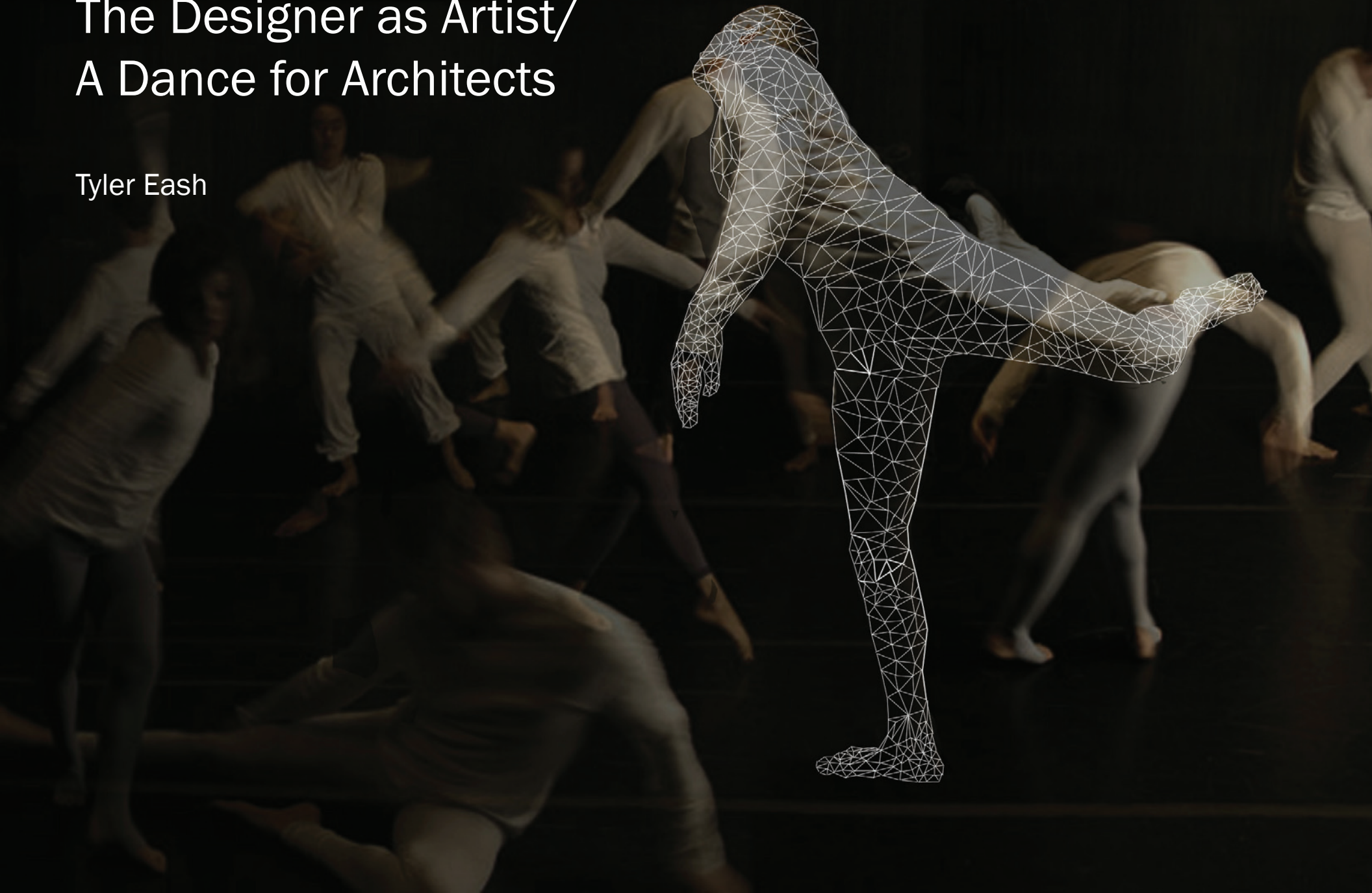


# EARTH NARRATIVES:

The Designer as Artist/  
A Dance for Architects

Tyler Eash



# EARTH NARRATIVES: THE DESIGNER AS ARTIST/ A DANCE FOR ARCHITECTS

is a senior thesis presented to the faculty of the department of Landscape Architecture of the University of California, Davis, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Bachelors of Science in Landscape Architecture

Accepted and approved by:

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EARTH NARRATIVES



# EARTH NARRATIVES

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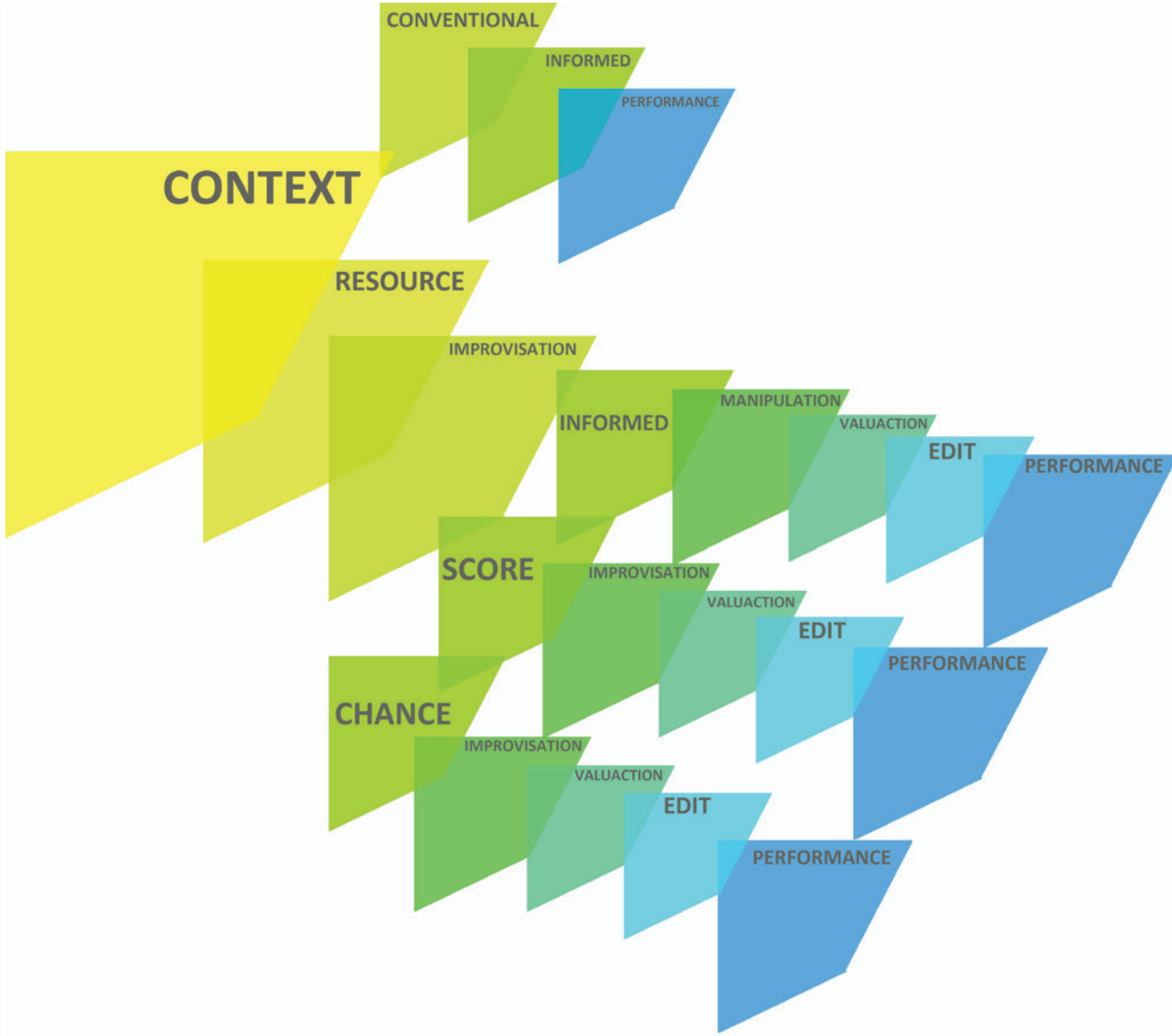
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## CREATIVE PATHWAYS

alternative methods for developing creative work





# INTRODUCTION

**The earth is the most sacred media.**

**The undetermined is the exciting.**

**Bodies are holy and the Garden is my church.**

Questions I consistently ask the community of Landscape Architecture is, “Are Landscape Architects artists?” and “If so, how do we translate our environment and what are our creative methodologies?” Should Landscape Architects hold the same obligations and freedoms as artists? My thesis displays the designer as artist, and further investigates alternative creative pathways to develop compositional structures for creativity and design.

Artists possess a level of sensitivity to context, process, and material that is rare in the realm of landscape architecture. Identifying artistic processes and methods might prove useful for landscape architects and designers. Through my research as a choreographer, landscape architect, and artist, I aim to identify useful creative pathways for landscape architecture and further investigate alternative approaches to designing space, place, and form.

I see the landscape as large scale experiential sculpture. Designers should use their bodies to perceive space. Gardens must be performed and are never still. Chance, physics, narratives, and experience can be viewed as valuable tools to motivate design. Although my process is inherently chaotic, it has consistently proven to be helpful in attaining powerful experience, performance, and design. I hope to share my investigations with the community of Landscape Architecture in the hopes that alternative creative pathways in designing the landscape and the practice of garden design can be cultivated.



**Image 1: A dance For Architects dancers performing a chance duet**

# The Designer as Artist / The Artist as Translator

Most of society, excluding esoteric art communities view the artist as a romantic, stripped of concise ideas and organized thought. The identity of an artist is largely displayed as being a non-linear thinker, one who is shamanistic in their process. The exotification or mystique of an artist derives from a misunderstanding of creative methodologies. Because of the variability and fluctuating identities of artists, the creative process is difficult to codify. With inconsistency in ideas and a constant change in context, it is difficult to assume a formula that would create epiphanies. The lack of valuation within the art community has prevented many designers from validating or adopting “lofty” contemporary movements. I perceive artistic research as being just as valid in developing design as engineering, ecology, or social science.

The ideas presented are constructed under my bias as a landscape architect, choreographer, and visual artist. The body, bodily experience, aesthetics, form, and movement play large roles in this thesis. Although I value conventional and taught methodologies in designing the landscape, I am driven to research my own methods that create an alternative representation of place and space. Creativity can be derived from sensitivity and poetic research. Artists are translators. Artists are scientists. Artists are performers but are not exclusively story tellers.



**Image 2:**  
**Compagnie Maguy Marin**  
**UMWELT**  
**by presenting mundane**  
**tasks on a stage,**  
**Compagnie Maguy Marin**  
**translated daily rituals**  
**into dynamic performance**

# INSPIRATION/IMPULSE, DREAMS & URGES

**“Improvisation is a blaze of consciousness. “**

**-Carol Armitage, Dance Artist,1**

The compositional process excludes no media, is erratic, holistic, and human. In creating a work, the conceptualization speaks the same language. It is difficult to think linearly. Creativity rarely appears in full statements. We must use logic to fill in the vagaries of thought. However, in moments of passivity, we are the most receptive. Designers should be listeners. To create is to be intimate, vulnerable. In the ether of thought, it is difficult to organize. It is an artist who dreams, but a designer must also plan.

**“Creativity is a fluid moving over the minds of men.”**

**- Ezra pound, 2**

As an artist and choreographer, I am granted the freedoms to create regardless of practical constraints. The artist is an individual who is allowed to take risks, and develop experiences and undecipherable narratives or abstractions. The only instances where I must think pragmatically are in installation and performance. A Landscape Architect may invite inspiration, but later crystallize a detailed plan of action. The difficulty in designing often arises in maintaining an honesty to an original inspiration. The transformation and articulation of inspiration is the task of a designer. It is the shape of content, rather than the content its self that allows our works to engage.

**“There is a certain level of independence and cynicism in conceptual art which can make it feel remote from society .... In a garden, the conceptual process has a more human dimension – there is always a sense of scale – and that makes it a more “grounded” mode of expression.”**

**-Marco Antonini, Architect, 3**

Gardens are realms of physical, visual, emotional, and social experience. Many landscape architects feel that they must acknowledge pattern and aesthetics but exclude the metaphysical, identity, or gestalt within their research? Artists are permitted to invite more intimate catalysts into their work. Impulse, urges, and dreams are sometimes treated as fuel for a work. Although landscape architects must gather inspiration from a site and express sensitivity to context, we can still draw inspiration from our humanity.

The beauty of art may be within its humanity. So too, the creation of art is human. Urges, physical-emotional impulse can be fuel for creating. Within dance, impulse and urge play key roles in developing movement.

**“Deny the very existence of mind” –Louis Danz, Contemporary Writer, 4**

When one dreams, one is experiencing a performance under the restrictions of your thought, composed by chance and hidden narratives. Dreams may fuel ideas. Dreams are often surreal, composed of emotionally connotative imagery and fully embodying social or physical experiences. And as a garden, dreams are metaphysical. The dream, the main idea, or the metaphysical content can be the seed of creativity. Although vague and often undecipherable, the artist or designer may further express the experience of our human inspirations. The absence of clarity might invite us to fill voids with content. The main idea or experience is strong enough to interest. I ask why not design for the metaphysical.

If something is understood too easily, it might not be worth the time to translate. Humans are curious. I myself will venture into a project driven by impulse and ideals, without knowing the full complexities of the work. My objective is to translate these impulses and my catalyst is curiosity. If it can be questioned, investigate it through design.

**“If there is value it rests upon the human ability to have idea, and indeed upon the stature of the idea itself.”**

**-Ben Shaun, Visual Artist, The Shape of Content, 5**



**Image 3: Dance Artist, Pina Bauch/ Wuppetal Tanztheater's work "Nelken" Pina Bausch's work is enriched with the excitement of human impulse, eroticism, and romance.**

# Context Informs Content

**My reach will only go as far as my body's architecture allows. The dance is already in my bones.**

The physical restrictions or physical realms of a work; time, and culture can present a distinct outline for the construction of a work. Context can also provide further guidance in the field of landscape architecture. Knowing this, one might be able to invite these restraints into the design process. In Landscape architecture, we often “design” by manipulating the natural formations of a site. We re-grade or alter topography so it fits with a geometric pattern or structure. If we show more sensitivity to the direct context of our site, or the inherent and honest geometries, we can use them as a catalyst for design. Perhaps, the issue with this may be that a site may not be naturally beautiful or pleasing in its aesthetic, but I argue that a design dialogue is still needed within the context of rock quarries, dumps, and polluted rivers. There exists many creative pathways when investigating the context of a site. It may show us the greater picture, form, or history of a site.

Further more, it is the designer/artist that must maintain an honesty to a site. To implement alien forms or patterns in a familiar site might be in error, unless the juxtaposition of the designed and existing elements is the cultivated dialogue. A creation must create a dialogue with its context. The subtle forms of hill sides, rivers and slopes present many valuable opportunities to design. We can slope a fence to a hill side, create outlooks, frame the sea, twist through trees, or swim down rivers. It isn't always necessary to implement strict, stagnant, and aesthetically conventional geometries over the soft and performative aspects of a site. Every site, structure, space, or creation has a distinct language. It is the designer's job to decipher this tongue. Only then, can one articulate creatively.

In making a dance, restraints help to shape choreography. I can only reach my arm as far as my bones will allow. I can only jump as far as physics allows. Also, in making a dance, the primary material is already decided. The dance already exists in the restraints of a body. We can only do what's humanly possible. It is the choreographer who edits and composes these parts and phrases into a formalized dance. So too, can a designer create a work that is a reconfiguration of a summation of existing parts. The restraints inform context. Context, informs content.



**Image 4:**  
**Visual Artist Leslie Shows, “Quarry” displays the macro story of a site, and the micro monologues of a landscape, by displaying mountains and the minerals with which they are composed.**



# The Language of Space

Relevance and continuity must be considered when designing a site. The identity of a site can be easily understood when viewing its macro conditions and aesthetics. Often, designers view the landscape on an exclusively macro scale. The intricacies and quiet monologues embedded within a site may help in developing a dialogue between a designer and a space.

The visual artist, Leslie Shows, paints rock quarries, mines, and industrial landscapes. She views both the macro substance of a site, and the micro substance. She further investigates the site elements symbology. In creating her work she may paint a site and litter it with diagrams of chemical compounds, or salt crystals, or even the material that is being mined. Salts, sulfurs, crystals, even toe nails are glued to her paintings for her to accurately articulate her site.

**Image 5: ‘Heap of Elements for a Body, About to Act or Finished Acting’, Visual Artist: Leslie Shows**



A landscape is already composed of a fabric, and already possesses a distinct vernacular. This may be the catalyst you need. Crop fields, hedge rows, rice fields, orchards, these are inherently beautiful spaces. A designer needs to prioritize the existing poetry of place. Perhaps it is the designer's job to not invent, but rather reorganize a site. In doing this, relevance is achieved and the site context is respected. Maybe a designer should treat the landscape as a fashion designer treats a dress. The fields, hills, marshes are a fabric, and it is the architect who must cut, fold and seam the existing elements. The language of your design may be present, or even the controversy decipherable.

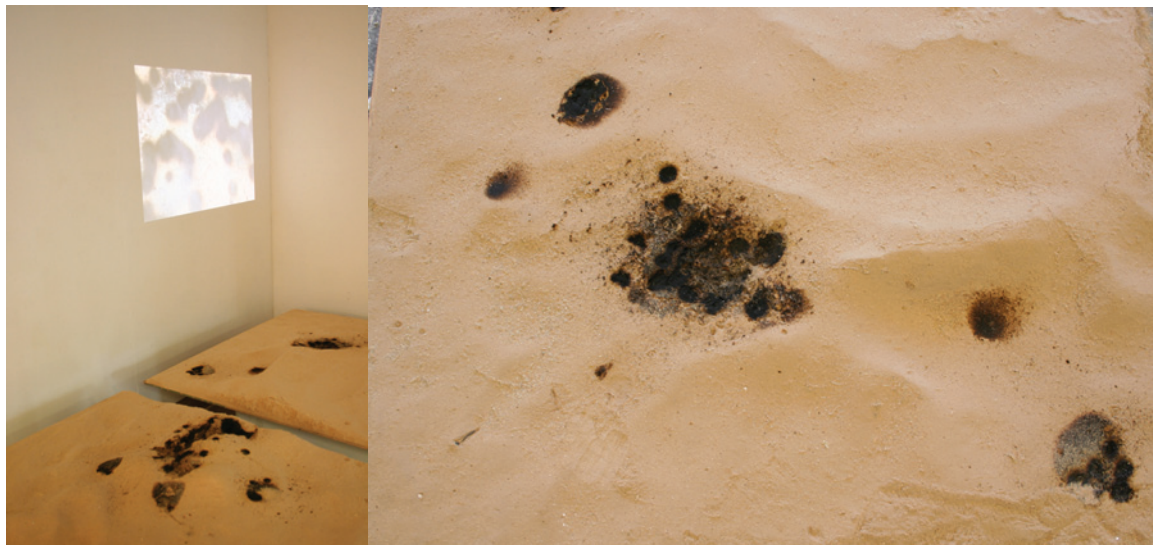
Is there a river interrupted by man?

Is there a fabric tear?

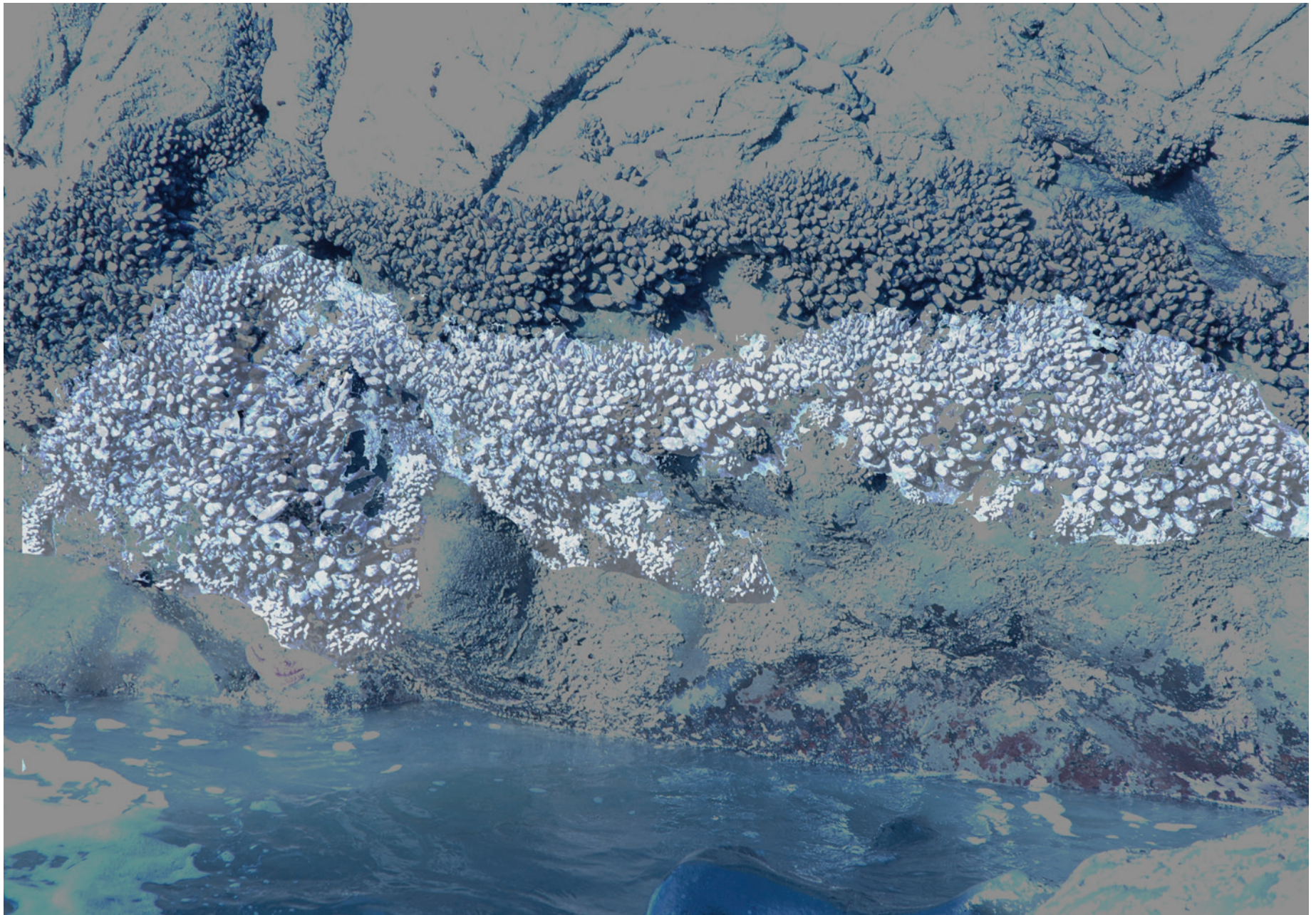
Are there wildfires? Erosion?

Can these be the stories that motivate design?

Can we create a narrative, a drama about a landscape?



**Image 6: Woodland Wildfire  
Tyler Eash.  
Video and Sawdust Sculpture. This  
sculpture work uses the process of  
wind and fire to sculpt. The sawdust  
sculpture is ignited, formations of  
black ash slowly form. The work  
highlights the natural performance  
and the spectacle of arid fire struck  
landscapes**



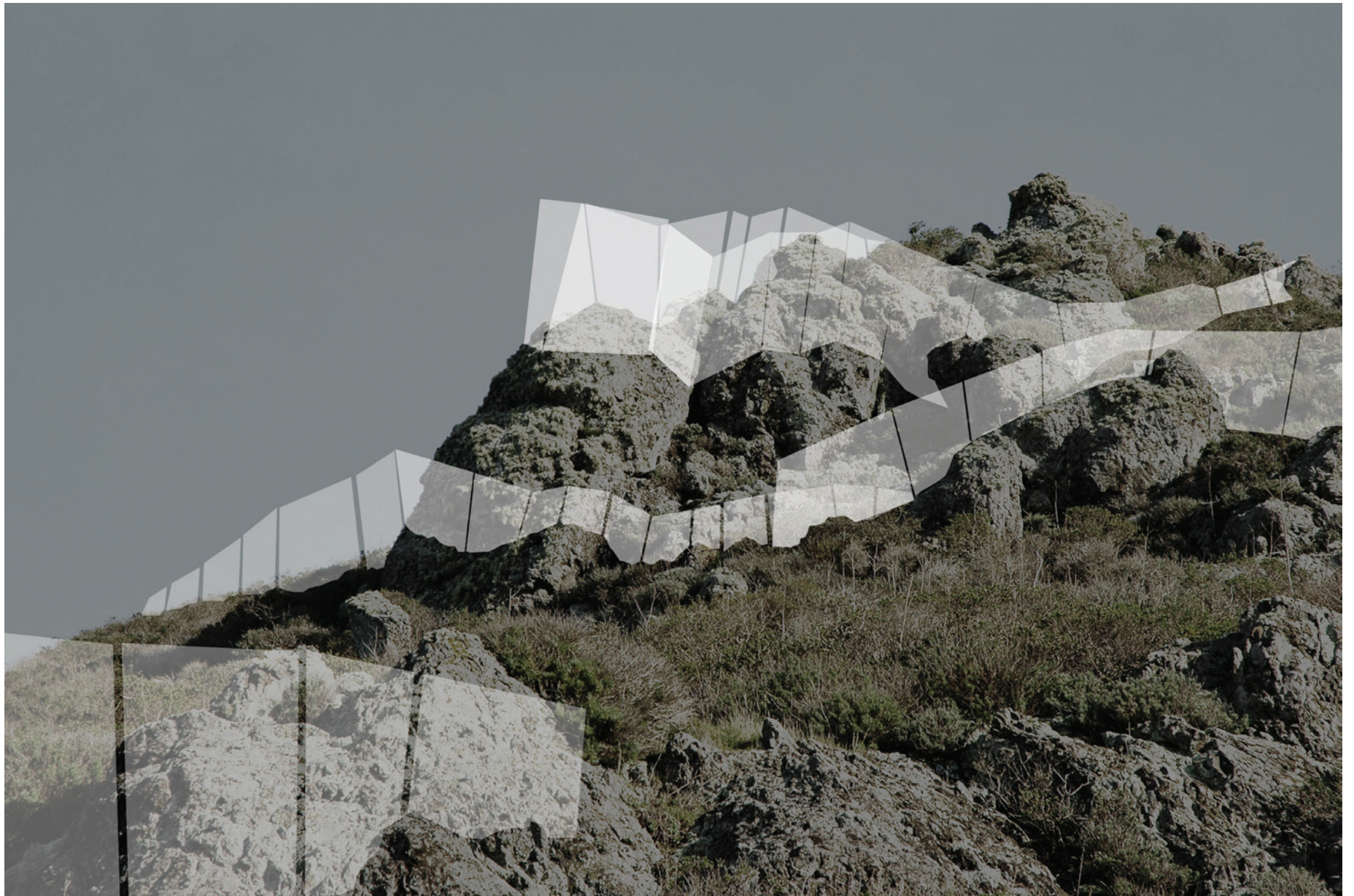
**Image 7: Mussels on a rock, Pirate's Cove, Muir Beach, CA**

How can designers translate a site, its language, and context into an aesthetic or design?

Designers can use the existing formations of landscapes to inform an aesthetic intervention. Hills can suggest the undulation of walls and fences. Rivers can carve the shape of a bridge, and trees can guide a path.

**Lawrence Halprin's favorite work was the trail system he created at Yosemite National Park. Of all the powerful works he created, one of his most passive interventions is his most successful. When designing the paths, he aimed to process a journey for the traveler and frame the existing beauty of the site. He facilitated nature to design for him. He reorganized and representing space without redefining it. Context played the largest role in developing his work at Yosemite.**

**Right Image 8: Hills at Pirate's Cove, Muir Beach, CA**



We can use existing rocks as points to plot designs.  
The existing elements of a site can determine a geometry.  
Using the natural architecture of a site would create coherence in a project instead of implementing a foreign aesthetic. Designers must support beautiful places and not command it with bias aesthetics.

We must not redefine space, we must represent space and develop a sensitivity to an existing controversy, monologue, and aesthetic language of a site.

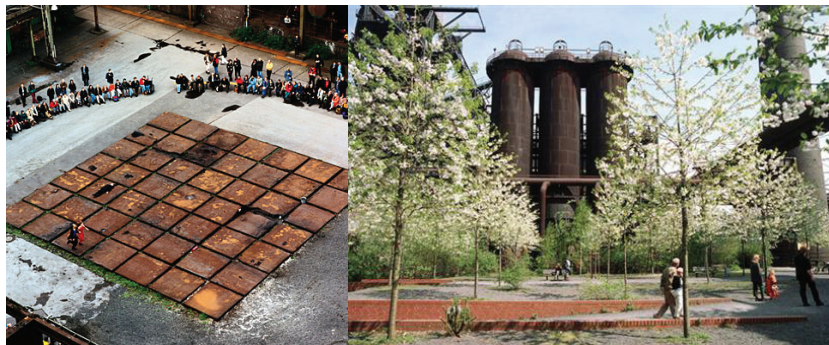
**Right Image 9: Mapping rocks to create a path. Pirate's Cove, Muir beach, CA**



# The Garden as Performance: Designing for People and Experience.

**“A Space without function allows one to be in the moment”.-Renzo Piano, Architect**

Gardens and buildings should not be designed to be viewed, yet rather to be experienced. Most performed concert works are displayed in formal proscenium spaces, where in, audiences view a piece from the distance of the house and the performance is on stage. Within the theatre, there exists a clear dichotomy of roles. The people on the stage are active performers, and the people within the audience are passive watchers. The landscape does not exist as a proscenium. The Landscape is not to be engaged passively. When one is in the landscape, one is performing. The roles we play within the garden can be driven by narratives, can be goal or task driven, or driven by experiences. Even animals play a role within the garden. Because living things are necessary for the garden to perform, people and animals should be regarded as necessary site elements. Gardens should be composed with the elements of time and the variability of natural spectacle. Although a garden's show could last a century, the transformation of space is dynamic.



**Image 10 & 11: Duisburg Nord, Piazza Metallica  
Peter Latz + Partners design at the now  
infamous Landschaftspark Duisburg-Nord,  
to display the performance of time and the  
dialogue between nature and industry on the  
site. Over time, the steel grid will erode  
allowing existing flora to grow through gaps  
and voids.**



It was Anna Halprin who demystified her late husband, Lawrence Halprin's creative process for me. In the realm he cultivated, of sublime quarries and ravines of water and steel, and stone amphitheaters tucked into mystic groves, he aimed to create a sense of mystery and intimacy. She told me that every design that he created was attempting to replicate the experiences he felt as a child. He would run off into the wood near his home and find sanctuary under a tree. Within the shade of that tree, he found a place of his own. After years of design research and an impressive body of progressive work, it was his childhood perception of place that informed his work.

**“Every child is an artist. It’s a challenge to remain an artist when you grow up” – Pablo Picasso, 6**

Perhaps this is how landscape architects should design. We should be aware of how we sense space and develop sensitivity to environmental stimuli, happenings, and spectacle. Too often, designers are driven by the pen or aesthetic goals and rarely by the existing experience of a site. If we as designers are aware of the performers within our garden, how can we design accordingly? How does a garden for one person feel? How does a garden for 1,000 feel? We must see gardens as both sanctuaries and stages.

If we are to design or dictate the experience of our garden guests, we must trace back every experience or aesthetic to its primordial origin and purpose for its primal stimulation. If we are to design for comfort, we must notice elements that comfort us, and question its origin. Water is relaxing because we need it to live. Being near water relaxes us. Enclosed spaces make us safe. Open spaces are places of assertion. If we are to design to stimulate, what elements should we use?

Gardens can be designed to choreograph performers. Halprin's Yosemite path would bend around trees, and dive under boulders, forcing guests to move and actively engage nature. Travelers would bend and shimmy past rocks and over rivers. Halprin used the experience of nature to make people dance.

Designing for experience

We can personify a tunnel into a breathing and living cave.

By linking sound to movement we can create an experiential gesture in a seemingly mundane site.

**Right Image 12: Sho Tunnel, Yerba Buena Island., San Francisco. By imitating the Japanese Sho, a wood-wind instrument that creates music on the inhalation and exhalation of breath, traffic can create music.**



# The Body as a Landscape: Metaphor, Lyricism, Sensuality, and Poetry

**“Our need for meaning, truth, and beauty are fundamental requirements that many of our landscapes must fulfil.” -Martha Schwartz, 7**

The garden may be the most romanticized space that we cultivate. The frivolity of a floral spectacle, or the ephemeral performance of a summer garden creates a realm of warmth, serenity, and ethereal philosophy. It is easiest to design a garden with a story, a theme, and prose.

The most conventionally artistic methods for landscape architects are in narrative design, constructing a space to tell a story. Narrative creativity is also the most classical method of developing art. Although narrative work in dance and art may be perceived as being both naïve and unsophisticated in conceptual thinking, it is still a very valid in developing form or gardens.

A designer may translate prose or stories into a garden, and construct a space as a stage designer does scenery. The landscape can be personified. We can transform the vast energy of space and the poetry or connotations present into something beautiful. We can determine the meaning every object within a space by its context. A vase is frivolous, it exists only to please us, this item may be beautiful in the classic sense, but shallow in dramatic worth. A large stone commands a space with its stoicism and creates permanence in a garden

Although, we can use theatrics and human stories to create space, it would be more relevant to rely on the dialogue and controversies within a site. We can highlight an interruption of a river, a disconnect from nature, a continuation or degradation of an urban fabric. We can utilize the existing languages of a site and cultivate it into a play.

The Landscape can be personified. We can create a story or highlight a landscape conflict. Designers may maintain a theme and perceive the landscape as a character. Landscapes have human characteristics. They can be sensual, masculine, surreal, sublime, powerful. There exists a strong narrative in most stimulating sites. We as designers must capitalize upon these narratives.

### **Abstraction:**

We can rely abstraction to translate conventional methods of designing. We can transform the inspiration or language of a space into undecipherable narratives, geometries, or forms. The abstract is a manifestation of content that was translated from a concept, thesis, or idea. The abstract does not dictate or explain an idea, but is composed within it. It may be gestural or experiential, but is rarely narrative. Often the content of an abstraction is only easily deciphered in the work's program or process. Artists are free to display their process as performance and further break down the conventional walls of viewing work.

### **Translating Narratives**

In my work, I often write poetry that is relevant to the concept of my piece. I will then use the words and translate it into movement. I have three methods. The first uses the connotative value of the words. The words used have associations and meanings that can be translated into movement. The second uses the visual depiction of the word. The shape of the letters can be a restriction to develop a dance. I often warm my dancers up mentally and physically by asking them to "sign" their name in space using different parts of their body.

The third method is to use the experience of the word. the sound, the sensation of saying it, the value of the word if we didn't understand its meaning but only the sound of it. It is not important to my self as an artist, in whether a process or translation is logical. The process does need to be beautiful, and must exist as an extension of the created work.

Landscape Dramas:

Natural Performance and Spectacle

Drama drives design in theater. Set designers and theater artists intend to “evoke” experiences in their performance spaces. A clear narrative and theme dictates aesthetic choices. How bodies move through space and how bodies are seen in space are taken into account. On stage, nothing should exist without purpose. If I were to place an object on stage, it is to be seen as an extension of character or body. In theater, Identity shapes place and defines space. How do we create narratives for our site? How do we as designers develop plays for space? If we are to invent or decipher a dialogue with our site, it may help motivate a design.

# CHOREOGRAPHY: Moving Architecture

**“Form is formulation- the turning of content into a material entity, rendering a content accessible to others, giving it permanence, willing it to the race. Form is as varied as are the accidental meetings of nature. Form in art is as varied as idea itself.”**

**-Ben Shaun, Visual Artist, The Shape of Content, 8**

A choreographer articulates the inherent geometries of the body within space. Abstraction of form exists even in the most narrative works. So too, does the designer articulate the geometries of materials. One can plot a dance, and one can move a landscape. I have realized through my studies of dance and landscape architecture that a structure of aesthetic truths exists, also, that the two fields should not exist in such a strong dichotomy. The freedoms of dance and movement can inform architects to further the abstractions of form or potential form. Choreography is moving architecture. When I make a dance, each movement is a series of articulated forms that are presented in a pathway of construction or degradation. The excitement of dance is within the unexpected spectacle of movement. A dance is architectural forms strung together. A body, an architecture that is recognizable and unthreatening can pull attention in space without movement. A dancing body is uncommon. When we view dance we are experiencing a recognizable structure that is transforming and translating itself into unusual and often emotionally connotative images. When we pair the power of this human recognition, movement, dynamic form, and a primordial urge to empathize, dance can develop a powerful catharsis in individuals.

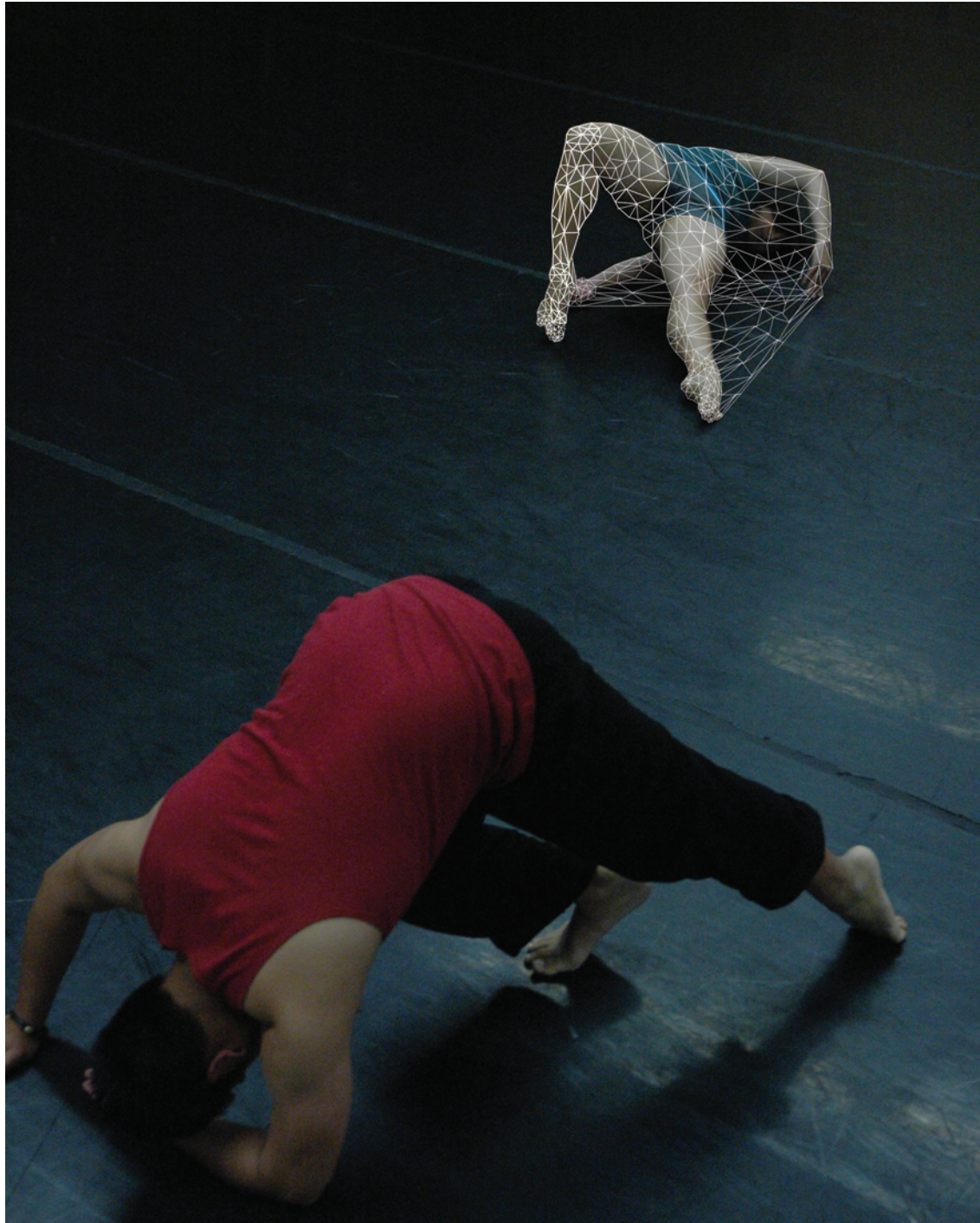
So much of space is designed to be still. If we can agree that dance is the dynamic movement of architecture, can we agree that a space that moves or implies movement is powerful?

Movement is the summation of time, space, and form. It is the past, present, and power of potential movement/form. Knowing this, how can we imply time and potential movement in space. A cantilevered building or chair catches our attention because it implies a collapse or fall. A twisting structure or tree is beautiful because it can be personified, it can be reaching or turning for something. A pyramid stands in an angle of repose, in strength as a dancer preparing to perform. I've come to realize these as truths in my research as a choreographer. The most dynamic movement is potential movement, and the most exciting work is an undetermined work.

**Left Image 13: the Body presented as moving architecture**

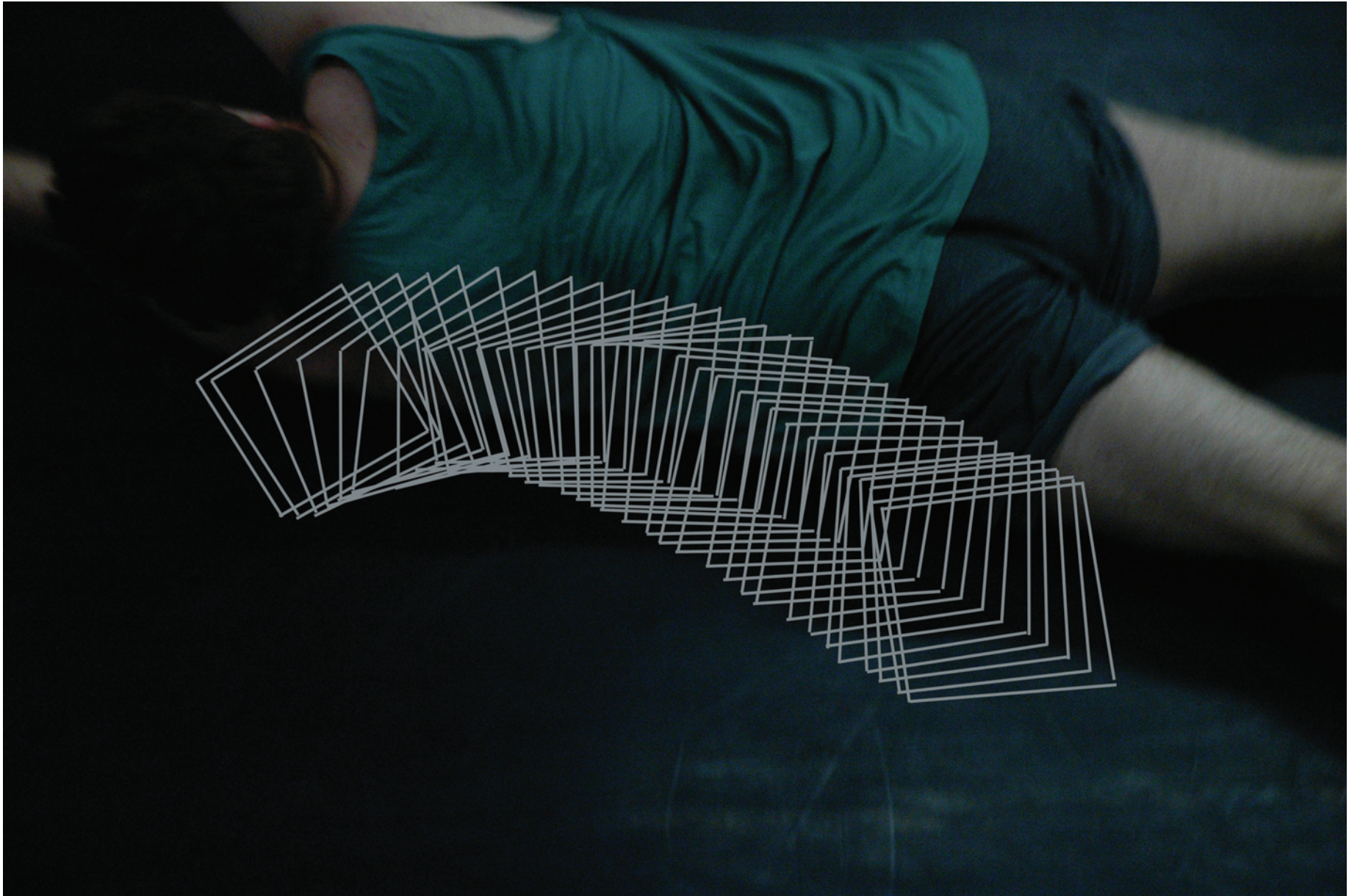






**Image 14:**  
**A Dance For Architects:**  
**Movement allows us to transform**  
**the body into new shifts and**  
**forms. Here, the body is not**  
**presented with four limbs, but**  
**rather as system of planes.**

**Right Image 15: We can use the**  
**shifts and twists of our bones**  
**to create “moving” architectural**  
**forms.**



# Movement Mapping

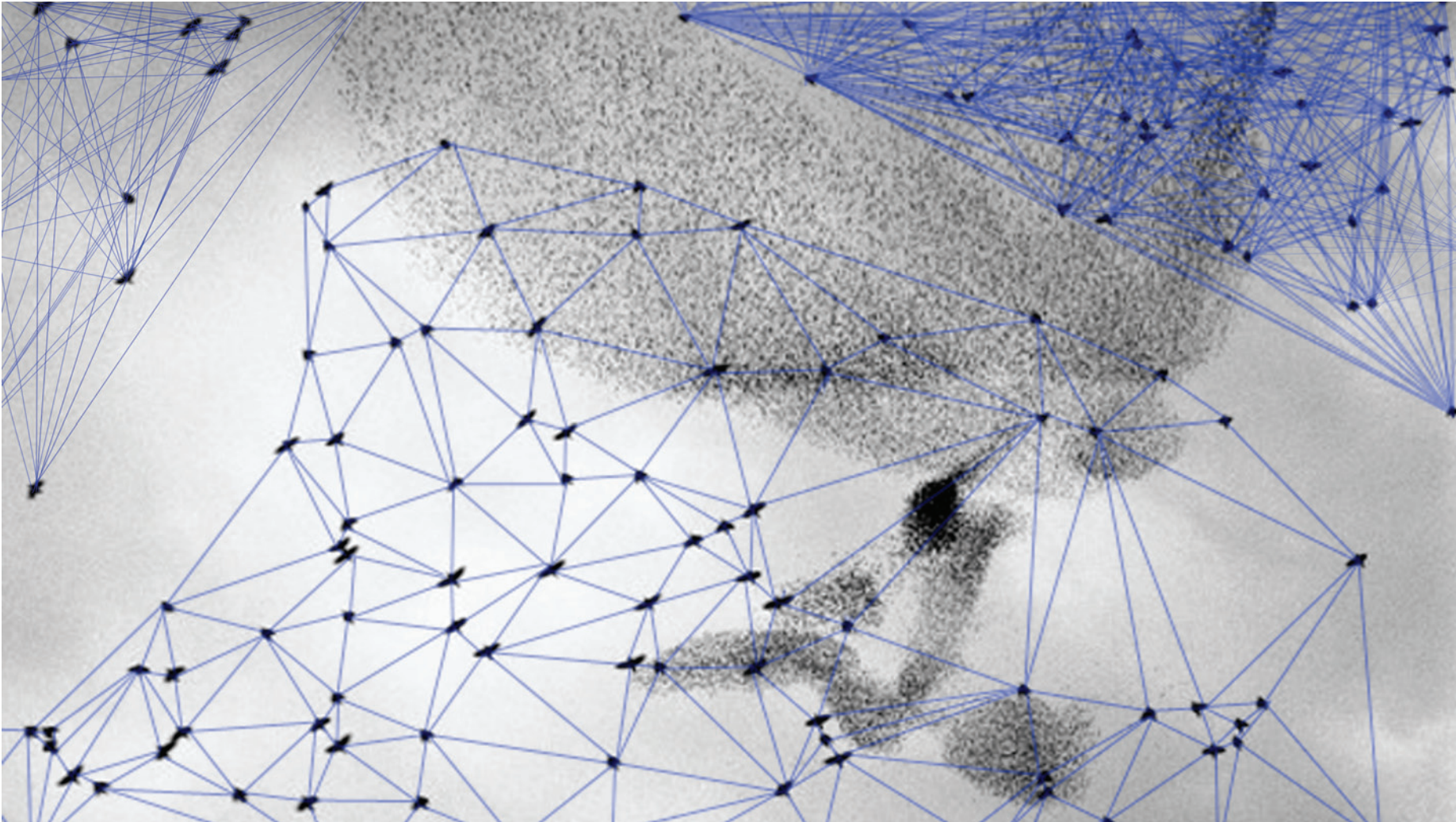
When we create a space, we must be aware of its intended use. Are we designing a space for transportation, is it a corridor, is it a journey to another destination? Is this a park to discover, or relax within? Am I going here to be seen or hidden? Is this a sanctuary or a stage?

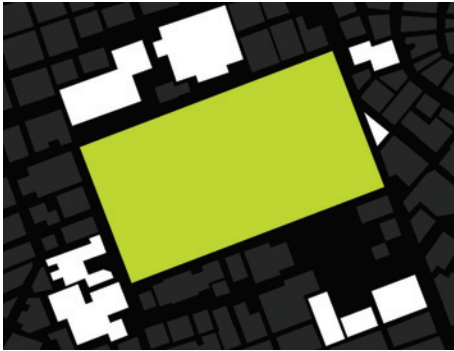
So much of what landscape architects do, determines how people move. A landscape architect is a choreographer. Knowing this, designers should research more closely as to how people use space. Too often, we design in concentric squares and aesthetic geometries but do not take shape from movement. If people move in curves, why do rooms have right angles? Is it to promote forgotten space, the inaccessible corner with which we cannot reach? Is this the intent of squares? Should we let go of design convention and prioritize for people? Should we acknowledge the “animal trails” that guests create across great lawns and flower borders? Should we assume that people will walk in straight geometries, and give up agency to the hegemony of public movement? What would a garden look like if we designed based off of the movements of people?



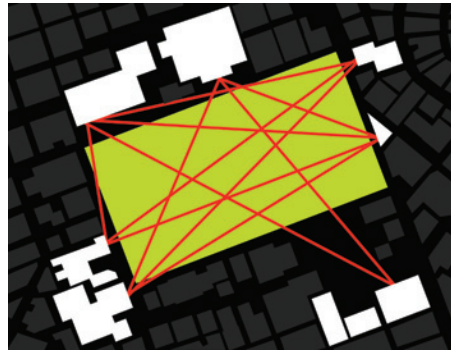
**Left Image 16: Thomas Eakins Motion Photography**

**Right Image 17: Mapping the Movement of Birds to create form.**

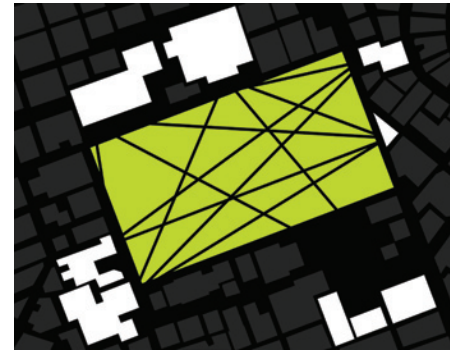




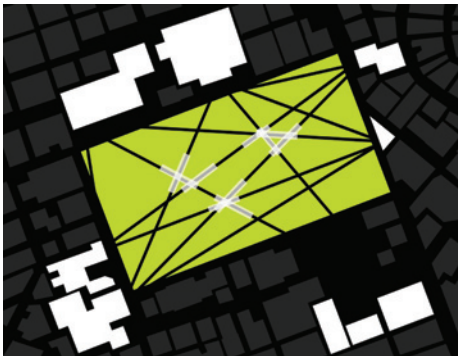
**Hypothetical Campus Green**



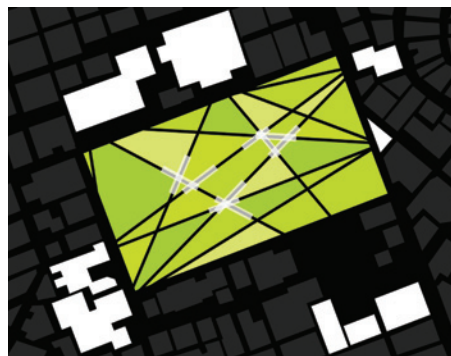
**Most frequented student buildings linked**



**Pathways established**



**Rest structures use the intersecting lines to inform architecture**

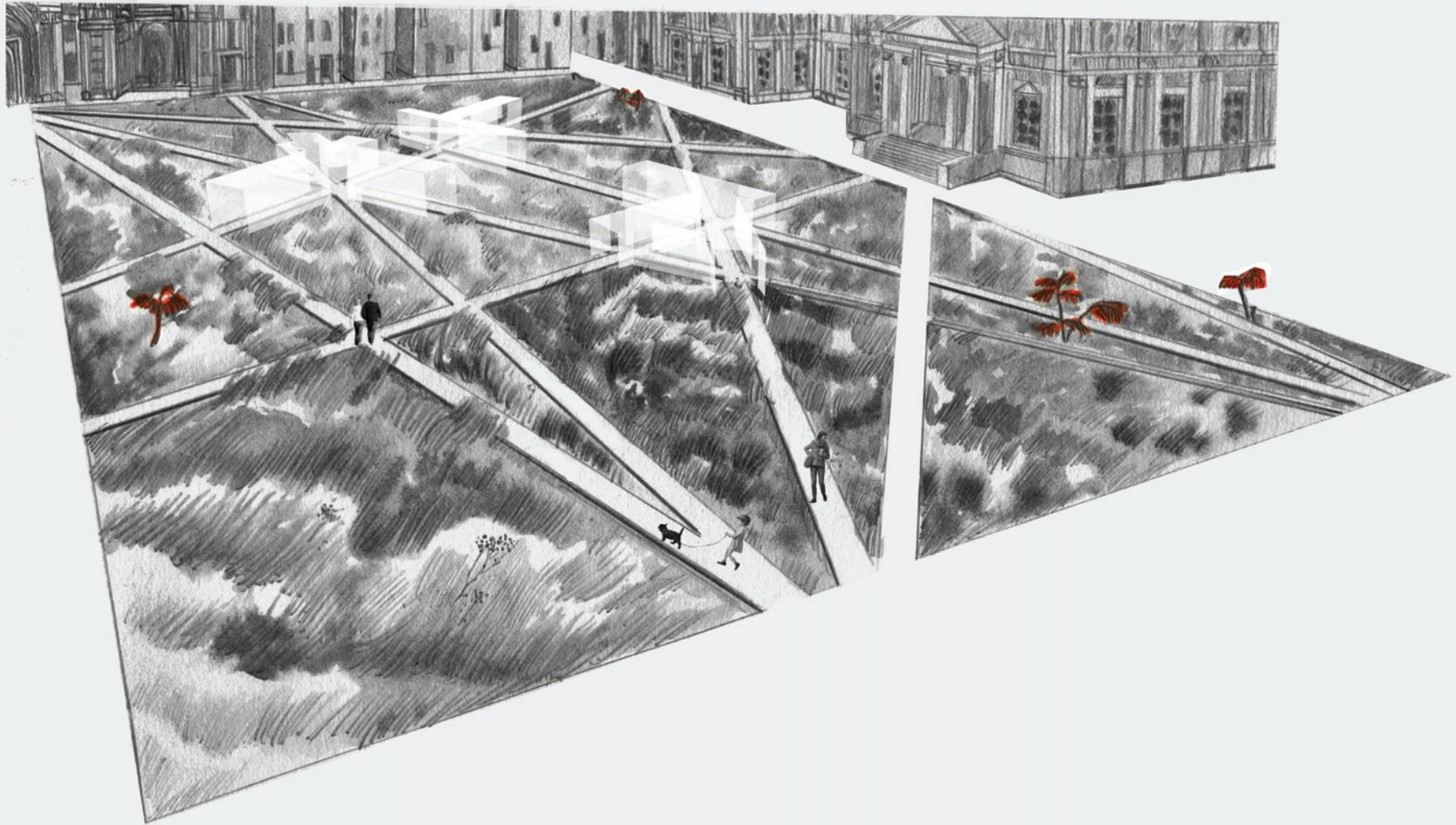


**Landscape is sectioned by pathways, and is planted with alternating meadows**

## Mapping Movement to Create Space: Hypothetical Campus

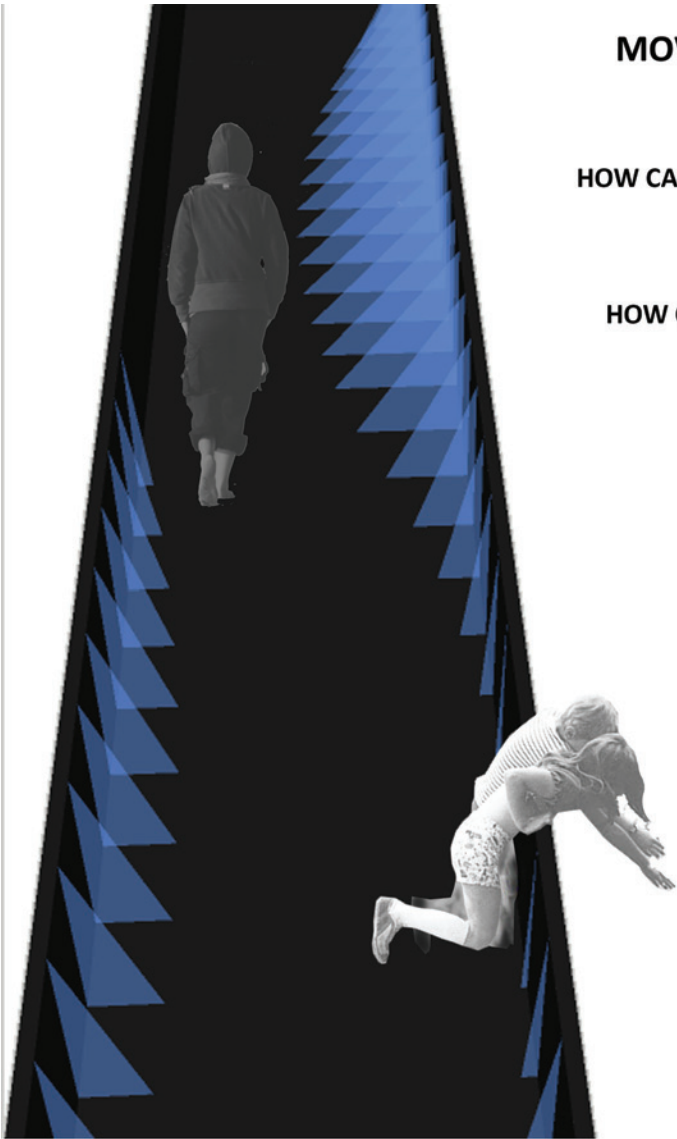
By tracking the most frequented destinations of students, a creative guideline could be established to design a campus green. The intersecting pathways lead directly to popular campus buildings and inform both the architectural and green elements of the hypothetical site.

**images 18-23**



If People travel in arcs and curves, why do most spaces have right angles?





## MOVEMENT MAPPING

HOW CAN WE DESIGN SPACE FOR MOVEMENT?

HOW CAN MOVEMENT DESIGN SPACE?



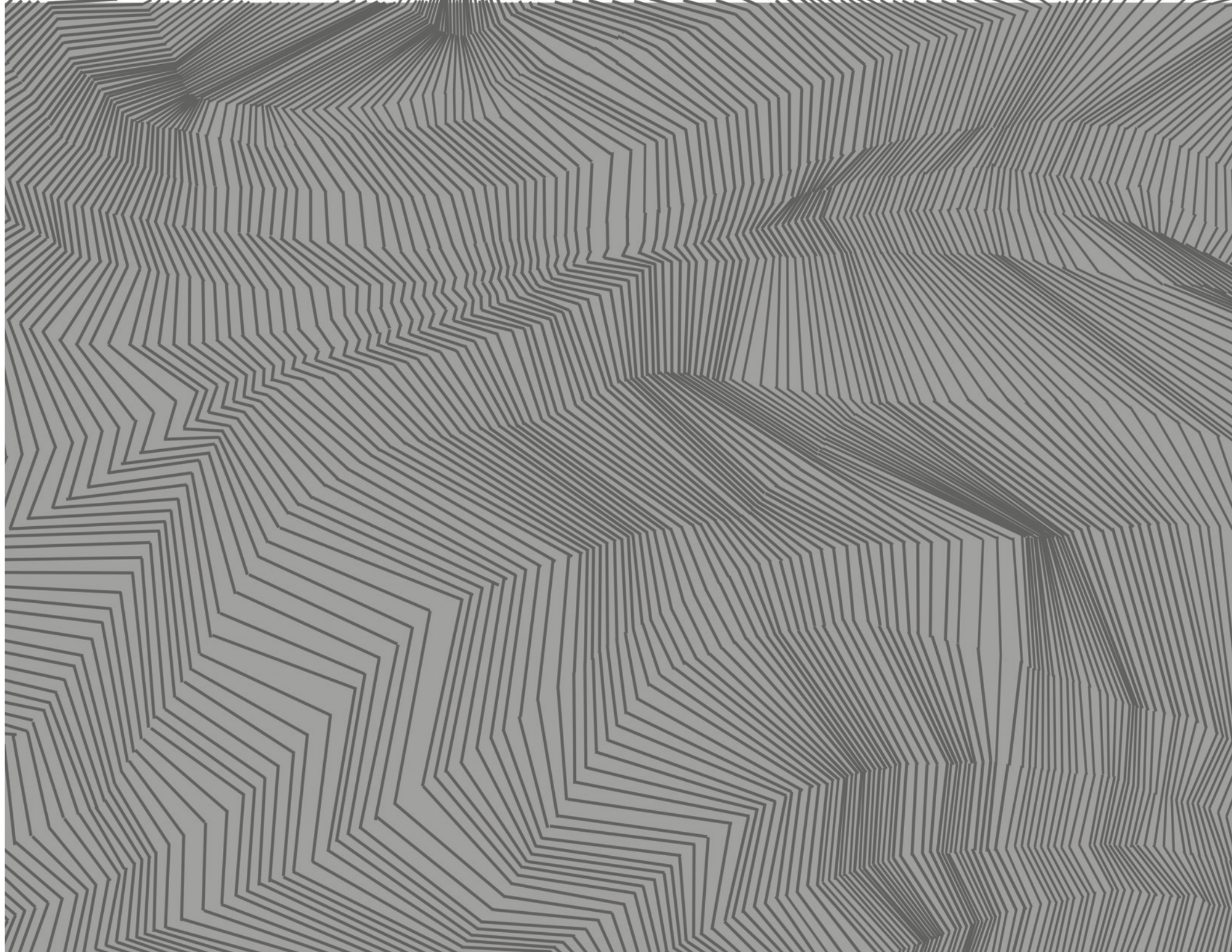
Image 24

## CHOREOGRAPHIC DECK

People respond to the geometries of space. One is more likely to travel the path of least physical and aesthetic resistance. Knowing this, Design can present itself as choreography.

A series of angled planking can suggest people to travel in the directional angles. the architect creates a dance.

**Image 25: Opposite page,  
Choreographic Deck**

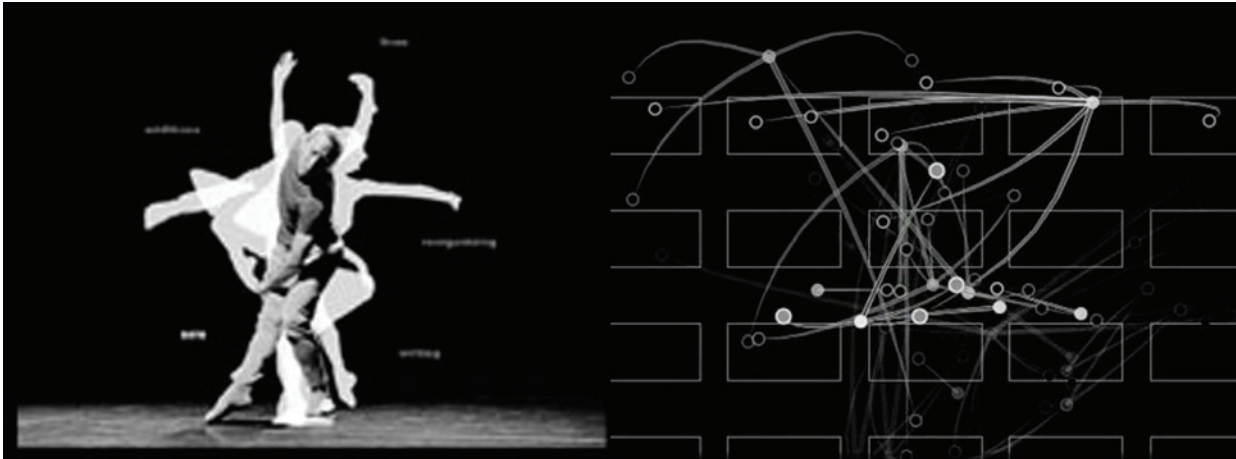


# MANIPULATION: REDEFINING FORM

I often use my body, and physical interventions to inflict ideas on material. In dance, I can manipulate a phrase of movement to create a new phrase. Choreography is more about translation than invention. We must alter the human form and movement instead of developing new material.

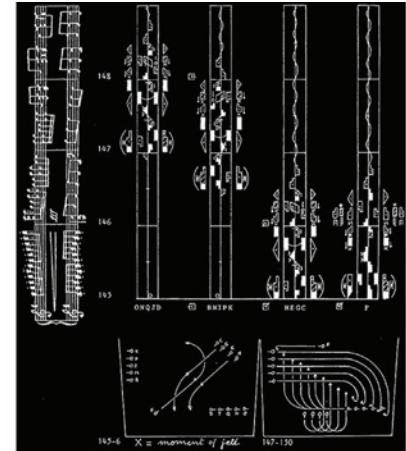
If we view dance as a series of separate forms, and view the body as an operating structure, it might help to clarify the act of choreography.

Rudolf Laban codified a system of movement notation that allowed people to document dance. Laban is studied as a technique and also as a method to document works. Laban developed a very detailed form of notation for the body. The contemporary ballet choreographer, William Forsythe, harnesses Rudolf Laban's notation and uses the informational diagrams to create movement. He has also codified his methods with a system called "Improvisational technologies" where in he uses a series of manipulations to deconstruct classical dance form. He employs Laban's "cube" of movement, a structure that is composed of points on six points in a large cube. Forsythe would direct dancers into establishing an aesthetic and performative language for movement by deconstructing classical ballet vernacular and reconstructing it with Laban's points. Dancers would connect the points within their cube by lacing balletic arms, legs, elbows, a head, a wrist, etc. It is Forsythe's translation and manipulation of a material (ballet movement) rather than an invention of a material that develops such innovative work.



WILLIAM FORSYTHE

IMPROVISATIONAL  
TECHNOLOGIES



LABAN  
NOTATION

Forsythe’s “Improvisation technologies” employs a series of movement manipulations. Image Forsythe dance

Methods for Manipulation:

- Retrograde
- Inversion
- Copy
- Time Distortion
- Manipulate/force
- Mirror
- Speed
- Reorientation

**Images 26-28**

## MANIPULATED LANDSCAPES

By reapplying Forsythe's systems of manipulation to a landscape, we can translate a material into a dynamic space, instead of relying on conventional aesthetic interventions.

Imagine a site as a paper, how can we create our own set of manipulations. How can we fold, pinch, cut, crinkle our paper/site, and what is the worth of these investigations?



DEFAULT



CRINKLED



CREASED



FOLDED



INVERTED



SPLICED

**LANDSCAPE CHOREOGRAPHY:  
MANIPULATION/ ALTERATION**

HOW DO WE ALTER  
A LANDSCAPE AS A  
CHOREOGRAPHER  
WOULD ALTER A  
PHRASE OR MOVEMENT?

# CHANCE & SCORING: FACILITATING DESIGN

What is a score?

**“A shopping list is a score. A football play is a score. The choreography of a dance can be determined by a score. Navajo sand paintings are scores. The intricacies of urban street systems are scores as are the plans for transportation systems and configurations of regions. Construction diagrams of engineers are scores.  $E=Mc^2$  is a score.”**

**-Lawrence Halprin, RSVP Cycles, 9**

Lawrence Halprin developed the RSVP cycles, by taking note from his dance innovator wife, Anna Halprin. He was concerned that his famous work “Sea Ranch” would become exclusive, and he didn’t agree with the conventional and exclusive strategies of design. Although the community is largely exclusive of class and race today, the RSVP cycles have presented their value in the field of design.

The RSVP cycles are different from most design strategies, in that the method is open ended and invites more variability into design. In the post modern dance movement, the idea of a choreographer that expected aestheticized and affected dancers to create a work’s success was not accepted. L. Halprin’s application of design was the same application that artists within the post modern dance movement developed. Halprin did not believe that goal oriented design would develop success. His research was largely in process and experience. He equated goal oriented creativity with Fascism, War, and political failure. The beauty of the RSVP cycles is in its variability and inclusivity of ideas.



Dancers and communities were given more agency in developing work. To implement the RSVP cycles is to take faith in ideas as a gardener does with seeds. The value to an artist, is that he/she alone does not determine the outcome of the process. The artistic ego steps aside and the work is allow to naturally develop within a holistic process.

**R-Resource: The material, body, or potential mediums**

**S-Score: The rules, guidance, or structure**

**V-Valuaction: Determining the worth or value of a result**

**P-Performance: The implementation of ideas**

These steps do not vary in importance and can be utilized in any combination; PSVR, VSRP etc

Halprin noted that goal oriented design is easily fascist, catering to the artistic ego of one individual and not allowing a work to naturally gain momentum through time, input, or development. Although the time in which the Halprins philosophized was a brief socialist moment in the art realm, the value of chance, and inclusiveness of elements within a process is still necessary for the progression of the arts and design.

The post-modern choreographer, Merce Cunningham, was the first artist (paired with partner John cage) to utilize chance in creativity. Cunningham would very articulately develop phrases of abstract movement, free of narratives, and easily recognizable/emotionally relatable forms. His interest was in developing abstract occurrences of movement. He was not interested in creating stories or developing emotionally cathartic work as his mentor Martha Graham had. He was interested in movement for the sake of movement.

In his process, Cunningham relied heavily on chance to develop works. After choreographing sets of movement, selecting multiple costumes, and ignoring all music, he would rely on dice to determine the organization of the dance phrases within a piece, determine which costume they would wear, and was unaware of all music until opening night. Although many individuals still view Cunningham's methods to be very extreme in his avoidance in controlling results, his use of chance proved the power of the invitation of exterior elements into a creative work.

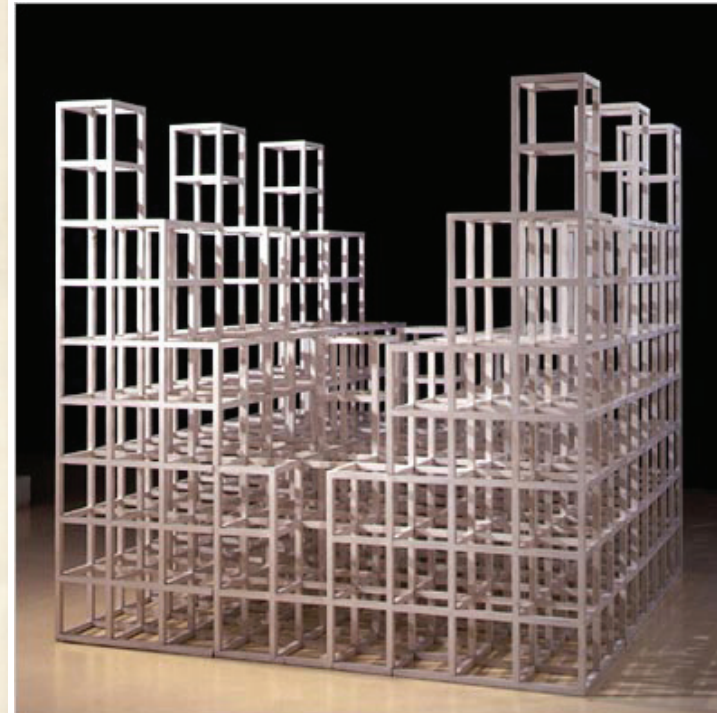
SEVEN TRANSLUCENT TIERS [(N+2) CENTER SETS ODD]: SEVEN

1	3	5	7	5	3	1
3	0	0	5	0	0	3
5	0	0	3	0	0	5
7	5	3	1	3	5	7
5	0	0	3	0	0	5
3	0	0	5	0	0	3
1	3	5	7	5	3	1

PRESENCE (-) = ABSENCE OF ASSIGNED MORPHEME / MEL BOCHNER  
DISCRETE, SELF-CANCELLING, ISOMORPHIC, SERIALIZED, TIERS  
(LEVELS), ON A 7' ORTHOGONAL GRID, IN BINARY LANGUAGE (+) =

**Left Image 30: Mel Bochner, use of scoring to create image and sculpture**

**Bottom Image 31: Sol LeWitt Sculpture**



# SCORING: PLAYING GAMES

Scoring can either be seen as an opportunity to invite chaos into a work or develop a strict structure for a work. Scoring is the game or rules of a process. Often, the rules can be nonsensical; they can create a problem for the sake of solving it through creativity, with the hopes that an end result will be beautiful

I find that design is about problem solving. If a problem does not exist, we must create it and solve it with design. We can develop strategies composed of creative formulas, pathways, and scores that would challenge our known aesthetic and develop new material. These methods would allow us to extend the reach of our aesthetic preferences, transcend artistic trend, and promote progressive forms and experiences. Scoring employs chance to create new opportunities for creation. The goal is to invite possibilities that we are not capable of creating. We must facilitate the constant processes, synthesize nothing, and consult all materials present.

To score is to invite chance into the creative process while setting boundaries. The restrictions or rules of scoring may help shape a process to an unknown yet desired direction.



# A DANCE FOR ARCHITECTS

I fell, and when I fell I was a cold hush on skin, a benevolent snow  
fired ghosts grasping to only hear their names.

I fell, and when I fell I was as clay, I grew dry and cracked  
horses on my arms dancing me to dust.

I fell, and when I fell I planted feet, rode a beast, and found home.

I fell, and when I fell I sought refuge in your human topography,  
tracing lips and teeth, finding caves and shelter.

I fell, and when I fell I took comfort in the earth with brothers and children  
caught in a bird storm, relinquished from light, and swimming home.



# A DANCE FOR ARCHITECTS

The highlight of my thesis research is the creation of a dance work: A Dance for Architects

A Dance For Architects, aims to validate my research into chance, scoring, manipulation, and translation as a choreographer/designer. The dance presented was developed using strict scoring structures, and architectural themes of construction and degradation.

The work stayed true to my thesis research, in the hopes that the presentation of forms can be accessed in the same way that landscape architects would access the success of a landscape or structure.

In “A Dance for Architects,” I developed a system of scoring that was further articulated than Cunningham or Halprin’s systems of chance. In Cunningham’s choreography, he restricted the use of chance to performance. He already developed a codified technique and a strict style of movement. The element of chance would only alter performance but would not influence his creation of movement. In the Halprin RSVP cycles, the couple employed chance to develop much of their work, more so, a combination of chance, environmental stimuli, and improvisation. The strongest design tool was their use of valuation or editing. They did not rely heavily chance to play literal factors in determining aesthetic or form. Chance rather acted as a facilitator within the process. I feel that the beauty of my dance work is in the utilization of chance and scoring to develop movement and form. I relied on these systems to present problems to solve choreographically. Chance and scoring were to firm guidelines that shaped all of the movement presented. Problem solving, manipulation of form, and translations were key themes in “A Dance for Architects”

I feel this dance to be a valid implementation of my thesis ideas because of the freedoms that ephemeral works such as dance allow. Cost and practicality (other than the restrictions of physics) could not stunt the formations of chance within movement. Also, knowing that dance is moving architecture, I felt it necessary to create a realm that allowed formations to





## **I used 5 main systems for developing form and movement.**

**1) Grid:** The stage floor is laid out into a large grid. I used dice to determine 3 numbers

The first number would determine the horizontal placement of a dancer on the X axis. The second number would determine the placement of the dancer vertically, on the Y axis. The third movement would correlate to a body part. The dancers would move to the determined XY point and perform a movement with the determined body part. Additionally, a series of numbers would follow, determining other body parts to initiate through movement.

**2) Moving Grid:** A variation on this structure: a series of numbers were determined by chance. The numbers correlate to a body part. The second series of numbers would be determined by chance. The odd numbers would dictate the dancers to move to their Right, and the even would dictate movement to their Left.

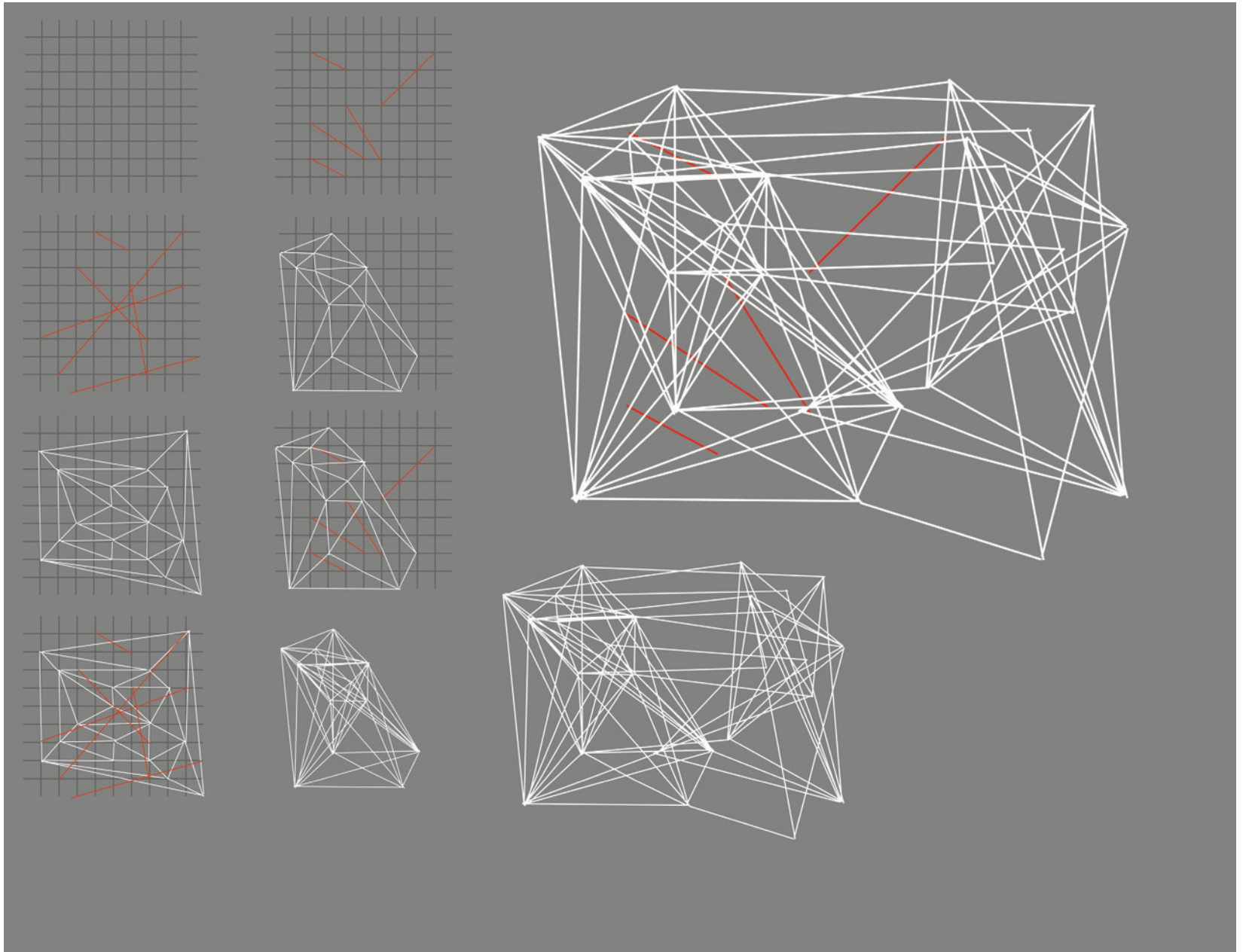
**3) Large Dance:** A series of movements were determined by my choreography. Each movement correlates to a number. The numbers were determined by chance and would present the progression of choreographed movements.

**4) Goal oriented performance:** Within this structure, dancers were instructed to simply move chairs improvisationally to certain points. All dance and body movement is determined by the interactions with the chairs.

5) Manipulation of materials: I choreographed a short phrase that was altered by segmentation, inversion, scale, and retrograde.

**6) Translation:** By using poetic text, we can translate words into movement. The movement was either developed by tracing or signing the letters or by using the images or experiences associated with the words. For instance, an entire fluid solo was developed by translating, "I took comfort within your human topography" .

The thesis performance aims to show the power of the development of form through chance, scoring and manipulation.



**By implementing the same choreographic systems as “A Dance for Architects”, designers could rely on chance and scoring to facilitate and sculpt forms. Image 34**

# CONCLUSION

In summation, a successful designer must think as an artist.

The landscape possesses a distinct poetry, and it is the designer that must maintain an honesty to this language. Earth as a media, is sacred and should be sculpted with the highest of conceptual obligations. It is not enough to implement an irrelevant aesthetic. We as designers and architects must create with the same inclusivity and sensitivity as artists. Context, clarity of idea, concept, story, and structure should be utilized in developing dynamic and coherent works. I have learned from indulging in the ephemeral joys of dance, that form can stand alone of the context is respect, shapes can be abstracted or utilized to tell stories. I have learned from staging works and being in gardens that a landscape performs, a garden changes, shifts, grows, and translates itself over and over again. I have learned as a dancing architect that still structures can suggest movement, and moving bodies can be a still architecture.

Through my research in dance and architecture, I have determined that alternative creative processes in design, whether they are holistic and poetic investigations, narrative tangents, or complete abstractions of form and movement are valid in attaining cohesive and arguable design. I have also come to know that this form of interdisciplinary research is necessary for designers to challenge conventional or taught design methodologies and is a valid creative pathway to the progression of arts and design.

I hope that the community of landscape architecture understands the potential value of interdisciplinary approaches and can learn from my research. Mapping movement to create gardens, using chance to construct buildings, treating garden guests as performers, listening to a landscape language, these are all important pathways to develop exciting, experiential, and progressive design.

**If there is one truth that I can state with absolute fervor, it is that Choreography is the architecture of people**

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Forsythe, William, Forsythe Company, Improvisation Technologies, CD Rom

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