create a performance using the information received from community members during the 2014 workshops. Even though the workshops elicited a positive response, it was my belief and theory that a performance would create the strongest aesthetic experience. Including the voice of the community throughout the performance was essential because it involved the community in the process and provided opportunity for reflection on everyday life while honoring a collection of individual stories in relation to the whole narrative, similar to the Halprin's collective creative process and Take Part workshops. The Riverbank Park Dance Project held two dialogue sessions, or story circles, to engaged community members with the process and to gain a better understanding of the community's perspective, which revealed themes of fond memories, concerns about blight and safety, and hopes for a better future at the park.

The story circles were held on July 11 at the Flint Farmers' Market, and July 23, 2015 at Buckham Gallery, both located in downtown Flint just two blocks south of Riverbank Park. Talking with people over the last couple of years, I had discovered that many people downtown didn't even know the park existed or that it was called Riverbank Park. The park has a lack of facilities that were not ideal for hosting the dialogue sessions, including no standard chairs for sitting, no restrooms, and no trashcans except for the one at the Grand Fountain. As a result, the locations were chosen away from the park for their ability to reach more members of the community in spaces that they may be more familiar with and feel more comfortable in. Ten people participated between the two events with a balance between age groups and those who grew up in Flint and those who hadn't. The conversations developed during the story circles provided first-hand information about the community's experiences and ultimately informed the creation of the performance script in addition to the responses from the 2014 workshop.

It's worth noting that the cast members from the performance were invited to the second dialogue session as a way to introduce them to the project and to include their perceptions before working at the park. To much of my dismay, only one of about twenty cast members participated, a dancer who was involved in the 2014 workshops as well as my modern 2 class at UM-Flint. Looking back, I should have made more of an emphasis to the cast on the value of their perspectives in the dialogue session while explicitly stating how the sessions were to be used. A part of it is that I was too involved at the time to see the importance of the connections for the cast between the story circles and rehearsals. They would have benefited greatly from the conversation and initial introduction to the project outside of rehearsals, and I would have benefited from hearing

their perspectives before jumping into the artistic process. In the future I will make sure there is an opportunity for the entire cast to have a conversation together about the project before starting the creative process.

A story circle is a popular technique for organizers to generate conversation through a democratic method that values the voice of each person while identifying themes important to the whole community. Many different types of artists in Flint use the technique, and I have participated in at least three story circles for other creative projects. In my experience, the technique made you feel a part of the community and created a stronger connection with the creative work being devised. The rules followed in our story circle were the same as those used in the past circles I have participated with. Participants sit in a circle and have two minutes to share a story related to the prompt. No one else talks except the person who's turn it is to share, which creates an equal opportunity for everyone to speak. Once everyone shares their story, the conversation opens for response to address each other's stories, ensuing organic discussion.

During our own story circles, we used a series of prompts about the park to create a launching point for discussion. The first prompt was, "say one word to describe Riverbank Park," and elicited responses such as peace, concrete, broken, romance, climbing, overgrown, and water. The second prompt was to "take two minutes or less to talk about a memory you have of Riverbank Park." Following the two-minute sharing session, the conversation opened up for responses, which sometimes prompted additional questions to the group, such as, "what would you like to see at the park to make you feel more safe?" The story circles provided opportunity for participants to engage in dialogue with other community members and identified reoccurring themes such as festivals,

safety, blight, a connection to nature, past memories, negative perceptions, and the desire to see it functioning again.

The community holds different memories of Riverbank Park depending on the person's age and experience with the park. People over 40 years of age remember when the park was in its prime during the 1980s, and recalled viewing music such as the Flint Folk Music Festival and The 5th Dimension concert. Younger people who grew up outside of the city but now live there remember they held negative perceptions about the park until they interacted with the space and their perception changed to positive. Melanie Schott, assistant director for the performance, grew up in a suburb just a few miles away from the city and shared that she was taught to see Flint as "scary," but her perception changed when experiencing the park first-hand, "walking through a realizing how cool it is." This experience represents stories I have heard from others, including the workshop participants, whose perception about the park changed once they interacted with the space.

Mixed feelings about safety were uncovered when listening to present day experiences of the park. Current activities like the Flint Community Cookout were mentioned and it was questioned why more business people downtown don't visit the park during lunch hours. Feelings of safety were divided by gender, with women feeling unsafe due to the many men that socialize at the park, and with men feeling little to no threat of safety at the park. An older woman, who also attended two of the performances, shared her experience that the park is close to Carriage Town, "so it's a place where drunks or homeless hang out and you hope they don't rob you." A male participant responded in contrast, sharing that he would walk there at eleven at night in "totally dark

places” and that he “had a cell phone but never felt unsafe.” These experiences show that the feeling of safety at the park is gendered, with men feeling safer at the park than women, and is a reflection of a larger societal issue of the ownership of women’s bodies in public spaces.

All participants hoped the current construction will be positive for the park, but many were skeptical of the city’s ability to follow through with the project. “It’s a diamond in a rough,” reported one participant, “hope something can be done to bring awareness so people can enjoy it.” Phase one demolition ended in early July 2015, and at the time of this paper, the second phase for construction still needs to be completed, causing the project to be several months behind the June 2015 grant deadline, and in the meantime, leaving the amphitheatre block a construction zone, fenced off unavailable to use.

The story circles also revealed that the community doesn’t have much access to resources or information about the park’s history and current developments. Our team was able to provide some of this information from research, talking with the city, and researching the Flint Journal archives at Buick Gallery. The participants expressed appreciation for new knowledge about the park’s past, present, and propose future.

Overall, the story circles revealed that the community still holds many fond memories of the park from the 1980s to present day, and would like to see the park become a point of pride again for the city by holding more events and festivals that would attract people, as well as expressing a desire for it to be maintained more regularly. The discussions confirmed that the project was on the right track for addressing community

needs, particularly by creating opportunity for dialogue and reflection, and by planning an event that will lead people to experience the park while learning about its history.

2015 Devising and Rehearsal Process

Before rehearsals started and before auditions were even held, the performance script was created through a collaborative process between myself and Nic Custer, who has experience site-specific collaborative playwriting. The script framework was built around community responses during the 2014 workshops and 2015 story circles as well as historical information significant to understanding the whole picture.

The narrative framework was modeled after the 2014 workshop design and was guided by the community's responses of being unaware of the park's history, and that they had a greater appreciation for the park when they engaged with the space. The performance flow, like the workshops, began with awareness and background of the park, then interaction with the space and people, and ended with community visions. The artwork, poetry, and dance created in the workshops were directly shared during final scene at the Grand Fountain.

Even though the primary focus of the performance was to bring dance and movement into the space, there were many aspects about the park that were better articulated through theatre. On the other hand, there were many emotions connected with the park that were better shared through music and dance. Therefore, it was clear that an interdisciplinary performance could provide the most information and awareness for audiences to have the best aesthetic experience.

The script incorporated themes identified by community members during story circles, including memories, safety, perception, music, nature, and hopes for a better future. Many of the community memories were embodied through theatre, dance and music performances. We weren't trying to speak for the experiences, but rather, create an opportunity to reflect on threads of shared experience woven together to form collective memory.

Oddly enough, we actually started framing the script over the Independence Day holiday while vacationing in Charlevoix, Michigan, three hours north of Flint. Charlevoix is a quaint tourist town on the bay coast of Lake Michigan. It was interesting because we sat at the river walk in downtown Charlevoix, and it had a fountain with kids playing, boats, tables, restrooms, people. It was clean and vibrant, open and simple, effective and not too complicated. While Nic and I were there, we reflected on Riverbank Park. What a contrast in spaces. We hadn't had a story circle yet, but we knew how people responded in the workshops, and they imagined water. People want to be connected with the water, and Charlevoix certainly inspired that too. I was also reading a book on Site-Specific dance, an anthology of different choreographers experiences. Combining the two of these aspects, water and site dance, I knew that the final scene of the performance needed to be at the Grand Fountain, envisioning water and sharing community stories of hope and reimagining.

The goal of the script and performance was to mirror everyday life at the park, engage individuals with the space to form a sense of community and awareness, and to reflect of the experience. Therefore the script was a reflection of history and the Flint community's collective experiences at Riverbank Park.

The beginning of the show needed to provide introductions and some information on the park's history. The first scene spoke directly to the audience, introducing ourselves, the park, the Halprin process, and the project in order to ease into the performance journey and begin the process of breaking down barriers. The second scene featured FEAT director Linda Tapp, giving a fundraising pitch for the park's north side. The purpose was to feel the sense of pride and hope exhibited in the 1970s when the park was being built. The location on a platform also provided an opportunity to visualize the park's features through the use of dance, which played on the natural elements of the park, including trees, birds, and water. The visuals of this scene were layered by distance, with Linda Tapp immediately in front of the audience, then the tree dancers on the island between the canal and river, and then the bird dancers at the water wall block across the river on the north side.

We then shared information of the positive reception after the park's opening, in addition to the soon-after challenges of the yellow, modernist sculpture on the amphitheater stage. Then, enters Parkour Kid. The park's Grand Fountain is used regularly by college-age people to practice parkour, or free running. So we wrote an actor who interrupts the group looking for the parkour meet at the Grand Fountain. The hope was that the interruption would make the experience feel more authentic, because that's what happens when you're at the park, people talk to you, and they don't care what you're in the middle of doing. You're at the park so whatever you're doing must not be that big of a deal, right? Parkour Kid also represents the juxtaposition of the park names versus what's actually there. Names like Grand Fountain, Canal, and Water Wall, but there's no water flowing from any of these things. Without knowing the history, it's

difficult to know what the functions of the park's areas really are supposed to be. So that was our lighthearted of incorporating those topics.

The scene at the Market Stall block was the same as the 2014 workshop, experiencing the space through Anna Halprin's score of the Golden Positions. Like the workshops, the performance score provided an opportunity for people to engage with the space on their own free will, perhaps in ways that they would have never done on their own. The difference between the workshops and the performance is the expectations about the roles of the participants. In a workshop, it's probably more expected to participate directly in an activity more so than it is likely in a performance. Also like the workshops, following the score was an opportunity for verbal response to the experience.

Then, a fisherman interrupts the conversation because, again, in our experience, that's what happens when you're at the park. This moment was inspired by the people fishing daily on the Flint River, and in particular, Nic's experience with fishermen who interrupted a theatre performance held at the Grand Fountain called "Awaken the Walls." The way Nic told the story, it was a very intense moment in the performance, everyone was silent, when the fisherman turned around from the river and announced loudly that he had caught a fish. It was one of those moments that make you recognize that site-specific performance means interacting with everyday life. The world continues to move around us and we are a part of the experience. The fisherman scene gave an opportunity to also provide information on the no-longer-remaining Archimedes Screw and discuss issues with the Hamilton Dam.

Up until this point, the script focused on providing information and resources to the audience, but the following scenes utilized dance and music to share the experiences

of the park and community members. A dance solo at a lamp post and two trees represented the relationship between nature and manmade elements of the park. The visually interesting aspect of this moment is that the trees were planted in a straight line with the lamp post, they were intentionally placed together to play off the differences and similarities of nature and concrete, which the dance explored. The following scene explored the music festivals held at the park over the years, and utilized dance and music to represent the different styles while highlighting the architecture. This scene was originally imagined to happen on the amphitheatre stage, but construction at the amphitheatre affected our ability to do anything in that block of the park.

The intention of the script at this point was to build a sense of pride and excitement for the park that mirrored community experiences, but the reality of the present construction work would physically stop the audience along the way. Standing under the Saginaw St. Bridge, the audience would look upon the amphitheatre stage while two workers conversed about the park construction. Learning about the changes causes a turning point in the narrative that represented the emotional rollercoaster and feelings of disappointment many people have experienced throughout the park's history.

A turning point in the show was represented by a physical turning point in pathway as well. We couldn't go into the amphitheatre, but we could get a look from the outside at the street level. The group walked back up the ramps and crossed Saginaw St to the Amphitheatre block.

Once across the street, two dancers and a saxophone player gathered at the construction fence, reflecting on the park's past and proposed future, while representing the memory of a wedding at the amphitheatre. During an initial point in the research

phase, a woman shared with me that her wedding was at the Amphitheatre and that she and her husband were upset about the construction. The experience was sad to hear and I knew we could explore through dance these feelings of losing something special but hoping for the best.

The last two scenes were written to take place at the Grand Fountain in order to reflect on the community responses and to imagine the future. The first scene involved a score that the audience would follow while six dancers performed different vignettes throughout the fountain. Each dancer represented a different character or theme from the park, including parkour, fishing, kayaking, youth, architecture, and volunteering. The purpose of the score was to take a self-guided tour counter-clockwise around the fountain's pathway while viewing the dancers. A chime rings two minutes to remind the audience to keep walking. On the fifth chime, the audience makes their way down to the pathway closest to the river for of the final scene.

The final scene includes all the cast members, beginning with poetry and transitioning into music and dance. It starts with a poem comprised of the lines from the poems written by the 2014 workshop participants, with a focus on remembering the past, recognizing the present, and reimagining the future. Then, dancers enter throughout the fountain with blue bright blue fabric and make their way to dance in the empty pools. The fabric represents the missing water. The musicians - a guitar, saxophone, and Tablas - create a song based on the poems and artwork, reimagining and rediscovering the park, looking towards hopes of a positive future. The dancers, and actors too, perform the movements created by workshops participants.

In order to create the performance, the project held an audition for musicians,

actors, and dancers on July 18 at the dance studio for UM-Flint's Department of Theatre and Dance. The response was positive for the summer months with 13 artists auditioning. More casting was done through outreach during Art Walk, at the Flint Institute of Music, and UM-Flint Theatre and Dance. The final cast was a diverse range of ages, races, ethnicities, genres, and experience levels. The cast responses throughout this section are from video recorded interviews with each cast member that happened before the performance dates.

The rehearsal process was designed to be collaborative and follow the intentions and philosophy of the Anna Halprin's approach to dance, the RSVP Cycles, and the Take Part workshops by valuing the role of the individual performer and providing opportunity for response. During the creation process, the artists' feedback and input was valued and consisted of dialogue through conversation and artistic performance. A traditional rehearsal process might consist more of a one-way flow of knowledge, meaning that the director or choreographer tells the dancer exactly what to do based on the choreographer's ideas. This process can be very limiting and unilateral. A more open score like in Halprin's *Ceremony of Us*, shows how the collaborative process allows for a cylindrical exchange of ideas that values the role of the individual as they relate to the whole.

Rehearsals lasted nine weeks and were held two days a week. Sundays from 12 – 2pm was the South bank dance cast, 2 – 3pm was finale rehearsal with everyone, and 3 – 5pm was the North bank dance cast, as well as Thursdays from 6 – 8pm for actors, musicians and the island dancers. Technical and dress rehearsals were held the Sunday and Thursday before the performance weekend.

Of the twenty-three cast members, including myself, Melanie, and Nic - ten cast members had been to the park before rehearsals started, and seven of those lived in Flint since childhood. Six cast members had been to the park before, but only on occasion, and four of them did not live or grow up in Flint. Lastly, seven of the cast members had never been to the park before, of which all seven have not grown up or lived in Flint.

The cast responses to Riverbank Park differed based on their level of past experience with the space. Those who live in Flint expressed memories and the desire to see the park nice again, yet they hadn't visited since they were younger. One cast member said, "I have these fond memories and then as a teenager and young adult it felt kind of abandoned, so like this place that was filled with joy is empty and lonely and sad." Those who had been there a few times seem to have visited only out of necessity of having to pass through the park while traveling to a destination. Sometimes they described a sense of curiosity, but also apathy, and concern for safety. One female cast member described her first visit, "...it did seem kind of seem like a little eerie and like, my friend, who's a girl, and I, and we're just like 'ummm' and we just saw like, men just...I don't know what they were doing. I was kind of scared." On the other hand, some with less park exposure also expressed wanting to help the park and to know more about it. Those who hadn't been to the park before described concerns for safety at first, but were also inspired by the park after visiting during rehearsals.

Like the Take Part workshops, initial rehearsals involved engaging the cast with the park through sensory awareness scores. On the first day, everyone explored the space they would be performing in. Each discipline had a different, but similar score, as they each had different tasks. Musicians received information on the purpose of their scene,

they needed to represent three different time periods in the park – past, present, and future – based on history and community poetry responses from the 2014 workshop, and that they would also be working collaboratively with the dancers. Actors were provided with a working script and worked together in their different spaces. Dancers explored their performance space through smell, touch, sight, sound, and taste, and then created movement responses to their findings. The first and second weeks involved creating in response to the park.

At first, there were mixed reactions to the rehearsal process that were discipline specific, but in general, many cast members were new to working with a collaborative process, had mixed feelings about improvisation, but described the process as a good experience. Words used to describe first impressions of the process included weird (x2), worried, confused, scary, new, not sure, too open, blank piece of paper, the same, not much change, no response, cool, no expectations, didn't know what to do, intimidated. Musicians experienced no change of expectations because they are used to working collaboratively. Actors were not used to a collaborative process and expressed a mix of feeling weird, no change in thoughts, and enjoyment with the process. Lastly, not all, but quite a few dancers were worried or unsure of what to do at first because they were new to working with a collaborative process.

Dancers identified the most as being new to working with a collaborative process, of which most were female, with the exception of one actor and one male. It is worth noting that the dancers make up fifty percent of the cast. This population also hadn't been to the park much, or at all, and a few articulated that they were new to modern and site-specific dance, and came from a more ballet background. One dancer new to the process

said, “It was different...because I’ve never done modern, so figuring out what that was, but then starting to understand the nature and everything that’s around it, and just bringing that in and using that as the inspiration kind of helped.” Even though the process was different, the awareness scores helped this dancer’s process connecting to the park and the performance material.

As rehearsal continued, valuation was an important part of creating a collective environment while valuing each individual’s response. Each week I wrote an updated score for the rehearsal, and then the dancers would perform the score. We would then discuss how that went. What went well? What didn’t? Is the work staying true to the narrative? The discussion allowed for an open process and made the cast feel involved in the process. We also video recorded the last performance of each rehearsal, and then began each rehearsal by watching the last week’s video. Performers said that they found this to be helpful during the process, and made them feel included too. A dancer found this to be helpful, stating, “One thing I really liked about it was watching the videos, which I’ve never done with dance before. Like every week we’d watch the videos and I could really see the progress, and kind of inform myself for the next practice, like what I wanted to change, and more performance aspects of it.”

There were also some challenges working in the collaborative process. The college student performers and the dancers had less experience working collaboratively and needed more direction sometimes. One dancer described needing more direction in the beginning “At first I was just very confused by what was going on. I didn’t understand that this freedom of motion meant that I got to have so much input, I’m like, “No, you need to actually tell me what I’m doing right now.”

On the other hand, the more experienced artists were used to working collaboratively and responded well to the creation process. As time went on, the inclusive nature of the process made room for everyone's voices, and as more people experienced this, they started to step up and own their role in the process and performance. One Musician said, "A lot of this is the result of a confidence building process. You give people latitude as they earn and acquire your respect, confidence, trust."

There were mixed reactions between each discipline about working with improvisation during the rehearsal process. While not all, dancers were more likely to have less experience working with improvisation and to describe the process as "different." While musicians were more experienced with improvising and described the process as "lovely" with "lots of freedom." Actors described the process as "interesting", and were open to the organic process, even though they were not used to having so much input.

Compared to other performances they have been a part of, seven of the cast members said that this show is different than others because it is a site-specific show, but also described site-specific as inspiring, exciting, and engaging, while the rehearsal process was less structured or strict than other shows they've been a part of, and felt that the process ultimately created a sense of community by valuing individual experience. One dancer said, "All the other shows I've done have been on stages and this one's outside so it's a completely different atmosphere...I think it's more exciting because you have more to work with and more things to inspire you." The less experienced dancers felt growth and open-mindedness throughout the process. Actors felt it was a new artistic environment because they were new to working with a dance project. Musicians felt more

engaged and free in the open process, and one musician said it was a normal process compared to past shows, "...it's, yeah, going in the normal stages of development I see in successful results."

By the end of the rehearsal process, cast members of all disciplines described the rehearsal process as a good experience that helped bring back memories while meeting new people and growing together. Many artists expressed that this process could be applied to other aspects of their artistic lives, teaching and performing, and that is helped develop their craft. One dancer said, "I've never done a site specific dance performance and it's really helped me develop my dance style, it's helped me improv better, it's just helped me open up my horizon to what dance can be and what it can do."

With the collaborative process, every one expressed a connection to each other across artistic disciplines because the dancers felt good because of connecting with each other and the environment, the actors felt good, and the musicians felt familiar. The actors and musicians commented that the process felt like a natural progression, and that things felt better once everyone was "on the same page" and felt more confident. Words used to describe the rehearsal process at the end included: Different (x6), Interesting (x4), New (x2), Good, Great, Lovely, Very little (x2), Freedom, Eye-Opening, Enjoyable, Exciting.

After coming to the park for seven weeks for rehearsal, the main themes identified by cast members from all backgrounds, no matter what type of experience they've had with the park before, felt that Riverbank Park has potential but it's sad to see it hasn't been maintained, that the park needs revitalization, and that they hope this project brings awareness, specifically the performance.

Since rehearsals, half of the Flint resident cast members who had been to the park before articulated that they haven't had the opportunity to go to the park lately, but since rehearsals, have an interest in returning more often. One dancer who lives in Flint said "It's been eye-opening in a way because I didn't realize in some ways how bad the park had gotten, and being in it, and being, walking through it a lot, it still reminds me of what it could be." Since rehearsals, those who have little to no experience with the park said that they now have a changed perception and want to visit the park more, they want to see more people there, and they were more likely to express being inspired by park and its architecture, seeing the park for what it is today as opposed to what it was.

From the impact they have experience during the rehearsal process, cast members described it as being due to the people making the positive experience and due to that the show is site-specific. Additional responses include the reflection on memories and applying it to the arts, an appreciation for opportunity for collaboration and performance in the city, and a desire to see a cleaner environment at the park in order to attract international students. One actor who grew up in Flint said, "It's been really cool working with a lot of people that I don't know, on a piece about a place that I'm really familiar with and kind of seeing everyone learn and grow about it, around it, together. All of the cast members hoped the performance brings hope for flint community, brings people to the park, and brings awareness and revitalization.

The rehearsal process was similar to Anna's process-oriented approach to dance as well as Lawrence's Take Part workshops. While the performance itself wasn't improvised, the rehearsal process utilized improvisation throughout devising, in order to include the performer's movement voice in a collaborative process, much like *Ceremony*

of Us. Rehearsals were also designed similar to the Take Part workshops by utilizing awareness walks and scores, having performers solve their own objectives, and providing opportunity to share their experience through art. Overall the rehearsal process worked collaboratively to include the individual experiences of the community and performers to create a unified performance.

2015 Performance

The performance was held over three weekend days (9/25; 9/26; 9/27) and included a Thursday dress rehearsal (9/24) in which 180 people attended total. Marketing was completed through handout and poster flyers, as well as website, email and social marketing lists from the Flint River Corridor Alliance, Flint Downtown Development Authority, and UM-Flint Department of Theatre and Dance. The show was titled, *Riverbank Park: A Beautiful Future*, and was inspired by a park fundraising brochure created by FEAT in the mid 1970s, which is now located at the Buick Gallery Archives.

At the beginning of the show, the audience gathered at the Riverbank Park sign next to UM-Flint's rink downtown. They were greeted by the Director and Assistant Director, who were acting as tour guides. The guides explained to the audience that the goal and intention of the event was to explore and discover Riverbank Park in a way that was similar to how the park was created, by interacting with the space.

As the audience traveled throughout the major blocks of the park, they were engaged with theatre, music, and dance that told the history and community experiences of the park. The performance consisted of eight different scenes, including a 1970s park fundraising pitch, fishing, dancers representing elements of nature and points in time,

music from festivals over time, the construction today, and an entire scene at the grand fountain about the imaginings of the community members from the 2014 workshop, representing the future of the park.

One of the unique aspects of the performance was the chance for the audience to interact with the space and being a part of the performance itself. During an interactive section, audience members were asked to participate in a score created by Anna Halprin called the Golden Positions, which are sitting, standing, walking, and lying down. The purpose of the score is to explore the space using the golden positions. Following the score, audience members articulated that they became more aware of nature in the park and they felt an improved connection with the space.

After each performance, the audience was engaged in a talkback about the performance, their experiences with Riverbank Park, and discussion of the park's future role for the community.

The project goals were met because the performance improved the quality of life for residents by creating a performance and space for community dialogue about Riverbank Park, the performance also brought attention to Flint's history and culture of the park by including important moments and themes in the script that were discussed during story circle events and last year's workshop, and the project promoted a wider use of and appreciation of the park by bringing people to the park to experience it first-hand in a memorable and meaningful way.

The audience response to the performance was overall very positive and ignited much conversation about the park's past, present, and future. For those who had been to the park before, it brought back both painful and joyous memories. On the other hand,

many audience members expressed different thoughts on what they'd like to see in the park's future, including several types of artwork, ways to address issues of safety, and better maintenance and cleaning. There was also a desire to see the park's water features working again, specifically at the fountain, and a hope that the amphitheater construction will help bring people to the park, despite skepticism of the city's ability to follow through with the project successfully. In response to the performance, the audience felt the cast was a good, diverse representation of Flint and that the authenticity of each performer's voice was appreciated and recognized.

The performance raised \$160 in donations from audience members for future park maintenance and clean ups. The money was donated to Flint's DDA. The future of Riverbank Park Dance Project will continue to focus on community outreach through the web archive, photos, and video of the performance.

To view photo and video from the performance visit

<https://www.facebook.com/riverbankdanceproject>

or

<http://www.riverbankdanceproject.com>

Conclusion

Examining the Halprin's work from John Dewey's philosophy of experience provides a method for creating successful art that engages communities throughout the process by reflecting on everyday experiences, valuing the role of the individual, and sharing through a transformational artistic experience. Likewise, the Riverbank Park Dance Project developed site-specific workshops and performances by using Anna's dance method to engage the Flint community with the threatened Riverbank Park, a space designed by Lawrence's firm.

During the last audience talk back, in the final moment of the dialogue session, a comment was made that I feel reflects the entire experience. An audience member said, "The key to any park is to have people to be able to actually participate in it. Parks don't exist in a vacuum. Without people being here, it's all for nothing, and I don't think that's what the Halprins would want." The Riverbank Park Dance Project did not set out to transform the park, but rather, the community's perception of the park.

There is little research available about the park's design process, intentions, and history. Also, due to issues of blight and safety, some Flint residents hadn't visited the park in many years and non-Flint residents rarely visited. The community is not using the space because of its negative perception. The project cannot control what happens to the park physically, but it can work with the people that are affected by the park to help instill awareness and appreciation. As Dewey outlines, and as the Halprins demonstrate, it's about transforming the individuals that make up the community while valuing their experiences.

By creating an aesthetic experience, the project was able to engage the Flint community by sharing its history and community's stories. For many involved in the project, their being involved with the process has meant that they care about the outcome of the park.

The project discovered that community members have fond memories of the park, are concerned about its maintenance and safety, and hopes the construction will result in better accessibility for the future. In general, the community reported having a positive experience at the park when both learning the history and engaging with the space through the methods of Anna and Lawrence Halprin, resulting in changed negative perceptions, increased awareness and appreciation, and a greater sense of community. Overall, the Riverbank Park Dance Project provides a framework for community-engaged site-specific dance in Flint's post-industrial urban environment.

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