CHOREOGRAPHING DIRT:
PERFORMANCES OF/AGAINST THE NATURE/CULTURE DIVIDE

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ABSTRACT

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In this dissertation I explore performances in which dirt operates as a critical choreographic element, a dynamic partner in an exchange. In each chapter, dirt functions as a complex site of interaction between human and non-human bodies that structures or choreographs the movement of the participant or performer. Using the discourses of ecocriticism, ecofeminism, postmodernism, and performance studies, I employ close readings of the National Park Service, Suzan-Lori Parks’s The America Play as a dramatic text, and productions of Pina Bausch’s The Rite of Spring and Eveoke Dance Theatre’s Las Mariposas to demonstrate how social, dramatic, performative, and theatrical representations of the natural world inform humans’ understanding of their relationship with it.

In Chapter One, I explore the representation and performance of “wilderness” in Shenandoah National Park, analyzing the history, construction, and choreography of space in the park to establish that the park’s performance of “wilderness” functions as symbol of the American frontier and simulacrum of the wild. In Chapter Two, I examine the unearthing of dirt in The America Play through the character of the Foundling Father who digs up the past in order to create “new” historical events. In Chapter Three, I focus on the relationship between dancer and peat in The Rite of Spring, investigating the significance of the ways in which the onstage peat and the dancers’ bodies mark each other. In Chapter Four, I analyze the relationship between dancers and dirt in Las
*Mariposas,* exploring the inter-species interactions between the organisms in the dirt and on the dancers’ skin.

Together, these analyses allow critical interrogations of the entrenched human notions of the so-called nature/culture divide. Bodies partner not only with the dirt, but also with the myriad species that reside in the dirt. This creates an ecologically complex *pas de deux* that evokes an intricate rethinking of conceptions of species and demonstrates that interchanges between humans and more-than-humans are porous and trans-corporeal. Each case study testifies that performance has the potential to dismantle master narratives, permeate borders, and create alternate modes of understanding of traditional Western anthropocentric, speciesist tendencies in dance and theatre.
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INTRODUCTION

Dirt is not messy.

Dirt is not “dirty.”

Dirt is teeming with life, and rich with possibility.

Megan Born, Helene Furján, and Lily Jencks

Dirt

Throw dirt on me and grow a wildflower.

Lil Wayne

“No Love”

During the past three summers, I spent a great deal of time tromping through swamps, schlepping through bogs, hiking through woods, trespassing on private property, and navigating through desolate, forgotten places overgrown with plant life as I accompanied my husband, a botanist, on his dissertation fieldwork. I have been covered in dirt, soaked with water and mud, swarmed by bugs, camped with bears, gone for extended periods without showering, and faced-off with a black widow spider. While I have always been intrigued by the intersections between science and theatre, it was during those botanical excursions that my interest in dirt as a performative element piqued. It was in the hours making my way through swamps, bogs, and woods with botanists in hot pursuit of Scirpus longii—that tall, green, grass-like plant with brownish-blackish chaffy flowers, and a thick rhizomatic brown and white root covered with fibrous strands—that I really began to contemplate the consistency and texture of the terrain and habitat around me and the ways it affected my body’s ability to move. It was feeling the buildup of dirt, bug spray, and perspiration seeping into my pores, and the faint tickle of ticks and other
insects creeping onto the surface of my body that I began to contemplate skin as a porous site that acts as an ambassador between our bodies and other elements and organisms. It was lying on the floor of a tent, snugly bound in a sleeping bag, listening to the leaves crackle and suddenly seeing the plastic curve in as a creature brushed against the tent’s side that I began to think about my perceptions of nature and how I understood myself in relation to it. It was in these moments, where I abandoned the security of makeup and heels for field clothes and tick spray that I began to contemplate how bodies inhabit, navigate, and make sense of the other organisms, elements, and phenomena around them.

In many ways, it was these experiences and the conversations that emerged from them that nurtured my interest in the relationship between bodies and dirt in performance. Navigating my own sweaty, dirty body through difficult terrain inhabited by other creatures and organisms made me realize my own anthropocentric speciesist tendencies and inclinations. These formative experiences challenged and stretched my understanding of the permeability between human and non-human bodies and the ways in which they move through and exist in space.

In these botanical excursions, dirt, mud, peat, and sand all functioned as critical elements that affected how my body was able to move through and operate in the terrain. In *Choreographing Empathy: Kinesthesia in Performance*, Susan Leigh Foster defines choreography as a “structuring of movement, not necessarily the movement of human beings. . . . [It] can stipulate both the kinds of actions performed and their sequence of progression” (2). In this study, I examine performances and productions where dirt functions as a critical choreographic element, a dynamic partner in an exchange. In each of these instances I investigate how dirt structures the movement of the participant or performer. Dirt, in other words, acts as a body and partners with other bodies in space, creating an ecologically complex *pas de deux.*
Description of Study

In my dissertation I use performance and ecocritical theory as a lens to analyze and critique the construct of the nature/culture divide, particularly its manifestations between people and dirt, in performance. I explore four different case studies that are linked together through the choreography of dirt.

In the first case study I explore the representation and performance of “wilderness” in Shenandoah National Park, by analyzing the history, construction, and choreography of space in the park to establish that the park’s performance of “wilderness” functions as both symbol of the American frontier and simulacrum of the wild. In the second case study, I explore how the past is unearthed in Suzan-Lori Park’s The America Play through the character of the Foundling Father as Abraham Lincoln, who functions as an archeologist, digging up the past in order to create “new” historical events. In the third case study, I explore the relationship between dancer and peat in Pina Bausch’s Le Sacre du Printemps (The Rite of Spring). This piece has a long history and Bausch’s interpretation brings the unique element of peat, organic matter composed of decaying plants, to the stage. Here, I investigate the significance of the ways in which the onstage peat and the dancers’ bodies mark each other. In the fourth case study, continuing the conversations from the previous chapter, I analyze the relationship between dancers and dirt in Eveoke Dance Theatre’s Las Mariposas, exploring the inter-species interactions between the organisms both in the dirt and on the dancers’ skin.

Through the choreography of dirt, each case study demonstrates how the constructed nature/culture divide is reified, transgressed, or agitated. The performance of “wilderness” in Shenandoah National Park reveals that through the displacement and movement of dirt,
vegetation, and wildlife, the park’s spatial choreography positions visitors as audience members gazing at a constructed performance of the “wild.” *The America Play* demonstrates that plantation dirt/land created a class structure among African American slaves during the Civil War and Reconstruction Era that altered their social movement. The peat and dirt used in *The Rite of Spring* and *Las Mariposas*, respectively, illustrates the ways the elements affect movements of the body and demonstrates some of the complications that arise when bringing a “natural” element like dirt into a “cultural” space such as a theatre. In each of these chapters I analyze exchanges between dirt and other bodies and ultimately argue that thinking differently about the relationships between humans, non-humans, and more-than-humans can disrupt traditional speciesist hierarchies and gesture toward more biocentric philosophies that value all life forms.

**Background and Context**

In “Beyond the Nature/Culture Divide: Challenges from Ecocriticism and Evolutionary Biology for Theater Historiography,” Wendy Arons asserts that as practitioners and interpreters of art we play a role, however small it may be, in shaping perspectives of the natural world. To articulate this point she references biologist Neal Everden who claims, “an involvement in the arts is vitally needed to emphasize . . . the intimate and vital involvement of self with place. . . . Environmentalism involves the perception of values, and values are the coin of the arts” (qtd. in Arons 149). The arts—for my purposes, theatre and performance—therefore have the potential to shape values and perhaps even change perceptions of the natural world. Taking up the idea with which Arons charges practitioners and interpreters of art, my dissertation explores the ways that theatre and performance practices have shaped and can shape our perceptions of the natural
world by examining the interfaces and intersections between theatre and the natural world, with a particular emphasis on performances using dirt as a choreographic element.

In *What is Nature?*, Kate Sopher parses out how the term “nature” is understood through the lenses of different ecological discourses and discusses the ways that the term is most commonly used. Nature is often “[e]mployed as a metaphysical concept,” asserts Sopher, “in the argument of philosophy, ‘nature’ is the concept through which humanity thinks its difference and specificity” (155). She continues, “our ideas about what falls to the side of ‘nature’ have been continuously revised in the light of changing perceptions of what counts as human” (155). Understood in this way, nature becomes a realm that is separate and distinct from humans. For Sopher, another common way that nature is understood is as a realist concept, which

refers to the structures, processes and casual powers that are constantly operative within the physical world. . . . It is the nature to whose laws we are always subject, even as we harness them to human purposes. And whose processes we can neither escape nor destroy. (155-56)

This understanding focuses on nature as a phenomenon with agency to act on its own as well as react to human interactions. Sopher notes that while these are both distinct understandings of “nature” they are rarely used independently of one another as many of the concepts and theories that inform both intertwine. She asserts however, that the overlaps and tensions between these understandings of nature are productive:

The aim has been to admit. . . the wisdom both of those who insist on the “culturality” or “constructed” nature of “nature,” and of those who would insist on the independent existence and specific determinations of that which is referred to through the concept of “nature.” For while it is true that much of what we refer
to as “natural” is a “cultural construct” in the sense that it has acquired its form as a consequence of human activity, that activity does not “construct” the powers and processes upon which it is dependent for its operation. (249)

I use the term “nature” in this dissertation to communicate the composite of these two definitions: both as a concept that has been constructed by humans to mark their difference from other non-human forms, but also as an “intra-acting phenomena,” to use Stacy Alaimo’s term, that has the agency and power to act (“Trans-corporeal Feminisms” 249). Thus, while many humans understand “nature” as something they are distinctly separate from, in actuality it is an ecosystem in which humans are intricately intertwined. Alaimo explains this relationship as a “trans-corporeality, in which the human is always intermeshed with the more-than-human world, [and this] underlines the extent to which the corporeal substance of the human is ultimately inseparable from ‘the environment’” (238).

Similarly, “culture” is a term that has been understood in various ways through different discourses and moments in history. In Historical and Cultural Theory, Simon Gunn notes that beginning in the nineteenth century, “culture” was most often used to refer to “intellectual development, to way of life, and to the arts” (55). Likewise, one of the definitions of culture listed in the Oxford English Dictionary defines it as “The distinctive ideas, customs, social behavior, products, or way of life of a particular nation, society, people, or period” (“Culture”). I use the term “culture,” as described by both Gunn and the Oxford English Dictionary, to encompass the ideologies, social systems, and artistic practices of a group of people. As Sopher notes, “nature” has often been understood as a realm from which humans and their cultural practices are separate. Una Chaudhuri gets at the core of this conceived divide in “‘There Must be a Lot of Fish in that Lake’: Toward an Ecological Theater,” when she asks, “are we human
beings—and our activities, such as theater—an integral part of nature, or are we somehow radically separate from it?” (27). This conceptual separation between nature and culture is a division that has manifested itself at many times throughout history. Western history, specifically, has at distinct moments, through religious, philosophical, and literary traditions reified the split between nature and culture. In the following sections I highlight some of the historical moments where this divide was particularly salient.

The nature/culture epistemology can be traced back to the Genesis creation account in the Hebrew Bible/Christian Old Testament where God gave man dominion over other living organisms:

So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea and the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth. And God said, Behold, I have given you every herb bearing seed, which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree, in the which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed; to you it shall be for meat. (KJV Bible, Genesis 1.27-29, emphasis in original)

According to some interpretations and/or translations, the Genesis creation account outlines a specific hierarchy between man and other species, declaring that man is to rule over and subdue the earth and its non-human inhabitants. In his influential essay, “The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis,” Lynn White Jr. traces the lineage of the current ecologic crisis back to the Biblical creation account and mandate:
Man named all the animals, thus establishing his dominance over them. God planned all of this explicitly for man’s benefit and rule: no item in the physical creation had any purpose save to serve man’s purposes. And, although man’s body is made from clay, he is not simply part of nature; he is made in God’s image. (271)

According to White, because God gave man authority to name and dominate animals and other inhabitants of the earth, they, therefore, existed to benefit man. Thus, this separated man from the plants and animals, placing him in a position of power above them. White notes that even though man was made from clay, an element of the earth, he still maintained his separation through the divine mandate that man was made in the image of God. For White, the Genesis creation account initiated the idea that man is not only separate from, but has authority over the natural world. It is this hierarchical ideology, White maintains, that has brought about many of the ecological dilemmas and catastrophes of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. “We shall continue to have a worsening ecological crisis until we reject the Christians’ axiom that nature has no reason for existence save to serve man,” White proclaims (280).

The medieval period also marked a salient hierarchy between man and nature through the notion of the Great Chain of Being. In “Introduction: Why go beyond Nature Writing, and Where To?” Kathleen Wallace and Karla Armbruster note that this concept “placed humans midway between nature and the divine in a hierarchical order” (9). This vertically extended continuum placed God at the top with everything else—angels, humans, animals, plants etc.—falling into place beneath Him. Similar to the Genesis creation mythology, this epistemology also placed the rest of nature under human rule. The hierarchy of the Great Chain of Being represented order and if these God-ordained rankings were out of order, medieval philosophers
believed the disharmony to be a reflection of chaos or imbalance in the world. Wallace and Armbruster assert, “While this concept did position humans as part of a greater whole that included the natural world, its hierarchical nature often justified and encouraged human domination of nature” (9).

Wallace and Armbruster argue that attitudes toward nature probably became the most destructive during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries during the Scientific Revolution and the Enlightenment. They note that mainstream thought during the Scientific Revolution and the Enlightenment is often characterized by “the rationalism of René Descartes and the empiricism of Francis Bacon [who] are most often singled out as representing this shift, by denying mind and spirit to any beings other than humans” (9). This was a period when many philosophers, including Descartes, considered the mind distinct from the rest of the body and through this thinking nature, and other species, were subjugated under humans. In this epistemology, animals and other non-human bodies did not possess a “mind” or “soul.” “Descartes hyperseparated mind and body, and denied to animals not only the faculty of reason, but the whole range of feelings and sensations that he had associated with thought,” argues Gred Garrard in *Ecocriticism*. “As a result, he saw animals as radically different from, and inferior to, humans. They were bodies without minds, effectively machines” (Garrard 28). Because Descartes and other philosophers did not believe that animals could think or feel, scientific and medical experiments that used animals became widely accepted. Affirming human domination of animals and other natural

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1 It is important to note that because of certain societal systems of power in place during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, it was mostly men who made discoveries that led to significant developments in physics, biology, medicine, geology, and chemistry during this time.
elements, Chaudhuri remarks that “Renaissance scientific philosophy . . . [reduced] nature to a neutral substance for human manipulation” (“Ecological Theater” 28).

Dualisms and hierarchies between humans and other inhabitants of the natural world continued to manifest into the twentieth century. In We Have Never Been Modern, Bruno Latour discusses the dichotomy between nonhuman nature and human culture present in the modern period. He asserts that modernity is a mixture of what he designates “‘purification,’ two entirely distinct ontological zones: that of human beings on the one hand; that of nonhumans on the other,” and “‘translation’. . . mixture[s] between entirely new types of beings, hybrids of nature and culture” (10). Latour argues that while most modernists proclaimed “a complete separation between the natural world . . . and the social world,” in actuality many hybridizations of nature and culture emerged during this period (31). 2 The intersection between “purification” and “translation” becomes a paradox because, as Latour argues, it was the hybridization of nature and culture that enabled a constructed ontological divide between nonhuman nature and human culture to be possible. He asserts, “the second [translation] has made the first [purification] possible: the more we forbid ourselves to conceive of hybrids, the more possible their interbreeding becomes—such is the paradox of the moderns” (Latour 12).

In a similar manner, Donna Haraway, in “A Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the 1980s,” emphasizes that these binaries continue to be a major component of Western thought in the twenty-first century. These dualisms “have all been systemic to the logics and practices of domination of women, people of color, nature, workers, [and] animals,” asserts Haraway, “in short, domination of all constituted as others,

2 According to Latour, hybridizations of nature and culture are constructed systems that mix disciplines such as science, technology, and politics.
whose task is to mirror the self” (35, emphasis in original). Haraway continues, “[c]hief among these troubling dualisms are self/other, mind/body, culture/nature, male/female, civilized/primitive, reality/appearance, whole/part, agent/resource, maker/made, active/passive, right/wrong, truth/illusion, total/partial, God/man” (35). For Haraway, these dualisms, persistent in Western traditions, create hierarchies of power where dominant groups tend to control minority or marginal groups. Like White’s earlier assertion, “that nature has no reason for existence save to serve man,” many of these dualisms perpetuate the idea that humans are separate from the natural world and therefore “nature” and its non-human inhabitants are subservient to humans. “Conventionally in Western discussions,” Haraway maintains, “nature is both outside of culture and posited as a resource for culture’s transforming power” (202).

It is important to note, however, that while these dualisms are plausible conventional worldviews for many historical periods, they were most likely not monolithic. During these periods, there were those who more than likely held viewpoints different from the mainstream and offered alternate ways of understanding humans’ relations with the natural world. As Wallace and Armbruster assert, “Despite the bleak record that we often find when looking back at the history of Western attitudes toward nature . . . [there are] alternate threads in the history of literary and philosophical attitudes toward nature in the West” (9). Wallace and Armbruster dedicate a section of Beyond Nature Writing to essays that explore some of these alternate ideas. For example, in “Beyond ‘Thou Shalt Not’: An Ecocritic reads Deuteronomy,” Betsy S. Hilbert argues that Deuteronomy’s “central message is one of social and environmental responsibility: a vision of human beings as intricately connected not just to each other but to the earth” (10). Similarly, in “Chaucer and the Politics of Nature,” Lisa J. Kiser posits that the representation of Lady Nature in Chaucer’s Parliament of Fowls, “reveals an explicit awareness of the social
construction of the natural world and of the ways that this construction serves gender and class interests” (10). These essays are just a few examples of ecocritical works that explore texts containing ideas contrary to conventional Western dualisms regarding humans and nature.

Many scholars who study ecocriticism and performance, Theresa J. May, Chaudhuri, and Arons to name a few, believe that many ideologies and master narratives that perpetuate a divide between nature and culture are still prevalent. In fact, May and Arons contend that the various ecological calamities of the past decade bring into stark relief the danger in refusing to acknowledge that the divide between nature and culture is strictly imagined. In the Introduction to Readings in Performance and Ecology, May and Arons assert,

> The popular conceptual binary that distinguishes between “nature” and “culture” has taken a beating in recent years. Recent large-scale ecological disasters such as Hurricane Katrina (2005) and Irene (2011), the Gulf oil spill (2010), catastrophic flooding in Pakistan (2010), severe drought in the US Southwest (2011), and famine in Somalia (2011), among others, have vividly dramatized the fierce, inexorable interconnectivity between nature and human culture, and made visible the extent to which that very binary thinking, which has been so instrumental to technological and cultural development, is also carrying us to the brink of ecological collapse. (1)

As May and Arons point out, the above ecological disasters collapse conceived dualistic notions of nature and culture because of the amalgam of ecological, biological, social, economic, and political forces that brought them about. The interface between all of these forces is the site of ecocriticism. Dirt, both as an element and word loaded with cultural and scientific significance, is a fundamental, perhaps overlooked component of these interchanges that is perfectly suited for
ecocritical inquiry. As Megan Born, Helene Furján, and Lily Jencks indicate in their quote in the epigraph to this introduction, dirt is not merely a “messy,” “dirty” element that creeps into humans’ daily lives. Rather, it “is teeming with life and rich with possibility.” The “possibilities” of dirt are what I explore in this study, by looking at dirt as “lively emergent, intra-acting phenomena” that have the potential to alter how humans perceive themselves in relation to the natural world (Alaimo 249).³

Dirt

Dirt is composed of myriad elements and an astounding number of organisms representing a vast diversity of species, and is a vital component in many natural processes. Thus, a discussion of the physical composition and cultural construction of dirt is critical in order to demonstrate how this element as a choreographic partner has the potential to disrupt speciesist hierarchies.

The Oxford English Dictionary first describes dirt (n.) simply as “excrement” (“Dirt”). The next two definitions characterize it as “unclean matter, such as soils any object by adhering to it; filth; esp. the wet mud or mire of the ground, consisting of earth and waste matter mingled with water,” and “mud; soil, earth, mould; brick-earth” (“Dirt”). On the other hand, the Oxford English Dictionary defines soil (n.) first as “the earth or ground; the face or surface of the earth” and subsequently as “a piece or stretch of ground; a place or site” and “a land or country; a region, province, or district” (“Soil”). While these definitions indicate that the two words are not

³ In Chapter Three I return to Alaimo’s theories regarding “intra-acting phenomena” and discuss them in greater depth.
synonyms, they do not clearly illuminate if there are specific differences between dirt and soil. If dirt and soil are distinct from one another, what exactly are the differences?

Soil is comprised of both abiotic and biotic elements and, depending on its geographic location, the abiotic elements could include rock, sand, clay, silt, and other various minerals. The biotic elements, however, consist of living or dead organisms such as insects and other animals, bacteria, fungi, and plants. In Life in the Soil, James B. Nardi affirms that “A staggering number of individual organisms as well as species representing all kingdoms—plants, animals, fungi, protozoa, bacteria—live in the soil” (ix). In fact, according to Nardi, one square meter of soil can contain up to 10 trillion bacteria, 10 billion protozoa (one-celled organisms), 5 million nematodes (roundworms), not to mention 170,000 other organisms including mites, springtails, insects, myriapods, spiders, earthworms, snails, and slugs (27). Similarly, Richard Bardgett, in The Biology of Soil, asserts that just one cubic centimeter of arable soil (about the size of a small six-sided dice) can contain up to 350 different species (31). These biotic elements aid in the decay of organic matter such as dead plants and animals. In this way soil perpetuates itself, turning death into a vital source of life as nutrients are released. If soil consists of sand, silt, clay, rock, minerals, insects, animals, bacteria, fungi, and plants, is not the same also true of dirt? And if so, how do soil and dirt actually differ?

Janet Raloff in “Dirt is Not Soil” poses this very question to Patrick Megonigal, a research biogeochemist at the Smithsonian Environmental Research Center. He responds simply, “dirt is displaced soil” (Raloff 1). Megonigal then explicates in more detail stating, soil is the compilation of minerals, air, water, animals and other living matter (and their wastes or decaying bodies) that accumulate in layers and become compacted over time. . . . When particles of that soil erode or are dug up, they lose the
“history” of their place . . . essentially their associations with particles that might have been above, below, and to their sides. (qtd. in Raloff 1)

According to Megonigal soil becomes dirt when it is removed from the site of its original geographic location and therefore no longer retains its historical and broader ecological context.

Scientifically, dirt is classified as displaced soil, an element in diaspora. Culturally, however, the word dirt acquires different meanings. In Dirt: The Ecstatic Skin of the Earth, William Bryant Logan describes dirt thusly:

> It’s the stuff that won’t come off your collar. It’s what smells in a compost heap. It’s what blows around on the floor or makes the sheets feel gritty and slick. It’s dog turds. It’s the stuff we walk on, and traditionally, it is where people plant crops. (7)

For Logan, dirt is an element that surrounds humans in their day-to-day existence; it gets under our fingernails, in our sheets, on our clothes, between our toes, in our food, and ultimately it is the element that our bodies will eventually return to when they are buried in the ground. He asserts that like “‘love,’ ‘fuck,’ ‘house,’ ‘hearth,’ ‘earth,’ ‘sky,’ ‘wrath,’ and ‘word,’” it is short, strong, and leaves a taste in the mouth . . . you want to get ahold of it and chew it” (38). Logan alludes to the idea that there is something visceral and kinesthetic about dirt, both as a word that you distinctly feel in your mouth when you utter it and as an element you can feel squished between your toes or running through your fingers. Likewise, in As Eve Said to the Serpent, artist Rebecca Solnit further links humans, dirt, and earth through their historical origins as words:

> Etymology connects humus and homo in Latin; cthon (earth) and epichthonios (human) in Greek; and Adam derives from clod in Hebrew, as in clod of dirt. The
microcosm of any dirt, all dirt, is linked to the whole of the globe by the word

*earth*, by *terre* in French. (152, emphasis in original)

Thus, the origins of the words earth and humans are closely connected. Dirt is not only an element that is part of humans’ day-to-day existence; it is also the element from which humans are constructed in many creation mythologies and it is the substance to which bodies will eventually return. Bodies buried in the earth, however, do not remain dead—eventually they teem with life as fungi, larvae, and bacteria colonize the remains. “Each grave is like a city beneath the soil,” remarks Logan, “until at last the remains have been reduced to the clean white bones.” Mites, beetles, moths, fungus, bacteria and other organisms feed away at the decaying body until the composted mixture becomes part of the soil. “So in the end the tomb is empty,” Logan avers, “The soil of graves is the transformer. It is natural magic. The grave is a memory from which the story of the Earth is told” (57). In this manner, dirt and the organisms that reside within it release nutrients into the soil, turning death into an origin of life.

The word dirt also conjures up distinct cultural conceptions regarding what it means to be “dirty” or “clean.” In *The Dirt on Clean*, Katherine Ashenburg notes:

> The archetypal link between dirt and guilt, and cleanliness and innocence, is built into our language—perhaps into our psyches. We talk about dirty jokes and laundering money. When we step to close to something morally unsavory . . . we say, “I wanted to take a shower.” Pontius Pilate washed his hands after condemning Jesus to death and Lady Macbeth claims, unconvincingly, “A little water clears us of this deed,” after convincing her husband to kill Duncan. (8-9)

Ashenburg articulates that during certain points in history the concepts of “dirty” and “clean” have functioned as a binary. Dirtiness is classified with more base, bodily functions and
associated with nature and cleanliness is identified with pursuits of the mind, Godliness, and culture. Likewise, in *Domesticity and Dirt*, Phyllis Palmer asserts that, “In our culture, we tend to believe that attitudes toward dirt and hygiene result from the logical unfolding of precise scientific knowledge about cleanliness and health” (140). As scientific and medical knowledge regarding health and hygiene have vacillated greatly throughout Western history, cultural constructions of what humans perceive as “dirty” or “clean” have also fluctuated. “Historians are just beginning to study Americans’ changing standards of dirt,” remarks Palmer (139).

Scientifically and culturally the words dirt and soil assume a multiplicity of meanings. For the purposes of this study, however, I am choosing to use the term dirt instead of soil. While I recognize that this word comes with its own baggage in the form of multiple definitions, understandings, and associations, I choose it because I am interested in the constructedness and usage of dirt within both the scientific and cultural realm. I choose the word dirt because in each of my case studies I remove the element from its historical and geographical situatedness to explore how it acts as a dynamic body within the context of performance. In *Dirt*, Born, Furján, and Jencks characterize dirt as,

> a highly-complex system, dynamic, adaptive, and able to accommodate great difference while maintaining a cohesive structure. . . . Dirt is less that by which we are repulsed than that which is endlessly giving and fertile. Organisms grow, thrive, and evolve amidst dirt. Dirt is thus a matrix capable of emergent behaviors, nurturing growth, spawning development, and igniting change. (8)

I choose the word dirt as understood by Born, Furján, and Jencks, as an intricate, flexible, vital system, able to sustain both itself and other organisms.
In 1983, artist Allan Kaprow began a series of performative “dirt exchanges” that would become known as “Trading Dirt.” For these transactions, Kaprow dug up dirt, placed it in the back of his pickup truck and drove it to different geographical locations to swap it with someone else. In “Just Doing,” Kaprow recounts several of these exchanges. He recalls taking a “bucket of good garden dirt” from his personal garden and exchanging it for some “heavy-duty Buddhist dirt” from underneath a Buddhist Zen Center. To retrieve this dirt, Kaprow, crawled underneath the Zen Center to the place beneath where his teacher meditated, dug up some of the “Buddhist” dirt and emptied his “garden” dirt into the hole he had created. Eventually he exchanged the “Buddhist” dirt with a woman operating a produce stand on a local farm. Kaprow asked the woman if he could “trade dirt” with her and then dug a hole next the farm stand, collected the “farm” dirt and emptied the “Buddhist” dirt into the hole. This process of trading of dirt went on for about three years according to Kaprow. “It had no real beginning or end. The stories began to add up to a very long story, and with each retelling they changed,” recalls Kaprow. “When I stopped being interested in the process . . . I put the last bucket of dirt back into the garden” (Kaprow 163).

At first glance Kaprow’s dirt exchanges seem problematic, from his exoticization of “Buddhist” dirt, to his displacement of the element without any regard to the attendant possibilities of ecological impact, such as: the spread of invasive species, distribution of insect eggs and larvae, and contact with contaminants or chemicals. These exchanges, however, act as complex, generative sites or contact zones where boundaries between performance, ecology, biology, and history are blurred. Because dirt contains abiotic and biotic elements that comprise complex ecosystems within it, the exchange of dirt (perhaps unbeknownst to those participating in it) had the potential to alter or disrupt the new habitats in which it was placed. This site of
exchange functions as a “contact zone,” which Mary Louise Pratt defines as “spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other” (“Arts of the Contact Zone” 34). This “contact zone” between performance, ecology, biology, and history demonstrates the permeability of person and place, individual and ecological community. The past, quite literally in the form of decayed organic and inorganic matter, is contained in the soil. To dig up the soil is to bring the past into the present and to move that soil to a new location, dislocating it and its contents from their ecological and historical context, creates dirt.

For me, “Trading Dirt” illustrates several things that I believe are crucial to my study. First, the movement of dirt without thought of the potential ecological consequences highlights that humans perhaps view dirt (and by extension other natural elements) as something that can be displaced, utilized, and/or manipulated for their own purposes. Second, the potential for ecological impact emphasizes the porosity between elements, humans, and other organisms. It is these permeable sites, between humans and other inhabitants of the planet, where boundaries between performance, history, biology, and ecology blur, that I investigate in this study.

“Trading Dirt” serves a springboard that raises questions about the relationships between humans and “nature” in performance. My project explores questions such as: What are some of the ways in which the nature/culture divide is performed? Can performance critique the construct of the division between nature and culture? What happens (or has the possibility to happen) when human bodies and natural elements connect and/or collide in performance? Do traditional approaches to performance tend to privilege the human body? How are hierarchies of species reified, agitated, or transgressed in performance? In what ways can dirt act as or be treated as a dynamic partner or active body in performance? Can dirt act as a body that agitates speciesist hierarchies? Are there alternate non-anthropocentric approaches to performance that allow for
equal exchanges between human and non-human bodies? Could affect and post-humanist theoretical approaches provide insights that enable different ways of thinking about relationships between human, non-human animal, and more-than-human bodies both in performance and the world writ large?

I explore how dirt operates as a complex matrix and choreographic element that interacts with other bodies in performance. I look to the discourses of ecocriticism, postmodernism, and performance studies to explore how these particular interactions with dirt imagine an alternate way for species to interact. Through this study, I hope to create a greater awareness of how both social and theatrical representations of the natural world inform our understanding of and our relationship with it. I am also particularly interested in how dirt is treated and/or mistreated within the culturally constructed space of the theatre. Additionally, I hope to bolster the idea that performance has the potential to transgress, subvert, and dismantle the nature/culture construct and offer alternative ways of understanding humans’ relationship with the natural world. I believe it is important to examine the relationships between humans and dirt, particularly in performance, because our conceptions of what constitutes “dirty” or “clean,” “nature” or “culture” are always shifting, and to investigate this relationship is to examine the cultural values that underlie and inform it.

**Methodology and Frameworks**

I employ close readings of Shenandoah National Park and the National Park Service, Suzan-Lori Parks’s *The America Play* as a dramatic text, and recorded productions of Pina Bausch’s *The Rite of Spring* and Eveoke Dance Theatre’s *Las Mariposas*. As the subject of my study, I interrogate the nature/culture divide and representations of nature in performance. I
examine the relationship between species, both human and non-human, by taking dirt and bodies in performance as my objects of study.

Using performance studies as a knowledge formation, particularly the scholarship of Elinor Fuchs, Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, Adam Sweeting and Thomas C. Crochunis, I will employ an ecocritical lens, using theories presented by Chaudhuri, May and Arons to examine my subject matter. My methodology will be predominantly post-modern theory and will also be informed by the theories of Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, and the feminist scholarship of Rosi Braidotti, Haraway, and Alaimo.

Ecocriticism is the body of theory that frames my research, which May defines as

the critical application of an ecological perspective to a cultural representation . . .

a critical (discursive) perspective on cultural performance (from theatre, film, and literature to zoos, amusement parks, and social protests) afforded and informed by the science of ecology and the greening fire it has precipitated across disciplines.

(95, 97)

Ecocriticism explores the intersections between ecology and performance, broadly construed. More specifically, this body of theory examines the intersections, disconnections, and overlaps between living organisms, the natural world, and performance. As Garrard puts it, “the widest definition of the subject of ecocriticism is the study of the relationship of the human and the non-human, throughout human cultural history and entailing critical analysis of the term ‘human’ itself” (5). Or in other words, ecocriticism investigates how the human understanding of what constitutes as “human” has vacillated over time and seeks to understand how humans currently understand themselves in relation to the natural world. I use ecocritical theory to explore relationships between humans and other organisms in each of my case studies.
Postmodern theory, specifically theories relating to post-humanism, affect, and animal studies also serve as a significant framework for my research. The current discourses in the aforementioned theories will serve as avenues by which to explore questions relating to dirt in performance such as: does the dirt agitate human/non-human boundaries? Does it open up performers to a more affective state? Does the use and treatment of the dirt reveal speciesist hierarchies in performance? Postmodern scholars, such as Cary Wolfe, Haraway, and Braidotti, who study post-humanism, affect, and animal studies posit theories regarding species relationships and how they manifest themselves in the world. For example, in *Animal Rites*, Wolfe asserts that relationships between species are “a fundamental repression that underlies most ethical and political discourse” (1). He argues:

Repressing the question of nonhuman subjectivity, taking it for granted that the subject is always already human. This means . . . that debates in the humanities and social sciences between well intentioned critics of racism, (hetero)sexism, classism, and all other -isms that are stock-in-trade of cultural studies almost always remain locked within an unexamined framework of *speciesism*. (Wolfe 1, emphasis in original)

Wolfe claims that the humanities and social sciences generally assume that the “subject is always already human,” and that this is a result of an “*institution of speciesism*” (2 emphasis in original). I use these postmodern theories to explore how speciesism is explicitly and/or subtly manifest or contested in performance practices and how the use of dirt reveals this “*institution of speciesism*” and can perhaps gesture toward a different way of thinking about inter-species relationships in performance.
I have given a brief outline of the chapters in earlier pages. What follows is a more thorough itinerary. In the subsequent chapters I implement an ecocritical analysis of the National Park System, Parks’s *The America Play*, Bausch’s *The Rite of Spring* and Eveoke Dance Theatre’s *Las Mariposas*, respectively. My readings of these performances, texts, and productions focus on the interactions between dirt and bodies. I demonstrate that the case studies in each of these chapters illuminate some of the ways that Western cultural and social institutions have informed how humans perceive themselves in relation to the natural world and can perhaps also offer alternate methods for thinking about relationships between bodies, both human and non-human.

In the first chapter I focus on the history and construction of the national parks to highlight how the rhetoric and spatial choreography of the parks seemingly reinforce the notion of nature and culture as two separate entities. Using the cultural scholarship of Sweeting and Crochunis, museum theory posited by Kirshenblatt-Gimblet, and environmental history theories of William Cronon, I analyze the history and spatial arrangement of Shenandoah National Park to argue that the performance of “wilderness” in the park functions as both symbol of the American frontier and simulacrum of the wild. I use theories of “liveness,” as articulated by Jean Baudrillard, Philip Auslander, and Sarah Bay-Cheng, to problematize this seemingly simple dichotomy by comparing popular granola bar company Nature Valley’s virtual “Trail View” national parks experience to that of visiting an actual park. Through the entanglement of the “live” and the “mediatized,” I argue, the national parks function as complex sites that possess varying degrees of “wildness.” Ultimately, I analyze the spatial choreography and performance of wilderness in the national parks to demonstrate that cultural institutions and performative practices have the power to influence the ways that humans understand themselves in the world.
Chapter One functions as a vehicle that demonstrates how human’s perception and orientation to nature (and by extension, dirt, as I will demonstrate in the proceeding chapters) is (and has the potential to be) constructed.

In the second chapter, I move into a textual and dramaturgical analysis of the use of dirt in Parks’s *The America Play*. I examine how the physical movement and choreography of the Foundling Father’s digging excavates the past and also imagines “new” historical events, specifically for African Americans. I use dance and affect theories to explore how *The America Play* problematizes notions of “genuine historicity” through kinesthetic movement, affective relationships, and virtual *becomings*. I use the scholarship of Foster to posit that the Foundling Father’s physical movement generates knowledge that blurs the boundaries between individual and ecological communities and therefore agitates the historical landscape. Using the scholarship of E. Patrick Johnson and Vershawn Ashanti Young, I investigate the connections between land privilege, hierarchies of class, black citizenship, and the concept of “make-belief,” which Parks uses to re-imagine Lincoln as an African American man. Employing Deleuze and Guattari’s theories of affect and immanent philosophy I also argue that by *becoming*-history and unearthing potential concepts on the plane of immanence the Foundling Father remakes or “reterritorializes” history. Ultimately, I argue that through the physical act of digging, *becoming*-Lincoln, and *becoming*-history, the Foundling Father performs an act of historiographic inquiry, by unearthing the past, excavating forgotten and buried “bones” or events, but also by creating “new historical

4 By dramaturgical analysis I mean that I explore the physical, social, political, and economic context of the play as it relates to ecocriticism. I also discuss the structure of the play and the ways that the playwright uses and plays with language.
events,” that stand in for the absent “bones” and give voice to the vanished, silent stories of African Americans.

In the third chapter, I concentrate on the use of peat as a choreographic element used in the staging of Bausch’s *The Rite of Spring*. I continue to use the ecocritical theory of Chaudhuri and Fuchs to analyze the symbolic and physical significance of the interactions between the peat and the dancer’s bodies. The feminist and ecofeminist theory of Alaimo, Karen Barad, Nancy Tuana, and Elizabeth Grosz informs my examination of the ways in which the peat marks and inscribes the dancers’ skin. Employing the cultural theory of William Ian Miller and Julia Kristeva, I argue that the dancers’ bodies become marked as “disgusting” and “abject.” I also implement the performance theory of Auslander to examine how the postmodern conceit of absence and presence functions in the piece. The peat marks the dancers’ bodies as “dirty” and I assert that this reveals a corporeality that is typically absent in traditional Western dance. I contend, that in *The Rite of Spring*, the peat, which has been reduced to what Alaimo designates a “thing,” reasserts its agency by pushing up against and inscribing the bodies of the dancers. Ultimately, I demonstrate Barad’s claim that “matter matters,” in this case in performance (140).

In the final chapter I delve deeper into the use of dirt in performance, this time to explore the inter-species interactions that take place. I use Eveoke Dance Theatre’s *Las Mariposas* as a case study to explore the relationship between dancers and dirt to demonstrate that troubling traditional speciesist approaches to dance and performance can lead to alternate ways of thinking about ecologically complex interactions onstage. I examine the stratified relationship between human and non-human bodies in this production to contemplate how the human/dirt relationship gestures toward an alternate approach to interactions between species in performance. Continuing the use of affect theory, in particular Deleuze and Guattari’s idea of the pre-personal
affective state of *becoming*, Alaimo’s notion of bodily “trans-corporeality,” and Braidotti’s post-human philosophy of “transpositions,” as a framework, I investigate these inter-species intersections, exploring the ways in which the dancers’ physical interactions with the dirt enabled them to *become* something other than themselves. Ultimately, I examine how the boundary between body, dirt, and species is blurred in *Las Mariposas*, deterritorializing the conventional relationship between body and dirt, and I explore the ways in which they coalesce and reterritorialize into an affective, “trans-corporeal” relationship. In this chapter I demonstrate that the porous relationship between humans and more-than-humans is an extremely high stakes one, as the other organisms with which humans share the planet have the potential to alter and change human bodies.

Examining each of these case studies through an ecocritical lens creates awareness regarding our physical bodies and how they interact with human and non-human bodies both in performance and in the natural world. Thinking about these relationships differently can point toward alternate ways of understanding relationships between all organisms and species and ultimately that nature and culture are one in the same because humans live in a “trans-corporeal” world. By examining relationships between humans and dirt in my particular case studies, I unearth speciesist, anthropocentric tendencies in traditional Western performance and dance and use Braidotti’s philosophy of *transpositions* and Deleuze and Guatarri’s notion of *becoming* as theoretical modes that present different approaches to performance. Through these investigations, my dissertation contributes to the ecocritical conversation that seeks a sustainable and equal future for all species by “expose[ing] the mythic underpinnings of unsustainable resource extraction and human exploitation . . . and . . . illuminat[ing] a nuanced and complex interrelatedness with the more-than-human world” (May 104).
Literature Review

The works I consult for my dissertation fall roughly into the following categories: postmodern theory, ecocritical theory, and feminist theory. Postmodernism, ecocriticism, and feminism each uniquely push against the constructs of modernism that have reified and perpetuated binaries like the nature/culture divide. Postmodern and feminist theories allow for an exploration of species subjugation and affective relationships between species; both discourses posit theories that examine radical shifts in human understandings of relationships with other species. Ecocriticism allows an examination of the disconnections and overlaps between living organisms, the natural world, and performance.

Royd Climenhaga’s *The Pina Bausch Sourcebook: The Making of Tanztheater*, artist and dramaturge Raimund Hoghe’s “Into Myself - a Twig, a Wall: An Essay on Pina Bausch and Her Theatre,” dance critic Arlene Croce’s “Bausch’s theatre of dejection,” performance scholar Gabrielle Cody’s “Woman, Man, Dog, Tree: Two Decades of Intimate and Monumental Bodies in Pina Bausch’s Tanztheater,” dance scholar Foster’s *Choreographing Empathy: Kinesthesia in Performance*, dance scholar Joan Cass’s *Dancing through History*, and director Wim Wenders’ film *Pina*. Finally, for the chapter on *Las Mariposas* I will look to interviews conducted with the dancers,5 DVD’s of the performance, and works by Guattari, Deleuze, Alaimo, and Braidotti, which I address with more depth in the proceeding sections.

The following paragraphs describe at greater length some of the postmodern discourses I employ. The sources I consult include but are not limited to: philosopher Félix Guattari’s *The Three Ecologies* and performance scholar Laura Cull’s “Affect in Deleuze, Hijikata, and Coates: The Politics of Becoming-Animal in Performance.”

In *The Three Ecologies*, Guattari contends that the fibers linking the environment, humans, and social relations are inextricable. Therefore a solution to the “environmental crisis” cannot be found without first comprehending how dominant ideologies inform the construction of nature in an individual’s mind. In order to make sense of these complicated relationships, Guattari calls for an ecosophical perspective, which would attempt to acknowledge the complex exchange between the individual, society, and the environment. He proposes a “reconstruction of social and individual practices” which would be classified as the three ecologies: social ecology, _______________

5 The dancer interviews were conducted by Evangeline Rose Whitlock in preparation for our co-presentation “‘And so I offered them our Land’: The Land/Body Intersection in Eveoke Dance Theatre’s *Las Mariposas*” at the *Earth Matters on Stage* conference in June 2012.
mental ecology, and environmental ecology (41). Guattari argues that in order to employ the lens of the three ecologies we need to eradicate “sedative discourse,” which he identifies as created and promoted by the mass media (42). For Guattari, nature cannot be separated from culture, because society’s concept of nature is shaped by prevalent metanarratives, which are informed by the mass media, corporations, politics, religion, and ultimately capitalism. Guattari argues it is not until we understand the social and political forces that inform our perception of the environment that we can work toward disassembling them. Guattari unpacks the construct of the nature/culture divide and illuminates the ways in which nature and culture are inextricably bound up together. His theories and arguments will serve as an overarching presence in my dissertation, but are especially present in Chapter One.

In “Affect in Deleuze, Hijikata, and Coates: The Politics of Becoming-Animal in Performance,” Cull explores the performance implications of Deleuze’s concept of affect, specifically the notion of becoming-animal. She defines affect as that “which is not understood as emotion, but a pre-personal process of ‘becoming,’ [a] change or variation caused by an encounter between bodies” (Cull 1). For practitioners of performance, affect offers a complex and compelling process that may allow a performer to embody an “other” not just through imitation but also through becoming. Cull asserts “we can say that the work of the performer is not to represent emotion or to represent other bodies in the world, but to devise a procedure to extract the affects of bodies, to somehow reconstruct in performance the power of another body to pierce us like an arrow, force us to think, and enable us to act in new ways” (7). In terms of performance, affect creates a method of performance that appears more biocentric and less anthropomorphic than many techniques. Affect would allow a performer to not merely imitate the physical movement and vocality of an animal, but to engage in a process where the performer
could start to become the animal. Cull explains the experience of becoming-animal as “a real, affective experience of relationality which occurs within a zone of exchange between man and animal in which something of one passes into the other” (13). In this exchange between man and animal, it seems that the man becomes more animal, and the animal becomes more man. If the boundaries between man and animal were to become blurred, then prevalent hierarchies of nature (such as dominant Western thoughts of animals being subjugated under humans,) could be disrupted. If this relationship could be severed, than perhaps affect could serve as a more biocentric approach to performance. I use Cull as a lens to examine the affective relationship between dirt and performers in The America Play, The Rite of Spring, and Las Mariposas.

Detailed below are several of the sources I consult regarding ecocritical theories of theatre and performance, which include performance scholars Elinor Fuchs and Una Chaudhuri’s Land/Scape/ Theater and Chaudhuri’s Staging Place: The Geography of Modern Drama.

In Land/Scape/ Theater, Fuchs and Chaudhuri argue that modern drama and theatre have taken a “spatial turn,” and they denote landscape as the new spatial paradigm of theatre. The authors assert, “Landscape has particular value as a mediating term between space and place . . . [in that] It is inside space, one might say, but contains place” (3, emphasis in original). Landscape functions as a connecting element between space and place; it exists within a space but could include many places. Chaudhuri contends that understandings of landscape could range from “a way of seeing, an ideologically and psychologically revealing statement about our relation to the world around us, to a way of not seeing, of masking and occluding the unsavory truths about our relations to each other and to the land we supposedly share” (11, emphasis in original). Landscape can operate as an entity that either exposes or conceals distinct aspects of how nature and culture are connected to both space and place. Fuchs and Chaudhuri note that
when applied to theatre and dramaturgy landscape can “become a perspective and a method, linking seemingly unrelated theatrical practices in staging, text, scenography, and spectatorship” (3). The concept of landscape is generative as an overarching idea in my dissertation, especially in the chapters focusing on *The America Play*, *The Rite of Spring*, and *Las Mariposas*.

In *Staging Place: The Geography of Modern Drama*, Chaudhuri advocates for a different methodological approach to drama and theatre, a practice that would explore the geography, rather than the traditional history, of theatre. She asserts, “To theorize a geography of theater . . . is to bring theater studies into alignment with a considerable body of contemporary cultural theory, in which space is increasingly replacing time as a significant category of analysis” (xi). Chaudhuri posits the term “geopathology”, which she defines as “the problem of place—and place as problem—. . . appearing as a series of ruptures and displacements in various orders of location” (55, emphasis in original). Included in these ruptures is the rift between humans and nature. Chaudhuri argues that nature is not merely a setting where human events unfold; rather it is a geographic site with its own ecological, physical, and social history. Geopathology reveals the ruptures between people and their habitats by considering the history, geography, ecology, and spatial construction of places. The notion of geopathology underlies all of the chapters but is especially important in the national parks and *The Rite of Spring* case studies.

Some of the feminist theory I use in this dissertation includes, but is not limited to, literature scholar Stacy Alaimo’s “Skin Dreaming: The Bodily Transgressions of Fielding Burke, Octavia Butler, and Linda Hogan,” and feminist scholar and philosopher Rosi Braidotti’s *Transpositions: On Nomadic Ethics*.

In “Skin Dreaming: The Bodily Transgressions of Fielding Burke, Octavia Butler, and Linda Hogan,” Alaimo presents several ideas that help to dissect and analyze the complex
affective state existing between humans and nature. She posits the notion of thinking of skin as a liminal space because of “its intimacy with the ‘outside’ word of oil, clay, ‘other bodies,’ and the ‘foreign land of air’” (134). As humans, our skin connects and collides with other bodies serving as an ambassador between us and other objects. Skin crosses borders, enabling us to affect and be affected by other elements. From its liminal position, skin has the power to cross boundaries and disrupt the anthropocentric nature/culture divide. It possesses the ability to dissolve hierarchies of power where humans rule over nature and instead create new relationships where humans and other species exist on equal terms. Alaimo declares that in order for the human constructed nature/culture divide to be abolished, we must begin to rethink the way we understand skin and, vicariously, the body. In The Rite of Spring and Las Mariposas chapters, I examine the role that skin plays as an ambassador or a liminal space between human and non-human bodies. Specifically, with performers and dirt, I explore the ways that skin might enable human bodies to upset traditional speciesist hierarchies and allow them to be open and receptive to more affective states.

In Transpositions: On Nomadic Ethics, Braidotti presents a radical and complex philosophy regarding transposing difference and becoming-other. According to Braidotti this philosophy “explore[s] the possibility of a system of ethical values that, far from requiring a steady and unified vision of the subject, rests on a non-unitary, nomadic, or rhizomatic view. The notion of ‘sustainability’ is the central point of reference” (5). Braidotti attempts to locate an ethics that values all living organisms. This ethic is not heterogenic in nature, it is constantly shifting, but its nexus is sustainability. She designates this a transformative ethics, “an ethics of sustainability, based on . . . interconnections” (5). For Braidotti, transpositions are an ethics of-
becoming, of exchanges between bodies, of relationships in flux. I use transpositions as a method with the potential to dismantle speciesist hierarchies in performance.

Stakes

Our planet is in the midst of ecological crisis, with problems such as deforestation, over-fishing, depletion of natural resources, dwindling natural ecosystems, and global climate change. As we face these dilemmas, all of which are anthropogenic in origin, humans are left searching for solutions. These are large-scale problems that humans will continue to encounter until we reach the tipping point where our understanding of how we relate to nature motivates reparative action.

The explicit and subtle fibers linking the environment, humans, and social relations are inextricable, as they have been forged through many forces such as: media, politics, social policy, religion and economics, to name a few. “Now more than ever, nature cannot be separated from culture,” asserts Guattari. “[I]n order to comprehend the interactions between ecosystems . . . we must learn to think ‘transversally’” (The Three Ecologies 29). Thus the dualistic conception of nature and culture is an untenable paradigm. I concur with Arons when she declares:

The need for theatre scholars to investigate the ways in which theater and performance have shaped and/or might reshape our orientation to the natural world has not become any less urgent as the threat of global warming (and its attendant ecological and social catastrophes) looms ever nearer. (149)

Analyzing the ways the natural world is presented and represented in performance is one step toward a more critical comprehension of how these representations inform our understanding of our relationship with the natural world. This is a vital study because it is not until we understand
how and why these narratives are being constructed that we can begin to comprehend how they affect our understanding of and relationship with the natural world. May urgently claims, “We need an ecocriticism that is dangerous to business as usual . . . [an] ecocriticism [that] can expose and dismantle the ideologies and master narratives that shore up business as usual and inspire performances that help society recalibrate towards sustainable human means” (104). If we have a better understanding of how these narratives are created, we may be able to take a step toward altering them or creating alternative ways of knowing, understanding, and interacting with the natural world.
CHAPTER I: (UN)TRAMMELED BY MAN: WILDERNESS
AS SYMBOL AND SIMULACRUM

[The National Parks are] the best idea we ever had . . . . Absolutely American, absolutely democratic, they reflect us at our best rather than our worst.

Wallace Stegner
Marking the Sparrow’s Fall

A landscape is built out of inclusions and exclusions; it is a structuring of knowledge and a valorizing of some things at the expense of others.

Garrett A. Sullivan Jr.
The Drama of Landscape

On October 1, 2013, the United States Federal Government entered into a shutdown that lasted for sixteen days due to congressional gridlock over fund appropriations for the 2014 fiscal year. During this time thousands of federal employees were furloughed and countless federal institutions, agencies, programs, and services were closed. One of the many agencies affected by the shutdown was the National Park Service, which forced park employees to take furloughs and the parks to close their gates. Guests, campers, and hikers already in the parks were given forty-eight hours to vacate the premises before barricades and roadblocks were erected. Many were forced to cancel travel plans and cut their vacations short. Some “gate jumpers” protested the national parks shutdown; these protestors disregarded gates and barricades and tried to force their way into the parks. Many “gate jumpers” took pictures in front of national parks and
monuments holding signs reading “catch us if you can” which they posted on Twitter and other social media sites under hashtags such as #YesWeCone and #SpiteHouse (“Government Shutdown”).

Travelers were not the only ones affected by the National Park Service shutdown, however, as many park employees were geographically confined without work or pay. For example, approximately two thousand people, the bulk of which were park employees, were stranded inside Grand Canyon State Park because of its isolated location. In “Stuck and Hungry at the Grand Canyon,” John M. Glionna of the Los Angeles Times reports that many of the employees stranded in the park were “the people who change the hotel room sheets, serve the meals, sell the gift shop mementos. Many are entry-level, minimum-wage workers with families who live paycheck to paycheck.” Hoping that they would soon return to work, many employees remained within the parks for the duration the shutdown.

Scientific research conducted by both park and non-park employees also had to be put on hold. Yosemite alone grants hundreds of research permits per year with research in the park ranging from “declining animal species studies to invasive plant removal strategies to human carrying capacity issues” (“Nature and Science”). The shutdown halted work for the Endangered Species Act, development work on wind and solar projects, and prevented the Forest Service from conducting research on fire restoration, conservation, and mitigation, to give a few examples (“Shutdown FAQs: Answers to your questions about impacts to visitors and wildlands”).

As these examples indicate, the national parks shutdown affected many people at a personal level and collectively affected the national economy. According to statistics gathered by The Wilderness Society, within the first ten days of the shutdown, the twelve busiest national
National parks lost, “seven million visitors, seventy six million dollars in visitor spending each day, four hundred and fifty thousand dollars in entrance fees per day, and forty thousand recreation-based jobs in or near those twelve parks were also put at risk, not including those that are in the parks themselves” (“Infographic: Shutdown crushed national parks, showed America’s love for wildlands”). The government shutdown demonstrated how intricately the preservation, management, maintenance, and administration of the national parks is entwined in political, economic, and social factors. Thus, the government shutdown illustrates the ways in which national parks function as sites where political, social, and capitalistic practices inform conservation and preservation practices. Perhaps, though, it prompts a larger question: How is it possible that the “wilderness” can be shut down for sixteen days? On deeper level, however, we can continue to see markers of what in the government and much of the public’s perception constitutes “nature” and “wilderness.”

In the translators’ introduction to Félix Guattari’s *The Three Ecologies*, Ian Pindar and Paul Sutton opine on the tie between capitalism and the environment, “There can be little doubt that around the world increased pollution, global warming, deforestation, desertification and the loss of biodiversity are anthropogenic, or that the motor of this generalized impoverishment of

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6 Twelve busiest parks according to The Wilderness Society: Acadia, Badlands, Cuyahoga, Everglades, Glacier, Grand Canyon, Great Smokies, Olympic, Rocky Mountains, Yellowstone, Yosemite, and Zion.

7 For more information about how the government shutdown affected the National Park Service see these sources: “Infographic: Shutdown crushed national parks, showed America's love for wildlands” at wilderness.org, “Planning a hike or Campout? Federal Government complicates things,” at blogs.seattletimes.com, and “Q & A: The Shutdown and Hikers,” at wta.org.
For Guattari, capitalism functions as “the dominant mode of economic interaction and transaction . . . [an] ideology of unrestricted competition [that] has resulted in the widespread plunder of natural resources” (3-4). Through their observation, Pindar and Sutton unveil the subtle strands that connect dominant economic systems with the environment and the individual. Guattari contends that the fibers linking the environment to social, political, and economic relations are inextricable. Therefore, a solution to Guattari’s designated “environmental crisis” cannot be found without first comprehending how dominant ideologies inform the construction of nature in individuals’ minds.

The dilemma with national parks is a component of the dualistic conception of nature and culture as I have discussed in the preceding pages. In the case of national parks, visitors’ perceptions of nature and culture are formed by dominant cultural metanarratives that are enforced through the media, politics, social policy, religion, and capitalism. Nature and culture are not, however, two opposing concepts, rather they are constructed ideologies that overlap, intertwine, and incorporate one another. National parks which “contain many of our nation’s most treasured landscapes,” function as complex sites where visitors’ perceptions of nature and culture are formed (“Science in Your National Parks”). The National Park Service crafts visitor’s experiences through the choreography of land and space. As Susan Leigh Foster maintains, choreography encompasses the structuring of any kind of movement, not merely human. “Buildings choreograph space and people’s movement through them; cameras choreograph cinematic action. . . . Multiprotein complexes choreograph DNA repair. . . web services choreograph interfaces; and even existence is choreographed,” she asserts (Foster 2-3). In this way the spatial orientation of parks choreograph how visitors move through them and what they view. This choreography affects how they perceive the park and their relationship to it.
Examine the history, literal construction, and spatial choreography of the parks illustrates how the concepts of nature, culture, and wilderness operate within them. Take, for instance, Ken Burn’s documentary series *The National Parks: America’s Best Idea.* In Episode One documentary writer and co-producer Dayton Duncan avers:

I think that deep in our DNA is this embedded memory of when we were not separated from the rest of the natural world, that we were a part of it . . . And so when we enter a [national] park, we’re entering a place that has been, at least an attempt has been made to keep it like it once was. We cross that boundary and suddenly we’re no longer masters of the natural world, we’re part of it. And in that sense, it’s like we’re going home. (*Ken Burns: The National Parks: America’s Best Idea*)

This succinct statement reveals volumes regarding the perception of nature in relation to the national park experience. Duncan claims that deep down we have a desire to be a part of the natural world, implying that humans are inherently separate from nature. He then explicitly states that not only are humans separate from it, but that they dominate the natural world. All humans must do, however, to fulfill this embedded desire is enter into a national park. According to Duncan, something transcendent happens when visitors traverse a park’s threshold: they no longer command nature, but become unified with it.

Duncan’s statement illustrates several dominant ideologies that have been woven into the narrative, experience, and construction of national parks. Humans and nature are separate until they converge together in a national park; the park has been preserved to be “like it once was,” and entering into the park is equivalent to “going home.” The phrase, “like it once was” implies that the original physical geography and ecological assembly of the park has been preserved or
restored while the phrase “it’s like . . . going home,” alludes toward the national park experience as something that creates a connection or induces a belonging to a native land. Peter Coyote, the documentary’s narrator, states that the national parks embody an idea “as uniquely American as the Declaration of Independence and just as radical” (Ken Burns: The National Parks: America’s Best Idea). This bold claim suggests that park visitors can experience something inherently and distinctly American within the parks boundaries. Experiencing a national park allows visitors to “return home” to quell an internal yearning to be included in the natural world. In this scenario, the natural world is equated with geography and biology unique and native to America. Thus, the national parks foster the perception that within their boundaries nature is untouched, untamed, and unequivocally American. Take for example, the Yellowstone website, which claims the park is “A mountain wildland, home to grizzly bears, wolves, and herds of bison and elk, the park is the core of one of the last, nearly intact, natural ecosystems in the Earth’s temperate zone” (“World’s Largest Collection of Geysers”). This statement promotes the idea that within the borders of the park nature has been largely untouched.

In this chapter, using Shenandoah National Park as a case study, I explore the ways in which the rhetoric and choreography of the national parks seemingly reify the notion of nature and culture as separate entities. I examine how the construction of the park, through the movement and dislocation of dirt, trees, people, animals, and other inhabitants of the land, constructs an orientation to the park that places people as subject and nature as object. Specifically, I use performance, museum, and environmental history theories, Adam Sweeting, Thomas C. Crochunis, Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblet, and William Cronon respectively, to analyze the history and spatial construction of Shenandoah to establish that the performance of “wilderness” in the park functions as both symbol of the American frontier and simulacrum of
the wild. I then use theories of “liveness,” as articulated by Jean Baudrillard, Philip Auslander, and Sarah Bay-Cheng, to problematize this seemingly simple dichotomy by comparing popular granola bar company Nature Valley’s virtual “Trail View” national parks experience to that of visiting an actual park. I argue that through the enmeshment of the “live” and the “mediatized,” the national parks function as complex sites possessing varying degrees of “wildness.”

Ultimately, I analyze the spatial choreography and performance of wilderness in the national parks to demonstrate that cultural institutions and performative practices have the power to influence the ways that humans understand and orientate themselves in the world.

This chapter will proceed in the following manner: I will detail a brief history of the development and establishment of the National Park System, I will then analyze the spatial arrangement of Shenandoah National Park and explore the ways in which “wilderness” is presented and performed within its boundaries. Finally, I will use the concept of “liveness” to examine and compare the experience of virtually visiting a national park through the Nature Valley Trail View website to physically visiting an actual national park.

National Parks History

An exhaustive history of the events and ideas that informed the development and creation of the National Park System is beyond the scope of my investigation. Instead, I focus here specifically on the emergence of the concepts of landscape and scenic preservation and the move toward “total preservation,” what Alfred Runte designates as the transition from purely scenic preservation to incorporating the protection of native plants and animals (108). I am especially interested in how these ideas relate to the United States’ performance of national identity,
especially vis-à-vis its status as a “younger” nation in relation to its counterpart in the “old world,” and how this performance informed the establishment of the National Park System.

According to the National Park System website, beginning in the 1800s:

scenic natural wonders of the West . . . like mineral springs in Arkansas, towering mountains and majestic trees of Yosemite, spouting geysers of Yellowstone, and the arid ruins of Casa Grande, inspired individual Americans to call for their preservation, asking their government to create something called “national parks.” (“Evolution of an Idea”)

The concept of land preservation, which would eventually culminate in the establishment of the National Park System, was rooted in individual Americans’ desire to perform cultural legitimacy akin to that found in England and Continental Europe. In National Parks: The American Experience, Alfred Runte explains America’s interest in creating cultural identification:

Unlike established, European countries, which traced their origins far back into antiquity, the United States lacked a long artistic and literary heritage. The absence of reminders of the human past, including castles, ancient ruins, and cathedrals on the landscape, further alienated American intellectuals from a cultural identity. (11)

Following America’s independence from Great Britain, Americans wanted to find a way to distinguish themselves and their new country from the “old world.” They wanted to prove that America had a natural heritage that could rival England and Europe. Runte notes, “No longer could the United States lay claim to the achievements of Western civilization merely by recalling its membership in the British Empire” (14). The United States had to discover an inherent aspect of their geography they could claim as distinctly American as a way to provide their nation with
a cultural heritage. According to Runte, Americans began to doubt whether their culture could survive apart from Europe, “Since the achievements of their own artists and writers were negligible, nationalists turned to nature as the only viable alternative” (14). Thus, America’s landscapes provided the country with a natural heritage that allowed them to perform their national and cultural identity to the rest of the world.

Individuals throughout the United States’ history, ranging from artists and naturalists to presidents, selected specific sections of land possessing pristine or picturesque qualities to be lauded as reasons that Europeans should visit America. For instance, in 1784 Thomas Jefferson proclaimed that the Virginia Natural Bridge and the Potomac River Gorge were “worth a voyage across the Atlantic” (qtd. in Runte 15). Similarly, essayist Philip Freneau proclaimed with much national pride that the Mississippi is the “prince of rivers, in comparison of whom the Nile is but a small rivulet, and the Danube a ditch” (qtd. in Runte 15, emphasis in original). Selecting specific American geographic regions, comparing them to those of other countries, and using this rhetoric as a method to entice travelers to journey to the United States became a vital avenue through which the United States began to shape its cultural identity as a nation.

As the United States expanded further west and European settlers began to inhabit the land, they continued to encounter impressive landscapes that were new to them. A critical moment occurred in 1864 when a group of Californians convinced state senator John Conness to propose legislation to the United States Congress that would protect the Sierra redwoods and Yosemite Valley from entrepreneurs who wanted to develop the land (Runte 28). Conness proposed this idea and on June 30, 1864, President Abraham Lincoln signed the Yosemite Act designating the Sierra redwoods and Yosemite Valley “for public use, resort, and recreation” (Runte 28). “The purpose of the park, as indicated by the placement of its boundaries, was
strictly scenic,” notes Runte, “Only Yosemite Valley and its encircling peaks, an area of approximately forty square miles, comprised the northern unit” (29).

The designation of this land as a separate entity, allocated for the public, set a precedent that through legislation and executive action the government had the power to decide what land was worth preserving for future generations and by extension, what land was not. Runte argues that the preservation of Yosemite filled a cultural role because “the term ecology was not even known” at the time (29). Thus, Runte concludes, “[m]onumentalism, not environmentalism, was the driving impetus behind the 1864 Yosemite Act” (29). According to other sources, however, environmentalism and conservation may have had more of a hand in the development of Yosemite than Runte gives nineteenth-century planners credit for. John Muir, a naturalist and conservationist, advocated for the protection of California wilderness and forests and petitioned Congress to stop depleting natural resources in the areas surrounding Yosemite. His exposés on the land surrounding Yosemite are said to have been one of the sparks that led to the Congressional bill that proposed to make Yosemite a national park (“John Muir”).

The concept of land preservation came to full fruition in 1872, when President Ulysses S. Grant signed a bill creating Yellowstone National Park in Wyoming the first official national park. In Guardians of the Parks, John C. Miles summarizes the 1872 Congressional statement: “The [Yellowstone Park] act reserved more than two million acres from ‘settlement, occupancy or sale’ and dedicated the land ‘as a public park or pleasuring ground for the benefit and enjoyment of the people’” (5). Yellowstone was not created to protect wilderness Runte claims, but rather as a means for the United States to “acquire a semblance of antiquity through landscape” (41).
Runte argues that Yosemite and Yellowstone were preserved not only because of their “beauty,” but because they were considered “worthless” lands. “From the very beginning Congress bowed to arguments that commercial resources should either be excluded from the parks at the outset,” states Runte, “or be opened to exploitation regardless of their location” (48). To support his claim he cites several of Conness’s remarks in the 1864 Yosemite debates, including his declaration that “this bill proposes to make a grant of certain premises located in the Sierra Nevada . . . that are for all public purposes worthless, but which constitute, perhaps, some of the greatest wonders of the world. . . . The property is of no value to the Government” (qtd. in Runte 49). According to Runte’s interpretation of Conness’s declaration, because the land is both beautiful and worthless to the government in terms of extracting resources, it should be set aside for public recreation. Because these particular landscapes could not be utilized for “lumbering, mining, grazing, or agriculture,” Congress designated them national parks (49). “Indeed, throughout the history of the national park idea,” avers Runte, “the concept of useless scenery has virtually determined which landmarks the nation would protect as well as how it would protect them” (49).

Three more national parks were established in 1890: Sequoia, General Grant (what is now Kings Canyon National Park), and Yosemite. In Uncertain Path, William C. Tweed asserts that the constitution of these three parks “marks the transition of the United States from a nation with a single national park to one that possessed a national park system” (17, emphasis in original). In 1916, President Woodrow Wilson established the National Park System within the Department of the Interior, naming businessman Stephen T. Mather as Director and Horace M. Albright as Assistant Director. Mather and Albright desired to see the parks system prosper and endeavored to attract more tourists to the parks by building hotels, museums, creating
educational activities, and allowing vehicles in the parks. In “The National Park Service: A Brief History,” Barry Mackintosh claims, “Crusading for a national parks bureau, Mather and Albright effectively blurred the distinction between utilitarian conservation and preservation by emphasizing the economic value of parks as tourist meccas” (“The National Park Service”). Mather and Albright began publicity campaigns, specifically utilizing railroad advertising, National Geographic, and The Saturday Evening Post, to communicate their message that the national parks were destination locations.

The establishment of Everglades National Park in 1934 marked a significant shift from the role of national parks as “pleasuring ground[s] for the benefit and enjoyment of the people,” to a focus on the “total preservation” of the land (Runte 5, 108). This shift indicated that the National Park Service was interested not only in touting the parks as scenic wonders and tourist destinations, but also in preserving the biotic and geographic elements present in the parks. Robert Sterling Yard, head of NPS Educational Committee at the time described the practice of “total preservation” in the following way: “Except to make ways for roads, trails, hotels and camps sufficient to permit the people to live there awhile and contemplate the unaltered works of nature . . . no tree, shrub or wildflower is cut, no stream or lake shore is disturbed, no bird or animal is destroyed” (qtd. in Runte 118). While biological sacrifices would still have to be made for certain amenities, no excess destruction would be permitted. “The commitment seemed all the more convincing in light of topography represented in the Everglades,” proclaims Runte. “For the first time a major national park would lack great mountains, deep canyons, and tumbling waterfalls; preservationists accepted the protection of its native plants and animals alone as justification for Everglades National Park” (Runte 108-109). The Everglades, therefore, were selected as a national park based on their diversity of flora and fauna, instead of a
spectacular landscape. Regarding the national park service selecting the Everglades as a national park, Runte affirms that the:

Everglades National Park was the all-important precedent. The sincerity of attempts to apply total preservation to existing national parks might still be discredited by their imposing topography. Totally devoid of the mileposts of cultural nationalism, the Everglades confirmed the depth of commitments to protect more than the physical environment. (137)

The Everglades National Park, as the above indicates, signals a shift in the National Park Service ideology, one that began in landscape and scenic preservation and moved into total preservation and conservation. From this moment forward, the National Park System continued to grow, expand, and fluctuate between scenic preservation and total preservation within the parks. Today, there are fifty-nine national parks managed by the National Park Service.

The United States’ interest in land preservation had its origins in no small way in the citizens’ desire to demonstrate that their nation’s landscapes were superior to the ancient heritage of Europe and England. By selecting distinct land to tout as reasons to visit America, the United States placed specific geographic/biological features on stage. Placing significance on the country’s physical geography created a foundation for land preservation that eventually developed into the National Park System. The National Park Service designates and preserves government appointed “national treasures,” and encourages American citizens to travel to the parks to survey their landscapes and behold their splendor. The United States government created the national parks so visitors can observe America’s geographic features in perpetuity; therefore, the spatial arrangements of the parks are deliberately designed and choreographed for human viewing.
Shenandoah National Park, located in Virginia, contains 300 square miles of space within the Blue Ridge Mountains, with the Virginia Piedmont located to its east and the Shenandoah Valley to the west. Visitors to Shenandoah can hike, camp, fish, and drive the scenic Skyline Drive. The Shenandoah National Park Visitor Guide informs readers that a main purpose of the Park is to “provide the traditional western national park experience to the urban east” (2012 Visitor Guide). Another park guide welcomes visitors to Shenandoah National Park by offering the park as a site of inspiration, relaxation, and recreation, where citizens of the urban east can reconnect with nature. “Like generations before you,” says the guide, “we invite you to explore, relax, and rejuvenate” (Shenandoah National Park Guide 2).

The Skyline Drive serves as one particularly compelling example of how the park’s designers stage the landscape for visitors. The Skyline Drive is described as “a narrow mountain road with beautiful vistas and wildflowers along the shoulders” (Shenandoah Map and Guide). The Shenandoah Map encourages visitors to “Take a leisurely drive and pull off at some of our 75 scenic overlooks to see the views.” The Skyline Drive’s scenic overviews demonstrate the spatial choreography of the park as employees have cleared trees and brush, excavated and removed dirt in order to level and pave the road, and eliminated other visual obstacles to allow visitors an unobstructed view of the mountain skyline and the valleys below. This arrangement allows visitors to gaze, not at the unadulterated land, flora, and fauna in the park, but rather at a constructed view. According to a Shenandoah brochure, this act generates a specific experience for the visitor, “to be awed and humbled and inspired all at once” (Shenandoah Map and Guide).

Positioned throughout the 105 miles of Skyline Drive are seven major stopping points or hubs of activity that structure visitor’s movement through the park. Each of these locations
includes an assortment of amenities including campgrounds, gas stations, gift shops, restaurants, visitor centers, ATMs, laundry, and showers. Some of the buildings at these stopping points even have Internet access. While driving along the Skyline a visitor can pull over to behold a scenic view, but they can also pump gas, eat at a restaurant, check email, or take in some local talent at an amphitheatre. If visitors are still interested in experiencing the park beyond the Skyline Drive, they can camp in one of the multiple campgrounds located in the park or hike one of the park’s many trails.

Lest one think that the trails are more direct encounters with unadulterated nature, as compared to the Skyline Drive, a closer look reveals them to be just as constructed. Shenandoah boasts, “more than 500 miles of trails leading to stunning views of waterfalls, spectacular mountain vistas, and lush forests” (Shenandoah National Park Guide 2). Many of the trails begin at specific points on Skyline Drive, so visitors can hike without venturing off the main thoroughfare. When hiking, visitors are encouraged to “always stay on trails and pay attention to the concrete posts found at trail intersections” (Shenandoah National Park Guide 38). To keep the hikers from veering off the trail the park has incorporated concrete posts as well as blazes, “marks made on trees with paint” (Shenandoah National Park Guide 38). These blazes are color-coordinated and indicate which trails are open to hikers and horseback riders. They also indicate where Shenandoah’s trails intersect with the Appalachian Trail as well as delineate the physical boundary of the park. The concrete posts and blazes function as signposts, guiding the hiker to travel through the space in a specific manner and keeping the participant within the structure of the intended experience.

Cultural theorists Adam Sweeting and Thomas C. Crochunis offer helpful theories to analyze the spatial design of Shenandoah and the intended experience for park visitors. In
“Performing the Wild: Rethinking Wilderness and Theater Spaces,” Sweeting and Crochunis use performance as a lens to explore the similarities in conventions employed in realistic stage practices and in designated wilderness zones, which they define as geographic spaces that have been shaped and designated as such by executive or legislative action, such as a national park. First, they note that both realistic stage practices and wilderness zones depend on a binary conception of space. Historically, in theatrical realism, the proscenium arch differentiates performer from audience. In wilderness zones, the perceived “wild” is distinguished from the “non-wild.” In both scenarios, spatial constructions dictate who/what becomes performer and who/what becomes observer. Second, the observer/performer binary encourages participants to view the events (both on stage and in the “wild”) as though they were naturally unfolding on their own. Sweeting and Crochunis argue that framing space in this manner, “efface[s] the cultural assumptions and structures that shape our performance” (326). Third, they assert that realistic stage practices and wilderness zones dictate what observers are able to see or not see; therefore they also limit perspective.

Analyzing Shenandoah through a performance lens reveals that a park visitor functions as an audience member who enters the perceived “wild” land from the “non-wild” land surrounding the park. The visitor travels through the park by car, foot, bike, or horse, and each method of travel has a designated path. The choreography of space in the park creates a relationship between the constructed “wild” as the object or performer and the visitor as subject or audience. Park visitors (or audience members) leave their cars to view a scenic overlook on Skyline Drive, or pause during a hike to observe a waterfall; in each scenario the visitor observes the scenery as though it were naturally unfolding. The scene is not unfolding naturally, however, but is instead part of a premeditated, carefully crafted performance of nature designed by the park. Framing
nature in this manner disguises the labor and curation that went into the production. These picturesque scenes have been constructed to serve as focal points along a designated path because the geographic or biological phenomena are deemed to be spectacular, interesting, unusual, or otherwise worthy of observation. Within the park are many designated paths that dictate where and how a visitor experiences it. By creating and controlling what paths visitors are allowed to travel, the park limits the perspective and experience. The design of the park generates a binary conception of space where the visitor/observer gazes at nature/performer. A visitor to Shenandoah is expected, then, to adhere to the intended choreography of the space, participating as an audience member in a deliberately constructed performance of wilderness. Visitors who do not want to abide by these restrictions have opportunities to resist, such as the “gate jumpers” and hikers who remained in parks during the government shutdown. Visitors could also venture off main drives and trails, but to do so is at the visitors’ own risk.

By creating this schism, Shenandoah National Park functions, to employ Una Chaudhuri’s term, as “a geopathologic site,” which she defines as “the problem of place—and place as problem—. . . appearing as a series of ruptures and displacements in various orders of location” (Staging Place 55, emphasis in original). Included in these rupture is the rift between humans and nature. Chaudhuri asserts, “The most fundamental dislocation is the one that . . . makes of nature a mere setting—‘scenery’” (55). Nature is not merely a setting where human events unfold; rather it is a geographic site with its own ecological, physical, and social history. Geopathology considers these histories and explores what the situatedness, geography, and spatial construction of a place reveals about the people who inhabit it.

Using a performance analogy to unpack the spatial construction of Shenandoah National Park illuminates how the conception of the “wild” informs human understanding and interaction
with the “wild.” Designating certain geographical spaces as “wild” or “natural” creates what Sweeting and Crochunis call “a large-scale human laboratory experiment, [or] a kind of biological theater” (328). Because these spaces are created through legislative and executive action, they are ultimately created through the government, who then decides what constitutes “nature” worthy of preservation. This is the case with all national parks, as the United States’ government, through the Department of the Interior, decides and designates what land is preserved.

The relationship between visitor/subject and wilderness/object perpetrates a separation between nature and culture. Because this exchange situates wilderness as the object of a visitor’s gaze, the term “outdoor museum” has occasionally been implemented to discuss national parks. Alison Byerly in “The Uses of Landscape: The Picturesque Aesthetic and the National Park System” comments that this term “embodies a conception of conservation that treats the national park’s contents as art objects to be valued for their appearance and preserved in their existing state” (59). This concept places aesthetic value on the wilderness in the park, suggesting that the landscape of a national park should appear beautiful and pristine. Considering national parks as outdoor museums regards employees “not as scientists . . . but as curators or policemen, protectors of valuable commodities” (Byerly 59). In this arrangement park employees become docents, helping to guide visitors through their park experience.

“Tourism organizes travel to reduce the amount of down time and dead space between high points,” asserts Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett in Destination Culture: Tourism, Museums, and Heritage. “Museums, for their part, are high-density sites, giving the visitor the best they have to offer within a compact space and a tight schedule” (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 7). This
understanding of the spatial construction and choreography of museums functions as a crucial
template for analyzing the arrangement of Shenandoah.

Applying Kirshenblatt-Gimblett’s museum template to the spatial orientation of
Shenandoah illuminates the intended park experience; it is designed to drive through. By creating
high points with the seven major stops and interspersing scenic overlooks along the straight
expansion of the Skyline Drive, Shenandoah planners have made their high-density sites easily
accessible to those driving along the highway. Visitors are able to move rapidly through the park
to see the high points. In fact, the Shenandoah National Park Map boasts the Skyline Drive as the
park’s “greatest single feature” (Map).

While there are activities and trails separate from the Skyline Drive, the drive is
constructed in a way that makes it easy and fast to navigate. Analyzing the spatial construction of
the park through a museum template illuminates the carefully crafted and controlled nature of the
Shenandoah National Park experience. Much of the original land has been cleared and leveled to
pave the Skyline Drive highway and create the seventy-five scenic overlooks. The park also
controls the rate at which visitors can travel down the highway, as there is a strictly enforced
thirty-five miles per hour speed limit. Should a visitor decide to venture further into the park,
perhaps on a hiking trail, the experience is still designed. Hikers must stay on the designated
hiking path, paying attention to posts and blazes that dictate the boundaries of where they are
allowed to venture and in what manner they can travel. There are also many scenic overlooks
incorporated into the trails, high points to anticipate as hikers travel along the trail.

In whatever ways visitors choose to move through the park, they are set in opposition to
nature. National Park Service employees construct the parks to move visitors through in a
particular manner and direct them where to look; they position nature as object and visitor as
subject. This spatial construction perpetuates a separation between humans and nature. This
dualistic conception, however, is in fact paradoxical to the very rhetoric presented by the
National Park Service because as Duncan noted earlier, the national parks experience is supposed
to make participants feel as though they are a part of nature.

Wilderness

The physical geography of Shenandoah is divided into two categories, the land
designated as wilderness and by extension, the land *not* designated as wilderness. Wilderness is
defined through *The Wilderness Act of 1964* as “an area where the earth and its community of
life are untrammeled by man” (Shenandoah National Park Guide 23). Furthermore, *The
Wilderness Act* designates wilderness as “an area of undeveloped Federal land retaining its
primeval character and influence, without permanent improvements or human habitation, which
is protected and managed so as to preserve its natural conditions” (“The Wilderness Act of
1964”). In this act, Congress presented four features that comprise wilderness:

1. [wilderness] generally appears to have been affected primarily by the
   forces of nature, with the imprint of man's work substantially
   unnoticeable; 2. has outstanding opportunities for solitude or a primitive
   and unconfined type of recreation; 3. has at least five thousand acres of
   land or is of sufficient size as to make practicable its preservation and use
   in an unimpaired condition; and 4. may also contain ecological,
   geological, or other features of scientific, educational, scenic, or historical
   value. (“The Wilderness Act of 1964”)
Shenandoah boasts “one of the largest wilderness areas in the Eastern United States, with over 40% of the park designated wilderness by Congress” (Shenandoah National Park Guide 36). According to the national parks website:

In 1976, Congress designated 79,579 acres of Shenandoah National Park as wilderness. The park's wilderness area offers outstanding opportunities for solitude and recreation. Many park trails are in designated wilderness. Most overlooks along Skyline Drive view wilderness. Wilderness offers respite from hectic daily life. Wilderness provides natural habitat for wildlife and wildflowers and preserves the human history held within the mountains. (“Wilderness”)

Nested within the nature/culture binary of the park is yet another dualism, the juxtaposition of “wilderness” and “non-wilderness.” Defining wilderness as “untrammeled by man” is paradoxical, as humans have trammeled the park. Roads have been paved, buildings erected, electric and plumbing fixtures incorporated, indigenous peoples evicted, and scenic overlooks constructed. Even if “wilderness” areas are free of certain synthetic amenities, the presence of human-made entities in other parts of the park has a direct affect on the “wilderness” areas. Additionally, the social and ecological histories of the “wilderness” areas have been shaped through the “trammeling” of humans.

Regarding wilderness, William Cronon in “The Trouble with Wilderness; or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature” asserts that “far from being the one place on earth that stands apart from humanity, [wilderness] is quite profoundly a human creation—indeed, the creation of very particular human cultures at very particular moments in human history . . . it’s a product of the civilization” (1). Wilderness is a problematic and complex concept because its very definition situates it as separate from and untouched by humans. In Wilderness and the American Mind,
Roderick Frazier Nash notes that for nomadic hunters and gathers in a pre-agrarian society the term “wilderness” had no meaning, as “[e]verything natural was simply habitat, and people understood themselves to be part of a seamless living community. Lines began to be drawn with the advent of herding, agriculture, and settlement” (xi). As specific spaces and places became designated as “controlled” or “uncontrolled” humans began to view themselves as separate and distinct from nature. “The intellectual consequence was the application of the concept of the ‘wild’ to those parts of nature not subject to human control,” asserts Nash (xii). “The concept of wilderness emerged as a way of thinking about nature with the beginnings of a pastoral style of life some twelve thousand years ago” (Nash xii). Therefore, the act of designating a geographic site as wilderness is a human act, bound up in cultural ideologies that are informed by social and political policies. In the case of the national parks, it is the United States government that decides what constitutes as wilderness. The Shenandoah National Park Guide notes, “Shenandoah is part of a national system of wilderness areas on our public lands that provide refuge for both animals and humans, who are drawn to these areas for inspiration, education, solitude and recreation” (23). According to this statement, visitors to the park seek out wilderness for inspiration, reflection, and enjoyment. Cronon traces the history of humans’ perceived relationship with wilderness:

[In] the decades following the Civil War . . . wild land was not a site for productive labor and not a permanent home; rather, it was a place of recreation. One went to the wilderness not as a producer but as a consumer, hiring guides and other backcountry residents who could serve as romantic surrogates for the rough riders and hunters of the frontier if one was willing to overlook their status as employees and servants of the rich. In just this way, wilderness came to embody
the national frontier myth, standing for the wild freedom of America’s past and seeming to represent a highly attractive natural alternative to the ugly artificiality of modern civilization. (9)

Wild land became a commodity that a visitor could gaze upon and consume. It also became a symbol of the American frontier, a reference to the natural landscape that Americans encountered and used to prove their cultural legitimacy to England and Europe. But this landscape began to disappear at an increasing rate with Western expansion and urbanization, so a system was put into place to preserve sections of land considered “national treasures.” Cronon notes:

Thus, in the myth of the vanishing frontier lay the seeds of wilderness preservation in the United States, for if wild land had been so crucial in the making of the nation, then surely one must save its last remnants as monuments to the American past—and as an insurance policy to protect its future. . . . To protect wilderness was in a very real sense to protect the nation’s most sacred myth of origin. (Cronon 7)

As noted above, land preservation has its roots in America’s performance of national identity; therefore, the maintenance of wilderness was the maintenance of America. Thus, designating wilderness as areas where the public could access and experience solitude, inspiration, and recreation became a uniquely American experience.

Wilderness, then, as performed and presented in national parks, functions as a symbol of the American frontier as well as a what Jean Baudrillard terms a simulacrum, a place where “the [distinction] between object and representation . . . are no longer valid” (6).8 In the parks,

8 I return to Baudrillard for a fuller discussion later in the chapter.
“wilderness” stands in as a representation of the land as it existed prior to European settlement, but since the existing wilderness and the land that existed before settlement did not remain to copy, any authentic correspondence has been severed by the very representational practices that promised humans wilderness. Furthermore, the park’s attempts to replicate its existence before human “trammeling” is a false understanding of the parks’ history as natives lived on the land prior to European settlement and their lives shaped and affected the land. If the wilderness, as constructed by the park, operates as a replica, what has been removed or erased to create this experience? In many of the parks, violent and contentious histories have been eliminated or cloaked, because these accounts have no room in the narrative of the national parks. Cronon comments on the “absence of human violence” within the boundaries of national parks:

the actual frontier had often been a place of conflict, in which invaders and invaded fought for control of land and resources. Once set aside within the fixed and carefully policed boundaries of the modern bureaucratic state, the wilderness lost its savage image and became safe: a place more of reverie. (10)

An example of this erasure of violence is settlers, soldiers, and federal agents forcing Native Americans to vacate their homelands. Cronon notes, “The movement to set aside national parks and wilderness areas followed hard on the heels of the final Indian wars, in which the prior human inhabitants of these areas were rounded up and moved to reservations” (9). The United States government forced Indigenous peoples from their homes so that could preserve the wilderness for their citizen’s recreation. Cronon asserts, “[Native Americans] were forced to live elsewhere, with the result that the tourists could safely enjoy the illusion that they were seeing their nation in its pristine, original state” (9).
Tweed contemplates this illusion, or what he calls the myth of a “virgin continent.” Inherent in this concept, he notes, is the idea “that Europeans found in North America a ‘virgin continent,’ a land where ‘nature’ ruled supreme and where human beings had never played a significant ecological role” (22). He acknowledges that within academic circles, anthropologists, archaeologists, and historians have attacked and dismantled this idea, but within the national parks world it still holds strong. Tweed traces the history of the “virgin continent” back to the European colonization of the “New World.” Large populations of Native Americans had inhabited the continent, but over the next several decades white soldiers and armed settlers killed countless numbers through the genocidal targeting of the Indian Wars, while European diseases decimated remaining populations, whose biology was unprepared to combat them. When the English came over to the “New World” they perceived scant worth in the natives and viewed their dwindling populations as a gift from God. “North America was a true Virgin Continent given by God to English colonists for their occupation and use,” asserts Tweed, “Certainly, these ‘primitive peoples’ had not played any significant role in making the continent’s landscapes” (23). Furthermore, maintains Tweed, “‘nature,’ an expression of God’s will, ruled the New World. The role of humankind in this worldview was to ‘civilize’ the landscape and make it humanly productive” (24). The English colonists viewed it as their God-given duty to “civilize” the land, making it efficient and productive. By the early-to mid-nineteenth century Americans ideas regarding the concept of nature began to shift with figures like Henry David Thoreau, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and John Muir, who “began to articulate the beauty and value of the natural world” (Tweed 24). “What they did not challenge,” however, maintains Tweed, “was the colonial concept that ‘nature’ and not other humans had determined how the landscapes of the continent looked and worked” (24). Tweed argues that the national parks would eventually
emerge out of this tradition. “Today, national parks and wilderness continue to be defined as places where ‘nature’ remains in charge and where the role of humankind is limited ideally to protecting and sustaining natural processes,” asserts Tweed, “That this runs contrary to most of our contemporary understanding of the history of North America almost never comes up” (24).

On a recent hiking/backpacking trip he took from Yosemite to Sequoia National Park, Tweed recalls encountering evidence of how the landscape was shaped by native peoples, including when he explored a meadow that was covered with the black volcanic glass known as obsidian. Native Americans, who resided in what is now California, used obsidian to make arrowheads and other sharp implements. “The people who left uncountable numbers of obsidian flakes here must have done far more than just work stone,” Tweed reflects. Tweed’s encounter with and contemplation of the obsidian illuminates just how little we know about how the land was used and shaped by native inhabitants. “What seems inescapable,” maintains Tweed, “is that to call this a purely ‘natural’ landscape is to perpetuate a long-disproved myth” (25).

Wilderness and Humans

Many of the national parks have violent and fraught histories that the United States government through curators of the national parks have labored to erase and Shenandoah is no exception. During the construction of Shenandoah in 1933, the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) as part of President Roosevelt’s public works programs forced native peoples and residents of the Blue Ridge Mountains to vacate Shenandoah lands. The CCC was composed of “more than 10,000 young men [who] lived in . . . camps under the supervision of the army . . . Their activities involved building trails, fire roads and towers, log comfort stations, picnic grounds, and construction projects associated with the Skyline Drive” (Shenandoah National
They moved dirt with bulldozers, clearing, contouring, and manipulating the shape of the land to pave roads. Clearing out trees, brush, and other wildlife they repurposed it into “viewing areas,” and also built hotels, lodges, and museums for tourists to visit. The CCC erected buildings, constructed paths, and created views that choreographed Shenandoah and the movement of future visitors through the space.

According to a small display in the Byrd Visitor Center, the only mention of resident displacement in the parks’ campaign of signage and literature, the years the CCC spent building Shenandoah brought anxiety and unease to the approximately 2,000 residents who lived in the Blue Ridge Mountains (Byrd Visitor Center display). The residents were evicted and forced to relocate once the park was completed. The Roosevelt administration “established seven homestead communities and offered chosen residents the opportunity to buy new homes. Others made their own arrangements and the remainder became welfare cases. A few resisted the changes being forced upon them” (Byrd Visitor Center display). Whatever option they chose, the CCC forced residents of the Blue Ridge Mountains to abandon their homes for the park’s construction. While Shenandoah acknowledges this history, it is not published in any of the park literature or publicized throughout the park, except for in the small display in the Byrd Visitor Center cited above and even there it is presented as a sacrifice for the greater good.

Because the national parks emerged out of the idea that impressive landscapes should be preserved as a means to create cultural legitimacy for America and shifted toward a more conservation-based approach, the role that tourists have played in the development of the parks is one that has always and continues to fluctuate. The government preserved landscape as a way to attract Europeans to America, but as the national park system developed and expanded, handling and accommodating the tourists who visited the parks became a significant concern.
Even a small sampling of critical moments in the national parks history demonstrates the ever shifting, crucial relationship between the parks and the people who frequent them: In 1916, Robert Bradford Marshall, a topographer with the U.S. Geological Survey, proposed a link between the military and the national parks. Marshall asserted that the national parks were essential for the subsistence and morale of men in the service because of their confinement to the city. Marshall declared, “‘city soldiers in the past have made good,’ as urban areas became ‘more and more congested’ the ‘physical status’ of boys and men ‘deteriorated’ and would ‘continue to deteriorate’ . . . working men ‘forget they have legs’” (qtd. in Runte 95). Marshall suggested that these men use the national parks as places to get out of the hustle and bustle of the city to “build up their bodies by being next to nature” (qtd. in Runte 95). Then, should these men be called back to serve their country their bodies would “be able to meet the physical needs of a strenuous field service” (qtd. in Runte 95). Thus, according to Marshall, the national parks should function as recreational playgrounds for those, specifically military men, who were cooped up in the city and needed to venture out into “nature” in order to rejuvenate.

George Otis Smith, director of the U.S. Geological Survey, supported Marshall’s claims and paraphrasing John Muir insisted that only in national parks “can be had the recreation that makes for increased and maintained efficiency” (qtd. in Runte 96). Promoting the idea that men need to take time to reconnect and commune with nature in order to operate in an efficient and effective manner in the city. Smith even went so far as to declare, “for no greater value can be won from mountain slopes and rushing rivers than through the utilization of natural scenery in the development of our citizens” (qtd. in Runte 96). Nature in the form of the national parks was not only to serve as recreational playgrounds, but as places of rejuvenation, where citizens could feel younger, and more energetic and efficient.
Achieving equilibrium between parks’ use and preservation was and is still a vital issue for the parks system. During the early years of the parks development this issue was amplified by the creation and popularity of the automobile. In 1956, Congress approved Mission 66, a “ten year program . . . [intended] to expand rather than reduce the carrying capacity of the national parks by reconstructing roads, adding visitor centers, and increasing overnight accommodations” (Runte 173). This plan was put into place to accommodate the estimated eighty million vacationers that were expected to visit the parks in 1966, the National Park System fiftieth anniversary. By making the parks more accessible the number of people who visited the parks grew substantially. “Between 1955 and 1974 visitation more than tripled,” notes Runte, “from approximately fourteen million to forty-six million in the national parks alone” (173). While these changes made the parks more accessible to the public, they did little in the way of thinking about the non-human biotic inhabits of the park. Many conservationists, such as F. Fraser Darling and Noel D. Eichhorn spoke out against the changes. They wrote in their 1967 report to the Conservation Foundation that, “[t]he enormous increase in drive-in campsites is an example of the very expensive facilities which do nothing at all for ecological maintenance of the park” (qtd. in Runte 173).

Not only did the changes to the parks’ infrastructure affect the biology and ecosystems of the park, it changed the way that wildlife inhabited the areas and by extension how they interacted with human visitors. Tweed asserts that the “great backpacking boom of the 1970s” changed the way that bears searched for food within national park land. With the large influx of hikers and campers in national parks, bears and other wild animals began to invade campsites to obtain food. Campers have tried different methods of food safety to ward off bears, from hanging their food in trees or on steel-wire cable-hangs, to using portable food storage canisters (Tweed
“Many techniques have been tried over the years,” Tweed affirms, “[but] the ever versatile bears have defeated most of them” (38). Many national parks have installed metal lockers for food at campsites and most parks encourage campers to keep their food in the trunk of their vehicle and away from their tent. Tweet notes, “Now thirty years after the peak of the backpacking boom in the 1970s, black bears have become a part of wilderness life in the Sierra Nevada. Along major trails, where campers are easy to find, bears patrol regularly looking for easy pickings” (39). Bears and other wildlife are inhabitants of most national parks and are factors that need to be taken into consideration when visiting. While wild animal attacks are extreme examples of clashes between humans and animal inhabitants of the parks, they are a sobering reminder of the “wildness” of the “wilderness.”

To prevent such confrontations, national park websites give detailed instructions about food handling, prevention techniques to keep unwanted wildlife out of campsites, and instructions on what visitors should do if they encounter bears or other wildlife.

These examples illustrate the ways that wilderness has been “trammeled by man.” While the national parks seem to promote the illusion that human impact has not changed the landscape or ecology of the parks, as indicated in the above examples, that is not the case. Tweed indicates Ansel Adams’ popular series of black and white photos of national parks and wildlands as visual rhetoric of this doctrine. “These black-and-white photos, composed and printed with powerful artistry, presented to the world what is likely to endure as the perfected visual definition of the ____________

9 Some recent cases of wild animal attacks, in 2011 and 2013 grizzly bears attacked hikers on different trails in Yellowstone National Park. For more information see these sources: “Yellowstone Grizzly Death Puts Bear Attacks in Focus,” and “Grizzly Bear Attack in Yellowstone Injures Two Hikers.”
Virgin Continent concept,” attests Tweed, “Adams’s best-known photos capture grand landscapes at dramatic moments. Clouds and low light both illuminate and obscure. Human beings do not exist” (27). Adams acclaimed and much circulated photos helped promote the idea that humans and human impact do not exist within the boundaries of the parks. These photos re-instilled the myth of the virgin landscape. Tweed asserts however, that this representation is false as humans populate the parks in mass numbers. Tweed recalls his recent hiking trip beginning in Yosemite:

In . . . [the] Wilderness, however, people are everywhere. Thousand Island and Garnet lakes not only attract backpackers and pack-stock users but are also within range for day-hiking. Solitude, it seems, is a rare commodity here. In six hours I meet nearly eighty hikers, most with backpacks, and six pack trains with at least sixty horses and mules between them. (27)

The national parks are not “virgin land” uninhabited by people. They are complex geographical sites that have been shaped by the natives who lived there before European colonization and continue to be shaped by the humans who visit and manage them.

Contentious and violent histories are often erased or tacitly acknowledged because they do not fit within the wilderness experience that the park strives to create. If “wilderness,” as constructed and performed by the park, functions as a symbol of the American frontier, the natural landscape America utilized to prove itself to the “old world,” there is no room for violence within its borders because that would mean acknowledging the violent history of American capitalism, expansion, and manifest destiny. It would mean acknowledging that construction and expansion of the parks forced people and animals to leave their habitats and destroyed ecosystems. There is not any space for these pasts in the national park experience
because if they are acknowledged the idea of the National Park System falls apart. They are not simply places of inspiration and renewal; but rather sites of geopathologic rupture, where humans gaze upon and consume a construction of wilderness that purports specific nationalistic ideologies and agendas.

Liveness

In 2012, Nature Valley, a General Mills brand that produces granola and granola bars, launched a new digital platform, The Nature Valley Trail View. According to Nature Valley’s website, the Trail View offers:

- 300-plus miles of immersive national parks content, through panoramic views and interactive guides to three of America’s most iconic national parks. A blend of boots-on-the-ground fieldwork and future-forward digital technology.

NatureValleyTrailView.com offers views of trails at Grand Canyon, Great Smoky Mountains and Yellowstone National Parks. (“Nature Valley Trail View”)

The Trail View allows anyone with access to an internet capable device the ability to explore and virtually hike trails in several national parks. A crew of approximately eight people captured the trail footage using Google Street View technology on a Dodeca 2360 camera. The crew, led by the editors of Backpacker Magazine, hiked anywhere between six to thirteen miles a day over a period of two months. The camera, designed to capture 360-degree imagery had eleven lenses and was mounted to a hiker’s backpack, so that it perched just above the hiker’s head. In early August 2011, the crew began filming in the Great Smoky Mountains and the project wrapped up in late September in the Grand Canyon.
According to its website, Nature Valley launched Trail View to expand what it calls the brand’s established commitment to preserving the national parks. Nature Valley’s website boasts:

The platform is designed to inspire Americans to enjoy the best that nature has to offer and to encourage outdoor exploration and education. Nature Valley is a long-standing supporter of the physical preservation of America’s national parks, through its “Preserve the Parks” program with the National Parks Conservation Program (NPCP). Preserve the Parks is designed to encourage Americans to get outside and visit the parks, while raising funds for their preservation. (“Nature Valley Trail View”)

The Trail View enables participants to “hike” a national park trail from the comfort of any place with internet access. Nature Valley hopes that the virtual hike will in turn inspire participants to visit national parks and support their preservation. The Trail View campaign, conceived by ad agency McCann Erickson, has, on the face of it, been very successful. In fact, it surpassed 75,000 visitors only two months after it was launched, far exceeding the campaign’s initial goals (“Nature Valley Trail View”). Nature Valley also supports the national parks through other fundraising programs. For every Nature Valley product UPC label consumers send in to the company, Nature Valley will donate a dollar to the National Parks Conservation Association (NPCA). Similarly, during National Parks weeks, Nature Valley donated a dollar every time a consumer “liked” a national parks post on Nature Valley’s Facebook page. Between these campaigns and flat donations, in the past three years Nature Valley has raised over one million dollars for the NPCA (“Nature Valley Trail View”). Nature Valley plans to add more national park trails to the Trail View as the funding and resources become available.
To hike a park trail on Trail View the virtual park visitor simply has to go to the Trail View webpage and choose which park they would like to explore. Once the user chooses a park, he or she can view a topographical map of that park, which depicts different trails and points of interest. Once the virtual hiker clicks on a trail, the website takes him or her to the trail. The computer screen is oriented in “first player” mode so that the user cannot see his or her “body,” but rather everything around them as they stand on the trail. The hiker travels down the trail or can simply stand and absorb the 360-degree scenery that surrounds them. There is a line graph on the bottom of the screen that displays the user’s elevation and distance. If the user does not wish to hike the entire trail he or she can drag the button on the line graph to view different sections of the trail. The virtual visitor can stop along the trail at any time and click to explore designated “points of interest,” which brings into high resolution the visual “point of interest,” usually especially interesting or majestic landscape. Information about this “point” appears on the left side of the screen. If at any time the user wants to take a picture of the area, he or she can do so and email or tweet it to their friends. If the user should choose to leave the trail before the hike is completed, the map will depict in red where the trail was left, so he or she can always return to that place.

It is precisely with a virtual experience of an already virtualized representation of nature (that is already a human construction) that Baudrillard comes in handily. In “Simulacra and Simulations,” Baudrillard argues that constituents of postmodern culture have become so accustomed to maps and renderings of the world that they have lost the ability to conceive of how things appeared before the map. He asserts:

Abstraction today is no longer that of the map, the double, the mirror or the concept. Simulation is no longer that of a territory, a referential being or
substance. It is a generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal. The territory no longer precedes the map, nor survives it. (169)

Because individuals in postmodern culture are not able to conceive of the territory before the map, argues Baudrillard, the map, therefore, stands in for the “real” territory and in a sense becomes the “real,” this is the simulacrum. The “real” and the “artificial” become so blurred that one cannot be distinguished from the other. In the Introduction to Jean Baudrillard: Selected Writings, Mark Poster paraphrases Baudrillard, stating, “Culture is now dominated in simulations . . . objects and discourses that have no firm origin, no referent, no ground or foundation” (1). There is no referent for the “real” in postmodern culture, so the artificial becomes the “real.” For Baudrillard, “The real is produced from miniaturized units, from matrices, memory banks and command models-and with these it can be reproduced an indefinite number of times. It no longer has to be rational, since it is no longer measured against some ideal or negative instance” (170). The “real” is constructed from maps, renderings, and memories that may be far removed from the original “real” object. It does not matter, however, how far removed the imitation is from the original object, because the object does not exist anymore. “[The real] is nothing more than operational,” asserts Baudrillard, “In fact, since it is no longer enveloped by an imaginary, it is no longer real at all. It is hyperreal: the product of an irradiating synthesis of combinatory models in a hyperspace without atmosphere” (170). The “real” becomes hyperreal, meaning that the “real” and the “virtual” become so muddled that they are inextricable from one another, in a sense they are reterritorialized (e.g., a transfer I discuss briefly in the introduction and more thoroughly in Chapter Four) into the hyperreal.

As I established earlier in the chapter, the concept of “wilderness” functions as a simulacrum within the park, as the biotic elements of the park stand in for the original habitat or
the false myth of the “virgin land” that once resided there. But what happens when we extend the theory of the simulacrum further to examine the virtual park that participants can explore in the Trail View? Participants can “experience” the Grand Canyon, Yellowstone, or Sequoia National Parks and many of the magnificent “points of interest” and majestic biotic elements that reside within them from an off site location. While participants are able to “explore” the park, hiking along trails, stopping to investigate “points of interest,” and taking snapshots of the scenery, the events in the park are not unfolding in synchronic time. The participant is instead interacting with park footage that was shot in 2011. As Baudrillard notes, the “real” is created from “miniaturized units” and “memory banks,” and “it can be reproduced an infinite number of times” (170). In the case of the Trail View, the trails are created from units of footage retrieved from the memory banks of the camera. This footage is stitched together to create a seemingly seamless view and experience of certain trails in specific national parks. Through the combination of the “real” footage of the parks and the “virtual” online experience of the park created by editing the footage in a particular way with a specific point of view, the Trail View experience becomes hyperreal. The trails as they existed in 2011 cease to be “real” as that ephemeral moment in time has faded and the maps, renderings, and memories of the park as they exist on the website, stand in for the “real” and therefore become “real” themselves. In this hyperreal experience the “real” and the “imitation” are also intertwined with the notions of what constitutes as “live” and “mediatized” in the virtual experience. The concepts of “real” or “live” and “artificial” or “mediatized” become increasingly hard to untangle within the Trail View.

In Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture, Philip Auslander clarifies what he believes to be misconceptions about what constitutes live and mediatized performance. “The common assumption is that the live event is ‘real,’” asserts Auslander, “and that mediatized
events are secondary and somehow artificial reproductions of the real” (3). Auslander argues that this is not necessarily the case: he holds that understandings of what constitute live and mediatized performances are historically situated and have fluctuated over time. He asserts that “within our mediatized culture, whatever distinction we may have supposed there to be between live and mediatized events is collapsing because live events are increasingly either made to be reproduced or are becoming ever more identical with mediatized ones” (Auslander 35). Auslander uses examples such as video screens at rock concerts and jumbo-trons at sporting events to demonstrate the collapsing of live and mediatized events.

“Hiking” a trail in the Trail View website is arguably a mediatized experience, as the crew who filmed and edited the footage have ostensibly mediated the experience for participants. What then, if any, are the “live” elements of the experience? Auslander references Nick Couldry’s notion of “on-line liveness,” a “social co-presence on a variety of scales from very small groups in chat rooms to huge international audiences for breaking news on major Web sites” (Couldry 356). This expanded definition of “liveness” incorporates the notion of co-presence as the element that undergirds the activating of the “live.” “The experience of liveness is not limited to specific performer-audience interactions” maintains Auslander, “but to a sense of always being connected to other people, of continuous, technologically mediated co-presence with others known and unknown” (61). In contemporary culture “live” is understood as being connected, or being there, it could be physically or virtually, but as long as there is co-presence, the experience is considered “live.” Auslander extends the notion of co-presence even further, so that it includes both human and non-human agents. In other words, co-presence can exist between technology and users. “Liveness is attributed not only to the entities we access with the machine but also to the machine itself,” Auslander argues. “When a website is first made
available to users, it is said to ‘go live.’ As is true of the computer, the liveness of a website resides in the feedback loop we initiate with it: the website responds to our input” (Auslander 62). Because there is a responsive relationship between user and the website, there is co-presence and therefore the interaction can be considered “live.” Auslander considers that “To the extent that websites and other virtual entities respond to us in real time, they feel live to us, and this may be the kind of liveness we all value” (62, emphasis in original).

Thus, according to Couldry’s and Auslander’s definition of “liveness” the Nature Valley Trail View would constitute as an event with elements of “liveness.” The participant “hikes” the trail interacting with blazes, signs, and points of interests, receiving responses from the website when each choice is made. He or she also has the ability to interact with other online users as participants can tweet, Facebook, or email pictures and documentation of their experience, extending the co-presence from a relationship with the website to a social group. Thus, as the Trail View contains elements of the live and mediatized it conforms to Auslander’s assertion that the live and the mediatized have collapsed into the hyperreal and can no longer be extricated from one another.

In “Theater History and Digital Historiography,” however, Sara Bay-Cheng takes the idea of presence a step further to argue that access, by virtue of its relationship with the digital context, is presence. She contends, “In a digitally connected and networked world, participation creates presence. In a digital context, people do not participate by being there, people are ‘there’ by participating” (130). In a sense, an event becomes “live” when participants are “there” in any form. To illustrate her point, Bay-Cheng cites Iraqi artist Wafaa Bilal’s interactive digital installation, Domestic Tension. In this piece, Bilal lives in a small gallery space with webcams that allow anyone online to view his daily routines and interactions. A paintball gun is also
located in the room; online viewers control the paintball gun and can shoot Bilal at anytime they choose. “As Bilal’s installation makes disturbingly clear, digital access is digital presence,” asserts Bay-Cheng. “With a globe wired for rapid data transfer, all digital presence has material consequences, even (perhaps especially) among those without digital access themselves” (Bay-Cheng 131, emphasis in original). For Bay-Cheng, digital access is presence not only because it constitutes being “there,” but also because it has material consequences. Because we live in a “digital moment” of an “information age” and digital access equals presence, Bay-Cheng contends that digital historiography should be accepted as a legitimate form of preservation (she argues specifically in relation to preserving performance practices.) “Digital historiography,” she argues, “allows for both a fuller understanding and a clearer articulation of . . . performance memories, including multiple forms of presence, all of which offers us a diversity of knowledges and perspectives that may extend our sense of being there” (Bay-Cheng 134).

If access is the equivalent of presence, according to Bay-Cheng, then those who have access to the Trail View website are able to “be there” to experience the park “live.” The Trail View functions as a form of digital historiography, as it is a digital record or preservation of specific parks that allow participants to “be there” and experience the parks. But if these interactions have material consequences, as Bay-Cheng contends, what are they? And if the mediatized and the live are collapsing as Auslander maintains, how does this idea manifest itself not only in the Trail View website but in the parks themselves? In the next section I complicate these notions by comparing how the concepts of “live” and “mediatized” operate both within the Trail View website and actual national parks to demonstrate how the performance of degrees of “wildness” affect visitors’ understanding of themselves in relation to the parks and “nature.”
In the “live” experience of the Trail View, virtual participants can hike and explore but at any moment they can exit the scenario. Users may encounter wildlife or rain, but as participants accessing the website from an off site location users are not affected by these encounters directly, except perhaps if they are moved to pause and observe the surroundings or take a snap shot. On the other hand, in the “live” experience of a physical national park visitors are able to hike and explore but constantly need to be aware of the surroundings as they could encounter a wild animal or severe weather. In the online experience users have the comfort and assurance of being able to opt out of such occurrences, but within a national park visitors do not; animals, weather, and terrain are material elements that they must consider. Furthermore, national parks possess a level of danger that the Trail View does not because both experiences contain different degrees of “wildness.” While the real park might be closed, as per the government shutdown, trapping visitors in the “wilderness” for days, the granola bar sponsored experience is not only available twenty four hours a day, seven days a week, but users can leave whenever they want, too.

While the Trail View enables participates to visually encounter some elements of the “wild,” it is at a relatively low threat level and participants have free will to exit the situation whenever they choose. Visitors, do not, however, have this luxury when hiking an actual trail in a national park. If they encounter a wild animal, inclement weather, or government shutdown, they cannot merely withdraw from the situation. They must immediately handle it. The inherent danger potential of inhabiting a national park contains much higher stakes than visiting the Trail View website. Because the wildlife, weather, and terrain of national parks have the capacity for potential danger, the material consequences of visiting one has the possibility to include physical health or harm. The material consequences of the visiting the Trail View are more removed and less severe. As a participant is not threatened by actual danger, the material consequences of the
Trail View could include: donating money to the National Parks Conservation Association, buying Nature Valley products (or boycotting their products,) or perhaps even deciding to travel to an actual national park. While these are all tangible results, some of them even beneficial to the parks system, none of them possess the potential for high stakes material consequences.

However, assuming the national park experience is purely “real” or “live” and the Trail View “artificial” or “mediatized,” is not so simple. In *Culture, Technology, and the Creation of America’s National Parks*, Richard Grusin asserts, “National Parks are themselves hybrid technologies for the reproduction of nature” (10). In other words, national parks utilize technology to maintain the parks (mapping, surveying, commerce, lodging etc.) but also that they function as technologies of representation (like paintings, photography, cartography, etc.) Grusin argues that “thinking about national parks as technologies reminds us that . . . national parks do not emerge in isolation from society, culture, and industry, but are part of the network of institutional structures, of discursive and material practices that make up American culture” (Grusin 10). Technology and mediatization are utilized in the construction and management of national parks. The parks also encourage the use of media within their borders as many of them have Wi-Fi and endorse visitor’s use of social media to promote the park. In fact, a sign in Shenandoah displays a picture of a female woodpecker standing next to baby woodpeckers, depicting them in a manner that makes the birds appear as though they are “talking.” The caption below the picture states, “Join the Conversation,” and underneath are the icons for Twitter, Facebook, You Tube, and Flickr (“Shenandoah Sign”). Thus as hybrid technologies that utilize technology, the national parks possess different degrees of “mediatization,” just as the Trail View contains elements of “liveness.” Both scenarios, the Trail View website and physical national parks, possess varying intensities of “wildness,” “liveness,” and “mediatization,”
demonstrating that neither experience is purely “real” and “live,” or “artifical” and “mediatized,” they are an amalgamation of both. Because a “real” visit to a park is mediated, per Auslander’s theories, it is not purely “live,” and therefore not ontologically more authentic or valuable than a virtual visit. An actual visit to a “real” park, even though it is mediated, is essentially no different from a virtual visit to a prerecorded but nevertheless “live” park. Trail View users are just as complicit in reifying the constructed boundaries between wilderness and non-wilderness. Therefore, in many ways the Trail View virtual visit is just as high stakes as a visit to an actual national park because both position the visitor as a subject who participates in simulacra that stand in for a referent that no longer exists.

Analyzing the construction of space and wilderness within the distinct geographic location of Shenandoah National Park reveals several things. First, the park is designed similarly to a museum, guiding visitors along designated paths and providing them with frequent focal points. Second, as visitors travel through the park, their viewpoint situates them as the audience and the “wilderness” as the performer. However, the “wilderness” is not “untrammeled by man” as it claims to be. In fact, the “wilderness” has been curated and shaped by the National Park System to provide views that are breathtaking and picturesque. As a result, the “wilderness” functions as a simulacrum, a representation of a referent that no longer exists. The “wilderness” however, has been purposefully designed as spectacular and pristine because it acts as a symbol of the American frontier. This mythology is vital to the concept of “wilderness” because it posits it as something uniquely American, something that needs to be preserved in order to remember the country’s history. However, the United States’s violent history has no place in the parks; instead the parks perform nature as a site of inspiration, solitude, and recreation. Further complicating the intersection of nature and culture are the ways that “liveness” and
“mediatization” operate in the parks, revealing that the parks are complex sites that possess varying and intertwining degrees of “wildness,” “liveness,” and “mediatization.”

The history, construction, choreography, and performance of wilderness in the national parks, in this specific instance Shenandoah, inscribe the mythology of the American frontier and seemingly demonstrate that nature and culture are separate. While national parks claim to be places where humans are a part of nature, their spatial arrangement, performance, and rhetoric of wilderness indicate otherwise. However, a deeper investigation collapses these constructed binaries of nature and culture, real and artificial, live and mediatized, because the parks themselves are “hybrid technologies” that possess varying degrees of each of these elements.

As noted by Guattari at the beginning of the chapter, we must first understand how social and political forces inform our perceptions of the relationship between humans and the environment before we can begin to dismantle those practices. The National Park System’s performance of wilderness demonstrates how a government agency has the power to shape visitors’ perceptions of themselves and the places they inhabit.

Using cultural and performance theory in this chapter, I analyzed the spatial choreography and performance of wilderness in the national parks, thus demonstrating that through the displacement and relocation of dirt, trees, humans, and animals, the performative practices of cultural institutions have the power to influence the ways that humans understand themselves in the world. In the next chapter I continue to investigate human perceptions of nature but move into new territory by commencing a textual and dramaturgical analysis of the use of dirt in Suzan-Lori Park’s The America Play. I explore how the choreography of dirt functions as a mode of historiographical inquiry and excavation that has the potential to create “new” historical events.
So much of African American history has been unrecorded, dismembered, washed out, one of my tasks as a playwright is to—through literature and the special strange relationship between theatre and real-life—locate the ancestral burial ground, dig for bones, hear the bones sing, write it down.

Suzan-Lori Parks

“Possession”

Soil is history beneath your feet.

McCauley Land Use Research Institute

“The Soil Beneath Your Feet - Where does it come from?”

In 1991, while performing an initial survey and excavation for the Ted Weiss Federal Building in Lower Manhattan, the General Services Administration (GSA) uncovered several intact human remains. The GSA brought in archeologists to the site, who over the next year unearthed four hundred and nineteen sets of human remains. Historically, the land had served as an African burial ground and archeologists believed the buried bodies dated back to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (“African Burial Ground”).

Howard University exhumed the remains to examine the bodies and conduct research on their cultural, historical, and biological backgrounds. They believed the buried bodies to be comprised of both free and enslaved Africans (“A Sacred Space in Manhattan”). In 2003, the GSA re-interred the bodies, building an outdoor memorial to commemorate the space and in 2006 President George W. Bush designated the site a National Monument. According to the National Parks of New York Harbor Conservancy, the African cemetery is a site where, “History, archaeology, biology, culture, spirituality, and community intertwine to educate visitors and encourage reflection, awareness, and remembrance” (“African Burial Ground”). The blending of history, culture, and biology in this site creates a space where individual and ecological communities become blurred. Where Suzan-Lori Parks, in the epigraph above, poetically invokes disinterment as a performative and historiographical tool, here the African Burial Ground is literally a space where bones and fragments of the past have been unearthed and allowed to tell their stories, giving voice to people and events that had up to that point been silent.

More recently, archaeologists, after decades of searching, unearthed the bones of King Richard III, the English king who died in the battle of Bosworth Field. It was believed that Franciscan friars buried Richard’s body in Leicestershire, but with Henry VIII’s dissolution of monasteries, the location of the remains became unknown (“Death and Disappearance”). In 2012, the University of Leicester, Leicester City Council, and the Richard III Society launched a project to locate the historical grounds of the Franciscan friary and search for the remains of Richard III. Archeologists began excavation on the former friary, now a parking lot, and in September of that year announced that they had uncovered the king’s bones. Archeologists were able to identity King Richard III’s bones through DNA and forensic analysis, osteology, and
radiocarbon dating (“Science”). Here, much like the African burial grounds, the excavation of Richard III created a space where history, science, archeology and culture, merged together.

These two examples demonstrate that land can quite literally contain information that changes and influences the ways that we understand and interpret the past. In the sciences, the study of what is present, or absent, in the soil after the death of a living organism is called taphonomy. Geologist Ronald E. Martin defines taphonomy as “the science of the ‘laws of burial’ (from the Greek taphos + nomos). It is the study of the transition of organic remains from the biosphere into the lithosphere or the processes of ‘fossilization’ from death to diagenesis” (1). Looking to taphonomy prompts us to ask some compelling questions, such as: Why are certain bones preserved and recorded while others are not? What elements of the soil or cultural practices could affect how and if bones are preserved? Ultimately, taphonomy seeks to understand why some bones remain preserved while others disappear.

Indeed, taphonomy can be an incredibly productive tool for theatre and performance studies, and the work of Suzan-Lori Parks is a case-in-point. Through her writing, Parks exhumes the “bones” of the past in order to examine why and how they were preserved. She investigates the events leading up to the bones’ burial and queries why they have not been unearthed and allowed to “sing” or tell their story. She questions the absence of “bones,” asking why some elements of the past have been “dismembered” or “unrecorded?” Parks’ quest is one of performative and historical taphonomy, as she seeks to “locate the ancestral burial ground” exhume the remains and question why certain “bones” or fragments of the past are present and why others are absent, and what the presence or absence communicates about the assemblage of history.
Parks’ taphonomical inquiry into the past is a pursuit in performative historiography as she seeks to uncover why particular stories, events, or “bones” are absent from traditional canonical Western historical narratives. In *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, Linda Hutcheon argues that history is a discourse, a way in which we organize knowledge to make sense of the past. She claims, “the meaning and shape are not *in the events*, but *in the systems* which make those past “events” into present historical “facts” (89, emphasis in original). For Hutcheon, the postmodern “reinstalls historical contexts as significant and even determining” and problematizes the concept of “genuine historicity” because it acknowledges that historical knowledge is generated by dominant and interlocking systems of power and hegemony (89). Because Parks’s work concentrates on the stories of underrepresented African American individuals and communities in North America, stories most often not considered suitable to record in “legitimate” history books, her plays problematize the notion of “genuine historicity” because she calls attention to systems of power that generate historical “facts.”

“[T]he history of History is in question,” Parks claims. “Since history is a recorded or remembered event, theatre for me, is the perfect place to ‘make’ history” (4). Parks indicates that the “history of History,” in other words, historiography, is in question because in order for something to become a historical “fact” something else is left out or erased. Parks looks for these elements that have been left out of the conventional narrative, the “unrecorded bones,” but she does not stop even when she discovers remnants that have been discarded, she instead, takes the process one step further. She uses her writing as a way to “make” history to create or consider events that have “not yet been divined” (Parks 5). She does not merely bring to light the “bones” that have been preserved, or buried slightly deeper, but rather, she “makes” history, imagining alternate events as a way to account for the absent “bones.”
Regarding Parks’s investment in “making history,” in *Understanding Suzan-Lori Parks*, Jennifer Larson claims,

Parks’s attention to history and her signification on the texts, language, figures, and cultural events that shape our lingering and acquired perceptions of that history . . . is not surprising. Her works explore the simultaneously formative and deleterious effects that these texts, linguistic structures, figures, and cultural events tend to have on racial and individual identity. (1)

Parks’s plays offer historiographic investigations that problematize the power given to historical “fact” through the authority of the written word. That is, if an event is recorded through written language it is considered fact until proven otherwise. In *The Archive and The Repertoire*, Diana Taylor considers the historical power granted the written word or what she designates “the archive” versus embodied knowledge or “the repertoire.” Writing about the power shift between the written word and embodied practice during the Spanish conquest Taylor remarks,

Writing now assured that Power, with a capital P . . . could be developed and enforced without the input of the great majority of the population. . . . Nonverbal practices—such as dance, ritual, and cooking, to name a few—that long served to preserve a sense of communal identity and memory, were not considered valid forms of knowledge. (18)

Documenting an event with written language traps that event within the confines and structures of that language, which is typically created and controlled by hegemonic powers (case in point being Taylor’s discussion of the Spanish Conquest of the Americas). The event is only “real” in the ways in which the language can communicate it. The use of language to record and document
events cuts off other possibilities of the event because the event becomes trapped within the structures of the given language.

Parks questions this confinement of the event by exposing the systems that shaped it and also by creating new “foreign words & phrases,” in her plays (Parks 17). “Words are spells which an actor consumes and digests—and through digesting creates a performance on stage,” proclaims Parks. “Each word is configured to give the actor a clue to their physical life. Look at the difference between “the” and “thuh.” The “uh” requires the actor to employ a different, physical, emotional, vocal attack” (Parks 12). Actors physically manifest words through their bodies and this physicalization creates a performance. In this way, for Parks, performance has the ability to “make” history. She uses her writing to create new words and physical embodiments as a way to create different modes of knowing and understanding past events as a way to “make” history. “The historically focused elements of Parks’ aesthetic position her as an author who challenges the ways readers imagine and experience history and/or receive recorded accounts thereof,” asserts Larson. “These texts make history more visceral and relevant by asking readers to see the past as more personal and urgent: history and identity remain ever entwined” (Larson 3). In her re-working or re-imagining of particular historical “events,” Parks emphasizes the ways that the past affects the present and the present affects the past, demonstrating that questioning “the history of History” is still a vital task. “A play is a blueprint of an event,” writes Parks, “a way of creating and rewriting history through the medium of literature” (4). Parks’s plays act as affective sites where alternate historical events are “divined,” where she imagines and creates different histories, particularly for African-Americans.

Parks creates alternate narratives because so “much of African-American history has been unrecorded, dismembered, [and] washed out . . .” (4). For Parks, theatre enables an
excavation of “unrecorded” and “dismembered” history, it functions as an archeological site where the unaccounted for past can be unearthed. Parks states, “The bones tell us what was, is, will be; and because their song is a play—something that through a production actually happens—I’m working theatre like an incubator to create “new” historical events” (4-5, emphasis in original). By exploring discarded fragments of the past and bringing them to life in performance, Parks cultivates and creates new historical events. “Theatre is an incubator for historical events,” she proclaims, “and, as in the case of artificial insemination, the baby is no less human” (Parks 5). Parks’s aspirations, in other words, are of historical and performative taphonomy, that is, she investigates why some “bones” remain while others vanish. She does not stop, however, after this excavation; she instead goes further and uses theatre as a medium to create new “historical events.” Events that have the potential to stand in for the events that have been wiped clean from the historical slate.

In this chapter I examine Parks’s *The America Play*, specifically focusing on how the Foundling Father’s digging of the great hole of history unearths events that have been buried, and also imagines new possible historical events, specifically for African Americans. I use dance and affect theories to explore how *The America Play* problematizes notions of “genuine historicity” through kinesthetic movement, affective relationships, and virtual becomings. Using the scholarship of Susan Leigh Foster, I posit that the physical movement of the Foundling Father’s digging creates knowledge that muddles the historical landscape by blurring the boundaries between individual and ecological communities. I use the scholarship of E. Patrick Johnson and Vershawn Ashanti Young to investigate the connections between land privilege, hierarchies of class, black citizenship, and the concept of “make-belief,” which Parks uses to re-imagine Lincoln as an African American man. I also employ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s
theories of affect and immanent philosophy to argue that by becoming-history and unearthing potential concepts on the plane of immanence the Foundling Father remakes or “reterritorializes” history. Ultimately, I assert that through digging, becoming-Lincoln, and becoming-history, the Foundling Father performs a taphonomic historiography, as he unearths the past, excavating forgotten and buried “bones” or events, but also as he creates “new historical events,” that stand in for the absent “bones” and gives voice to the vanished, silent stories of African Americans.

In The America Play, an African American gravedigger known only as the Foundling Father as Abraham Lincoln and The Lesser Known impersonates Abraham Lincoln because he has been told that he resembles the Great Man. He begins his career by delivering the “Great Man’s” speeches and eventually creates an arcade booth where customers can pay a penny to “act out” Lincoln’s assassination in any manner of their choosing. The Foundling Father begins his career as an impersonator in the great hole of history, an amusement park. He eventually leaves his family and the amusement park to venture out west to re-create the great hole of history, which Parks describes as “A great hole. In the middle of nowhere. The hole is an exact replica of The Great Hole of History” (158). Throughout the play, the Foundling Father simulates the death of Lincoln over and over as customers pay to shoot him.

Throughout Act I the Foundling Father digs the great hole of history and in Act II his son, Brazil takes up his mantel and continues digging. Brazil digs because as his mother, Lucy, proclaims, “I need tuh know thuh real thing from thuh echo. Thuh truth from thuh hearsay” (175). Each time Brazil discovers a vestige of the past he and Lucy place it in the Hall of Wonders, a museum like venue, where they store their finds. Before he dies, the Foundling Father leaves his re-creation of the great hole and returns to his family. After the Foundling
Father’s death, Lucy and Brazil place his body inside the great hole of history, which is housed within the Hall of Wonders.

The America Play is a non-linear play that explores the notion of creating new or alternate histories by re-enacting the past in a different manner than has been traditionally transmitted through historical narratives. In Exceptional Spaces, Della Pollock discusses what she designates a crisis in historical representation:

What does it mean to represent the past? How have politics shaped the traditions of representation? What are the appropriate objects of historical analysis (whether from the prospective of the art, literary, or social historian)? Who are the subjects of history—and are they agents or subjects only? How can the representational tactics of scholars across the disciplines restore and enable historical agency? To what extent is history writing itself an exercise in history making? (3)

In The America Play, Parks interrogates the “crisis of representation” that Pollack emphasizes. As the introduction to this chapter illustrates, Parks’ interest in the history of history leads her to question what gets historical representation and what does not. She works to expose the ways in which history has been constructed and canonized and offers alternate perspectives through which to view and understand the past.

Theresa J. May discusses ecocriticism’s connections with social injustice, race, and postcolonial theories. “Ecological issues, like the concerns central to feminism and postcolonial and multicultural theory, address injustices felt in the body,” asserts May, “the body of experience, of community, of land” (101). Indeed, The America Play deals with some of these bodily injustices: the individual body of the Foundling Father that was shaped through grave digging, the body of the African American community that was left with only a partial and
incomplete history, and the body of land that was so deeply connected to the class system that was put into place by white plantation owners. Each of these relationships demonstrate the permeability between person and place, that people affect the land and the land in return affects people, each has a vital impact on the other. Concerning the permeability of person and place May claims:

> Ecocriticism applied to theatre must examine how bodies bear the markings of environmental policy, raising questions that go to the heart of cultural convictions of self and other, subjectivity, community, identity, and about the impact of cultural values and ideologies on the material/ecological—in which humans as organisms are, even in our most abstract and rationalist moments, utterly embedded. (101)

Humans are embedded in the natural world and their relationship with it is manifest in the ways they think about themselves and their communities. May goes on to ask, “How are place and person permeable?” (105). This generative question serves as an underlying foundational query for this chapter (as well as the entire study) as I explore the ways in which Parks’s work, per the call of ecocriticism “addresses injustices felt in the body.” I explore the connections between ecological community and the individual in relation to the Foundling Father and the great hole of history, the relationship between African American slaves and plantation land, as well as the landscape of history. May’s question also aligns with Una Chaudhuri’s assertion that “Theater ecology . . . will call for a turn toward the literal, a programmatic resistance to the use of nature as metaphor” (“Ecological Theater” 29). My intention is that this chapter, through a new examination of Parks’s work vis-à-vis an ecocritical lens, answers the call for an ecocriticism that takes “a turn toward the literal,” and “[maps] the connections between social injustice,
human and other bodies, and environmental exploitation,” by exploring dirt in *The America Play* as a literal element that affected the lives of African Americans.

**Doing/Moving/Choreography**

In the first line of the play the Foundling Father states: “To stop too fearful and too faint to go. He digged the hole and the whole held him (159). As the Foundling Father digs, with Parks’s wordplay, he is contained by the hole and the whole. Literally, the hole engulfs him as he digs deeper. Metaphorically, the whole of history envelops him and holds him in a constructed historical narrative while he digs for the un-remembered past. The Foundling Father has been digging his entire life because he comes from a family of “diggers”:

FOUNDLING FATHER AS ABRAHAM LINCOLN. The Lesser Known was a Digger by trade. From a family of Diggers. Digged graves. He was known in Small Town to dig his graves quickly and neatly. This brought him steady business. (160)

Because the Foundling Father was raised and trained as a gravedigger, his body was disciplined in the physical motion and choreography of the movement of digging. Years of performing such distinct physical labor would shape and mold his body in a particular way, essentially making his body an efficient machine capable of performing a specific task. According to Foster, the action of executing either a trained or an unskilled movement creates meaning. “A body, whether sitting writing or standing thinking or walking talking or running screaming, is a bodily writing. Its habits and stances, gestures and demonstrations, every action of its various regions, areas and parts—all these emerge out of cultural practices, verbal or not, that construct corporeal meaning,” writes Foster. “Each of the body’s moves, as with the
writings, traces the physical fact of movement and also an array of references to conceptual entities and events” (Foster 3).

Henry Wiencek discusses the “bodily writing” of African American slaves through the perpetual repetition of their labor in *An Imperfect God: George Washington, His Slaves, and the Creation of America*. In order to kinesthetically comprehend their physical labor, argues Wiencek, one would need to perform a task over and over to the point of exhaustion. Wiencek quotes Jinny Fox, an African American historical interpreter regarding the performance of slave labor at Mount Vernon:

> We began implementing the hands-on program because we wanted to produce a sense of what slavery really was. . . . If you do the work you begin to grasp the labor . . . . Only you get to quit. You can stop. . . . But the slave is going to be there from five o’clock in the morning until the sun goes down. (115)

For Wiencek, tourists who visit “living history” sites that offer second person interpretation such as: digging clay, hoeing fields, cutting rails, and harvesting tobacco plants, can never feel the true kinesthetic experience because they have the option to stop when they have had enough.

Thus, according to both Foster and Wiencek, kinetic and kinesthetic movements of the body are informed by cultural, social, and economic practices and therefore create meaning. The Foundling Father’s shape and movement are fashioned by a culture and socio-economic status that has made him historically and socially disenfranchised, forcing him and his family to dig graves for a living. These factors shape the exterior and interior structure of his body as well as his physical movement; they also concomitantly shape how he creates and perceives his world. Through this process his body becomes a generative site of knowledge.
In “Situated Knowledges,” Donna Haraway coins the term “material-semiotic actor” to describe the body as a site of knowledge production. “This unwieldy term [material-semiotic actor]” she asserts:

is intended to portray the object of knowledge as an active, meaning generating part of apparatus of bodily production, without ever implying the immediate presence of such objects, or, what is the same thing, their final or unique determination of what can count as objective knowledge at a particular historical juncture . . . bodies as objects of knowledge are material-semiotic generative nodes. (351)

Bodies, by how they move and the ways in which they move, produce meaning. Their movement yields knowledge. Bodily movement creates modes of being in and understanding the world. The Foundling Father’s digging produces knowledge and creates meaning, but exactly what kind? In order to comprehend what knowledge is produced Foster asks what type of body and what kind of movement is being executed:

empowered bodies? enslaved bodies? docile bodies? rebellious bodies? dark bodies? pale bodies? exotic bodies? virtuoso bodies? feminine bodies? masculine bodies? triumphant bodies? disappeared bodies? All these genres of bodies first began moving through their days performing what they had learned to do: carrying, climbing, standing, sitting, greeting, eating, dressing, sleeping, touching, laboring, fighting. . . . These quotidian activities. . . these mundane habits and miniscule gestures mattered. . . All a body’s characteristic ways of moving resonated with aesthetic and political values. (Foster 5)
Thus, according to Foster, the moving body and bodily movement matter. But what kind of body does the Foundling Father possess and why is his digging important? How does his particular body performing this specific task produce knowledge? It is these questions that I explore in the next sections.

Blurring/Permeability/Landscape

In *The Death of Character*, Elinor Fuchs posits the notion of “perceptual landscape,” which she describes as something that incorporates “visual design, sound, lights, music, arrangements of figures on the stage, and intermittent bursts of story fragments that then subside again into the totality of shifting configurations” (100). The idea of “perceptual landscape,” when applied to *The America Play*, reveals the way it moves between different vignettes that incorporate sounds, objects, and visual images. The characters are surrounded by the objects and detritus they dig up, elements, images, and echoes from the “historical” past. As the play does not progress in a linear manner, the characters are not bound by time or space; instead, the characters and *mise en scène* become a landscape, a composite of multiple senses—sight, sound, and feel. Because the action of the characters is not the locus of the play the focus is instead placed on “visual design, sound, lights, music, arrangements of figures on the stage, and intermittent bursts of story fragments” that blur together to form a sort of landscape or kinesthetic composite of all of these elements (Fuchs 100). Through “perceptual landscape,” writes Fuchs, “we are becoming ecologists of theatre. No longer fascinated by the struggles of single organisms in their habitats . . . we pull back to scan Thorton Wilder’s intuited intersection of myth, Stein and landscape, where the thing-held-full-in-view-the-whole-time becomes the measure of theatrical interest” (107).
The America Play does not zoom in on the human characters as the main focus of the action; instead it zooms out to view the “whole” landscape or perhaps the spatio-temporal “w/hole of history.” It presents a perspective of all the moving parts or ecosystems that make up history and asks the reader/audience to re-imagine these narratives. Parks uses the spatio-temporal landscape of the play to examine multiple events at the same time. Because the unfolding of the play is not character based and is therefore not limited to chronological time or linear action Parks is able to play with time and space. The landscape of the play is not spatially or temporally static. Fuchs draws on Bonnie Marranca’s analysis of Anton Chekhov’s work, in order to problematize the traditionally static concepts of time and space. In Theatrewritings, Marranca claims:

Setting entraps a play in historical time; it is mere scenery, information, the dressing that frames a play in a set of gestures, speech styles, and moral values. The static view of space encourages closure, preoccupation with causality, motivation. . . . It separates the human being from the world, forcing the two into opposition. (197)

Much like the spatial choreography of the national parks, this view creates binary opposition between humans and their environment, time and space act as a backdrop for human drama. Fuchs suggests that the concept of landscape comes in to demonstrate that “we are interested in the entire field, the whole terrain, the total environment of performance, as performance, and as an imaginative construct” (106, emphasis in original). Humans are not separate from their environment; instead, together they form an ecosystem of various elements. It is in this landscape or ecosystem that person and place become permeable. One is not separate from the other; they form a relationship of “the thing-held-full-in-view.”
Likewise, in *Performing Remains: Art and War in Times of Theatrical Reenactment*, Rebecca Schneider describes *The America Play* as a “landscape play, in which the landscape is” Parks’s Great Hole of History (66). Thus the play takes place in the w/whole of history, both in the history that was recorded and the history that was left out. The landscape of the w/whole functions as an important element of the play. Judith Hamera, in *Opening Acts*, writes about space as “an actor, produced by, and in turn producing communicative possibilities materialized by embodied subjects” (76). Or, in the words of Michel de Certeau in *The Practice of Everyday Life*, “Space is a practiced place” (117, emphasis in original). Space is not static. Rather it is dynamic: it changes based on the social actors and actions that inhabit or avoid it. “Space is multivocal, characterized by perpetual possibilities for transformation,” claims Hamera, “Space is univocal, stable, proper” (77). Because space is practiced, it is therefore capable being re-created.

It is in this landscape, the blurring of character, story, time, space, and place, that the boundaries between individual and ecological community become muddled. Through his digging the Foundling Father blurs the borders between his personal history, “historical” events, and the unaccounted for past by unearthing human-made detritus, as well as plants, animals, microscopic organisms, and decomposed organic elements that reside in the dirt. These organisms and elements that witnessed the past are unearthed from the ground to bear witness to untold stories and histories. The unearthing of these elements blur the boundaries between individual and ecological community because through their excavation, history, culture, and biology collapse (similarly, to the examples in the introduction) into a specific space, the w/whole of history.

As the Foundling Father digs the hole he dredges up forgotten elements and objects in the dirt and as the pile of dirt becomes larger it entraps him and he is contained by the hole. As the hole becomes deeper (and the pile of dirt concurrently becomes larger), the landscape of the
play, the whole of history, and the character of the Foundling Father begin to blur together. As he digs deeper into the hole and becomes enveloped by it, the Foundling Father begins to create a new history onstage as he unearths the ecological remnants of the past and simultaneously surrounds himself with the dirt, objects, and detritus he is digging up. The physical act of digging obscures the boundaries between the ecological community of the dirt, the gravedigger and his family, and the “unrecorded” histories of African Americans. Through his archeological unearthing the Foundling Father “allows the bones to sing” and therefore begins to create new and/or unaccounted for historical events.

The salient relationship between the Foundling Father, an African American man, and the dirt/land is not a new concept. Historically, the “African American,” since his/her very invention through systems of colonization and the slave trade, has had a marked relationship with American land/dirt in which he/she labored. In *From Bourgeois to Boojie: Black Middle Class Performance*, E. Patrick Johnson states:

> Since our arrival on American soil, African Americans have always been marked by our class position. Although we were considered only three-fifths human and had no material possessions to speak of, enslaved Africans’ intracultural relations were shaped by class, for white masters understood the psychosocial dynamics of divide and conquer: give one group access to the master’s house and family and put the other in the fields and forbid them access to the same. Thus the distinction between house slaves and field slaves paradoxically codified a caste system that effectively divided a people along class lines. (xiii)

Thus land/dirt functioned as a medium that divided antebellum American slaves into two classes. Many Africans were brought to the United States and forced to work the land on southern
plantations, the very act of working in the field imbued them with qualities of a specific class. In *White Over Black*, Winthrop D. Jordan considers the association between black skin and dirt. He remarks that before the sixteenth century a definition of “black” in the Oxford English Dictionary included, “deeply stained with dirt; soiled, filthy, begrimed” (“Dirt”). “Embedded in this concept of blackness was its direct opposite—whiteness,” asserts Jordan. “White and black connoted purity and filthiness, virginity and sin, virtue and baseness, beauty and ugliness, beneficence and evil, God and the devil” (Jordan 7). Thus, slaves working the field were considered lower class because “dirt was seen as primitive and chaotic,” whereas house slaves where considered to be higher class because “cleanliness. . . promised morality, good order and reform” (Ashenburg 210). Through the blurring of ecological and individual community, slaves who worked the field were associated with dirt; therefore, dirt became signifier of class. Anne McClintock in *Imperial Leather* writes about dirt as a class marker, “Smeared on trousers, faces, hands, and aprons, dirt was the memory trace of working class . . . labor, unseemly evidence that the fundamental production of industrial and imperial wealth lay in the hands and bodies of the working class, women, and the colonized” (154). In this context, dirt functions as a manifestation of labor and its presence on bodies marks them as “dirty,” uncivilized, low-class, and immoral.

In *The America Play*, Parks returns to this historically fraught relationship with the land/dirt, but re-imagines the relationship, with a black gravedigger dressed as Lincoln working in the dirt. A black man dressed as the great emancipator, returns to the land to unearth the stories that have been left out of the narrative. The Foundling Father’s work and bodily physicality as a gravedigger pays homage to the slaves who worked the field while his aesthetic embodiment of Lincoln imagines a different past, perhaps a liberated past. Through his digging he illuminates the stories of those whose lives and identity were in the dirt, those who were
considered the lowest of the low in class ranks. Regarding these supposed class markers, Johnson notes, “The irony, of course, is that those slaves who were assigned to the plantation home were actually no better off than those in the fields in terms of what they actually had materially. . . . Nonetheless this division of labor created an image of what we now call the black middle class that remains today” (xiv). As Johnson states, the house and field slaves were not any different in terms of their material possessions, but their differences lie in the way they were treated by their white owners, which in turn affected the way they treated each other. White slave owners were successful in creating a performance of class that was based on the relationship with the land/dirt. Those who worked in and with the land were literally treated like dirt, an expendable commodity.

It was not until 1868, when the Fourteenth Amendment was adopted, that individuals born or naturalized in the United States were considered American citizens, including freed slaves. While this was one step toward a more equal future, there were still many issues to contend with, one of those being the class markers and signifiers that had been put into place by white slave owners. Even though former black slaves were freed and considered citizens, they still faced racial and class discrimination both from whites and within their own communities. In “Introduction: Performing Black Citizenship,” Vershawn Ashanti Young comments on the African American struggle for “full class citizenship,” stating that “changes in African Americans’ experience of citizenship have something, if not everything, to do with the reason that class is now believed by some to be the factor that determines race” (3). According to Young, class may now be the factor that determines race and American dirt/land functioned as a dividing line that created this class system, the effects of which still resound in contemporary culture.
The long-term effects of the historical relationship between African Americans and the land/dirt makes the Foundling Father’s relationship with the dirt even more complex as his dressing as and impersonating Lincoln constitutes what Young calls “make belief,” which he defines as “enacting the effects [the black middle class] want the receivers of their performances [and perhaps themselves] to accept ‘for real’” (4). The idea of black make-belief was purported by E. Franklin Frazier in *Black Bourgeoisie: The Rise of a New Middle Class in the United States*:

Having abandoned their social heritage and being rejected by the white world the black bourgeoisie have an intense feeling of inferiority, constantly seek various forms of recognition and place great value on status symbols in order to compensate for their inferiority complex. (111)

According to Frazier, because the black bourgeoisie have been historically marginalized and treated as inferior they have a complex and strive to make up for it. Young notes, “This complex . . . arises because the black middle class has adopted the white man’s values and patterns of behavior yet must constantly [live] under the domination and contempt of the white man” (4). The notion of make-belief comes out of the reality that black people have historically been forced to live in a white man’s world. In order for them to survive and thrive they have had to adapt to the oppressive system of power that was in place. Young summarizes it thusly:

the black bourgeoisie believe that their middle-class status compensates for the social inequality they experience, and, since they must live with racism, they focus their attention on what they can change (their class status) rather on what they cannot (their race), believing that economic equality with whites is attainable and will contribute to future social equality. (5)
While race is something that cannot be changed, class is something that can. The concept of make-belief enables a performance of class that allows African Americans to imagine their lives in alternate ways. Make-belief offers an avenue into becoming something different.

_Becoming-Lincoln_

While I argue that the Foundling Father uses make-belief to imagine himself as Lincoln, a white man with power, I believe that he goes even further in his becoming of Lincoln, as he fashions his physicality and cosmetic appearance to match Lincoln’s. The Foundling Father remarks on his resemblance and performance of Lincoln:

THE FOUNDLING FATHER AS ABRAHAM LINCOLN. He [The Lesser Known] was identical to the Great Man in gait and manner how his legs were long and his torso short. The Lesser Known had taken to wearing a false wart on his cheek in remembrance of the Great Mans wart. When the Westerners noted his wart they pronounced the 2 men in virtual twinnship. (sic 163-164)

The Foundling Father begins moving, dressing, and fashioning his physical appearance after Lincoln. Larson argues, “a suit, a hat, a set of beards, and a fake wart help ‘The Lesser Known’ feel connected to Abraham Lincoln both ideologically and temporally” (58). The Foundling Father, however, does not stop at a mere physical embodiment and impersonation of Lincoln; he pushes the performance further and begins re-enacting Lincoln’s assassination for customers.

THE FOUNDLING FATHER AS ABRAHAM LINCOLN. The Lesser Known had under his belt a few of the Great Mans words and after a day of digging, in the evenings, would stand in his hole reciting. But the Lesser Known was a curiosity at best. None of those who spoke of his virtual twinnship with greatness
would actually pay money to watch that greatness. . . when someone remarked
that he played Lincoln so well that he ought to be shot, it was as if the Great Mans
footsteps had been suddenly revealed. . . The Lesser Known returned to his hole
and, instead of speeching, his act would consist of a single chair, a rocker, in a
dark box. The public was invited to pay a penny, choose from the selection of
provided pistols, enter the darkened box and “Shoot Mr. Lincoln.” The Lesser
Known became famous overnight. (164)

In his re-creation of Lincoln’s death, the Foundling Father alters the way he holds and moves his
body to embody the movement and physicality of Lincoln before, during, and after he is shot.
The kinetic and kinesthetic repetition of the movement of his body performing this task enables
the Foundling Father’s body to become an embodied producer of knowledge in the same manner
as his grave digging. Through his physical and cosmetic embodiment of Lincoln, and his re-
creation of his death, The Foundling Father becomes-Lincoln. The Foundling Father and the
“discursive body” of Lincoln develop an affective relationship.

In The Affect Theory Reader, Gregory Seigworth and Melissa Gregg describe affect as
“those intensities that pass body to body (human, non-human, part body, and otherwise), in those
resonances that circulate about, between, and sometimes stick to bodies and worlds, and in the
very passages or variations between these intensities and resonances themselves” (1, emphasis in
original). In other words, for Seigworth and Gregg, affect is something fluid and intangible that
circulates through, around, and between bodies, both human and non-human, which alters the
physical and metaphysical state of those bodies.
In “Rhizome Versus Trees,” Gilles Deleuze uses the concepts of deterritorialization and reterritorialization to describe the fluid, intangible affect that flows through an orchid and wasp during pollination:

not imitation at all but a capture of code . . . an increase in valence, a veritable becoming, a becoming-wasp of the orchid and a becoming-orchid of the wasp.

Each of these becomings brings about the deterritorialization of one term and the reterritorialization of the other; the two becomings interlink and form relays in the circulation of intensities pushing the deterritorialization even further. (33)

This complex transaction alters the physical and metaphysical states of both the wasp and the orchid. In other words, the affective exchange reterritorializes their relationship, wasp becomes-orchid and orchid becomes-wasp.

Laura Cull defines Deleuzean affect as that “which is not understood as emotion, but a pre-personal process of ‘becoming,’ [a] change or variation caused by an encounter between bodies,” in “Affect in Deleuze, Hijikata, and Coates: The Politics of Becoming-Animal in Performance” (1). For Cull, Deleuzean affect is not an emotion. It is pre-personal experience, something that changes, varies, or becomes when two bodies encounter one another. Cull writes specifically about the process of becoming-animal and offers affect as a complex and compelling process that may allow a performer to embody an “other” not just through mere imitation but also through becoming. “We can say that the work of the performer is not to represent emotion or to represent other bodies in the world,” writes Cull, “but to devise a procedure to extract the affects of bodies, to somehow reconstruct in performance the power of another body to pierce us like an arrow, force us to think, and enable us to act in new ways” (7). Affect, in other words, would allow a performer to move beyond imitation to extract the intensities of other bodies and
use them in performance. Cull explains the experience of *becoming*-animal as “a real, affective experience of relationality which occurs within a ‘zone of exchange’ between man and animal in which something of one passes into the other” (13).

Seigworth, Gregg, and Cull characterize affect as a passing of something from one body to another, a *becoming* of bodies. But what exactly is being passed? In *Ordinary Affects*, Kathleen Stewart describes this *passing*:

> Ordinary affect is a surging, a rubbing, a connection of some kind that has an impact. It’s transpersonal or prepersonal—not about one person’s feelings becoming another’s but about bodies literally affecting one another and generating intensities: human bodies, discursive bodies, bodies of thought, bodies of water. (128)

For Stewart, this passing/surging/rubbing “is not that of emotions” or anything tangible, but rather a prepersonal transfer of intensities that literally affects a body. “Affect accumulates across both relatedness and interruptions in the relatedness,” note Seigworth and Gregg, “becoming a palimpsest of force-encounters traversing the ebbs and swells of intensities that pass between ‘bodies’ (bodies defined not by an outer skin-envelope or other surface boundary but by their potential to reciprocate or co-participate in the passages of affect)” (2). Affect, then, can be described as an intangible transfer of intensities that physically alters the bodies engaged in the transfer and has the potential to literally modify or transform the bodies involved.

By taking on the physicality and aesthetics of Lincoln and reenacting a crucial moment in his life, the Foundling Father *becomes*-Lincoln. Cull writes that *becoming*-animal would allow a performer to “reconstruct in performance the power of another body to pierce us like an arrow, force us to think, and enable us to act in new ways” (7). Here, the Foundling Father is affecting
and being affected by the discursive body of Lincoln. The two affect one another in a way that alters their physical and metaphysical structure and in a sense re-creates the past in the present. Deleuze designates the state when the original bodies are altered as a deterritorialization and a reterritorialization when those bodies form an affective relationship that creates a different body.

Through his embodiment and re-creation of Lincoln, the Foundling Father’s body is deterritorialized and when he becomes-Lincoln both he and the discursive body of Lincoln are reterritorialized. Foster comments on how present physical bodies desire to relate to past historical bodies, stating,

[The] historian’s body wants to consort with dead bodies, wants to know from them: What must it have felt like to move among those things, in those patterns, desiring those proficiencies, being beheld from those vantage points? Moving or being moved by those other bodies? A historian’s body wants to inhabit these vanished bodies for specific reasons. It wants to know where it stands, how it came to stand there, what its options for moving might be. It wants those dead bodies to lend a hand in deciphering its own present predicaments and its staging some future possibilities. (6)

Present bodies want to understand past, absent bodies. Present bodies want to know how they arrived where they did. Parks uses the present body of the Foundling Father to excavate and investigate the body of the past, to understand how he and other African Americans emerged where they did. The Foundling Father becomes-Lincoln as a way to consort with the past, a way to understand the present through the past (or the past through the present.) By having the Foundling Father become-Lincoln, Parks imagines a reterritorialization of the historical bodies of African Americans and Abraham Lincoln. Just as she plays with the words she uses in her
dramas, Parks plays with notions of history and historicity. She messes with the “recorded historical narrative,” to explore alternate possibilities, stories, and imaginings of those recorded “facts.”

One of the ways in which she plays with notions of history and historicity is by staging the Foundling Father’s re-enactment of Lincoln’s assassination in different ways. The Foundling Father’s customers are comprised of people with differing backgrounds and various motivations for participating in the re-creation of the event. The Foundling Father taps into a niche market and finds great success in his reenactments of Lincoln’s assassination, as some customers travel for the “tourist” thrill of shooting Lincoln, while “regulars” come on a weekly basis to re-create the event. The Foundling Father offers a range of experiences, from re-creating the event with historical “accuracy,” to shouting phrases that John Wilkes Booth was rumored to have said. Customers are also allowed to choose their weapon from a variety of options and shout words and phrases of their choice. The Foundling Father has one particular customer who comes in once a week and re-creates the event exactly how it is recorded in history books.

FOUNDLING FATHER AS ABRAHAM LINCOLN. Comes in once a week that one. Always chooses the Derringer although we’ve got several styles he always chooses the Derringer. Always “The tyrants” and then “The South avenged.” The ones who choose the Derringer are the ones for History. He’s one for History. As it Used to Be. Never wavers. No frills. By the book. Nothing excessive. (sic 166)

While some customers are not interested in deviating from the recorded narrative there are others who want to change the events to suit their own purposes such as the newlywed couple that comes in and wants to shoot the Foundling Father together.
C MAN. You allow 2 at once?

THE FOUNDLING FATHER

(Rest)

C WOMAN. We’re just married. You know: newlyweds. We hope you don’t mind. Us both at once.

THE FOUNDLING FATHER

(Rest)

C MAN. We’re just married.

C WOMAN. Newlyweds.

THE FOUNDLING FATHER

(Rest)

(Rest)

(They “stand in position.” Both hold one gun). (170)

After the couple shoots the Foundling Father, C Woman shouts, “They’ve killed the president!,” the words Mary Todd supposedly shouted after Lincoln was shot (Parks 170). While the couple has strayed from the recorded narrative, they still feel the need to keep the re-enactment in some sort of “accurate” historical context, as evidenced by exclaiming these words. While this deviation is accepted, the Foundling Father’s yellow beard is one departure from the narrative that his customers do not appreciate.

FOUNDLING FATHER AS ABRAHAM LINCOLN. This is my fancy beard. Yellow. Mr. Lincoln’s hair was dark so I don’t wear it much. If you deviate too much they won’t get their pleasure. That’s my experience. Some inconsistencies are perpetuatable because they’re good for business. (sic 163)
He notes that while participants stray from the narrative, there seems to be some invisible boundary that prevents them from straying too far. If the re-creation strays too far from the actual “event” the participants lose some element of pleasure. On the other hand, he acknowledges that some deviations are “good for business.”

FOUNDLING FATHER AS ABRAHAM LINCOLN. Some inaccuracies are good for business. Take the stovepipe hat! Never really worn indoors but people don’t like their Lincoln hatless. (sic 168)

Some inaccuracies have become so ingrained in the historical narrative, such as the stovepipe hat, that the Foundling Father’s customers are uncomfortable when they are changed. While the hat would not have been worn indoors, there is something comforting and familiar about the “historical” Lincoln wearing a stovepipe hat.

Through these interactions between the Founding Father and his customers, Parks demonstrates that those who record, interpret, and perform history allow for some leeway in their narratives, but not too much. Once you begin to stray too far from the written “facts” or historical “events” historical-consumers start to get uncomfortable because they want pleasure and familiarity in their history. That is why the stovepipe hat is acceptable, but the yellow beard is not. The yellow beard strays too far as Lincoln did not have blonde hair. He did, however, wear a stovepipe hat outdoors, as was customary of the time period. Because Lincoln’s hat contains an element of truth, this act becomes permissible to embellish. Instead of a simple hat worn by many men of the period, it is exaggerated to become an iconic emblem, an accessory that Lincoln is never depicted without. By drawing attention to these arbitrary lines in terms of historical “truth” Parks call attention to the history and historicity of events. In these scenes, Parks demonstrates Hutcheon’s claim that “the meaning and shape are not in the events, but in
the systems which make those past ‘events’ into present historical ‘facts’” (89, emphasis in original).

While Parks plays with notions of history and historicity in the Foundling Father’s re-creation of Lincoln’s death, she takes this even further through his relationship with the hole of history. Through this interaction she plays with the timeline of history, re-imagining the past as a way to conceive a different present and future.

**Becoming-History**

In order to explore how Parks’ experiments with the historical timeline I turn to some of the theories posited in Deleuze and Guattari’s *What is Philosophy?*, in which they outline the differences between philosophy and science. For Deleuze and Guattari, philosophy explores the virtual, the range of possibilities that something is capable of becoming. Science, on the other hand, deals with the actualization of the virtual; it explores the actual materialization of the virtual into “states of affairs.” In *Deleuze and Geophilosophy*, Mark Bonta and John Protevi explain that:

> Both [science and philosophy] are approaches to chaos that attempt to bring order to it. . . . Philosophy gives consistency to the virtual, mapping the forces composing a system of pure potentials, what that system is capable of.

> Meanwhile, science gives it reference, determining the conditions by which systems behave the way they do. (29)

Science deals with the materialization of the virtual, explaining why an event actualized, whereas philosophy looks at all the possible events that could have actualized, and, in so doing, it explores the potentials and possibilities of events. “Science deals the properties of constituted
things,” summarize Bonta and Protevi, “while philosophy deals with the constitution of events” (31).

For Deleuze and Guattari, philosophy is composed of concepts, which they describe as “the contour, the configuration, the constellation of an event to come” (33). More thoroughly, Deleuze and Guattari designate concepts as “fragmentary wholes that are not aligned with one another so that they fit together, because their edges do not match up. They are not pieces of a jigsaw puzzle but rather the outcome of throws of dice” (35). Concepts reside on a plane that Deleuze and Guattari term the plane of immanence, “a table, a plateau, or slice” (35). They explain the relationship between concepts and the plane of immanence thusly, “concepts are the archipelago or skeletal frame, a spinal column . . . whereas the plane is the breath that suffuses the separate parts” (36). The plane of immanence acts as membrane that connects the concepts to one another. Put another way, “concepts are events, but the plane is the horizon of events, the reservoir or reserve of purely conceptual events” (Deleuze and Guattari 36). Therefore, the plane of immanence functions as a place where concepts reside, a site of virtual possibilities.

The virtual possibilities or concepts that reside on the plane of immanence have the potential to become actualized “states of affairs.” This actualization occurs when the “states of affairs” and virtual events, which are located on two different vectors, intersect. It is at the moment of intersection that an event is actualized, the concept moves from the virtual (the world of philosophy) to the actual (the world of science). “Actual states of affairs and virtual events, are two types of multiplicities that are not distributed on an errant line but related to two vectors that intersect,” explain Deleuze and Guattari, “one according to which states of affairs actualize events and the other according to which events absorb . . . states of affairs” (153). When these two vectors intersect, the virtual concept is materialized into a “states of affairs,” something that
is concretized in time and space. The concept moves from a possibility into an actuality, it becomes the “states of affairs.” Regarding this process, however, Deleuze and Guattari assert: 

the state of affairs actualizes a chaotic virtuality by carrying along with it a space that has ceased, no doubt, to be virtual but that still shows its origin and serves as absolutely indispensible correlate to the state of affairs. . . A state of affairs cannot be separated from the potential through which it takes effect. (153, emphasis in original)

While the “states of affairs” has actualized it still contains the initial concept, the virtual possibility, as the two cannot be divorced.

Because Parks explores notions of history and historicity through experimenting with both recorded and possible events in *The America Play*, Deleuze and Guattari’s theories on science and philosophy serve as a generative methodology to examine the play. Parks takes particular historical events and people that have been actualized into “states of affairs” such as Lincoln and his assassination and uses the Foundling Father digging in the dirt as a way to explore the virtual possibilities of what could have been. She moves from the scientific realm of “states of affairs,” to the philosophical realm of concepts to explore what other virtual possibilities resided on the plane of immanence, what other events had the potential to occur. She disregards the linear Hegelian timeline that science imposes on history and uses a philosophic lens to view time and history differently. “Time has a circular shape,” writes Parks, “Could Time be tricky like the world once was—looking flat from our place on it—and through looking at things beyond the world we found it round? Somehow I think time could be like this too” (10). Through the Foundling Father digging the great hole of history, Parks explores what non-linear
or circular time might look like. This understanding of time becomes manifest when the Foundling Father talks about his relationship between Lincoln and time:

FOUNDLING FATHER AS ABRAHAM LINCOLN. The Great Man lived in the past that is was an inhabitant of time immemorial and the Lesser Known out West alive a resident of the present. And the Great Mans deeds had transpired during the life of the Great Man somewhere in past-land that is somewhere “back there” and all this while the Lesser Known digging his holes bearing the burden of his resemblance all the while trying somehow to equal the Great Man in stature, word and deed going forward with his lesser life trying somehow to follow in the Great Mans footsteps footsteps that were of course behind him. The Lesser Known somehow to catch up to the Great Man all this while and maybe running too fast in the wrong direction. Which is to say that maybe the Great Man had to catch him. (sic 171)

The Foundling Father tries to follow in the Great Man’s footsteps, which he recognizes are not ahead of him, but behind him. He concedes that perhaps he is trying to move in the wrong direction to follow the Great Man that perhaps it is the Great Man who needs to catch up with him. In this monologue, as well as the entire play, Parks plays with conventional notions of time and space and looks to virtual possibilities or concepts, the “paths not taken” as a way to explore what could have been or what still might be.

Remaking/Reterritorializing

The play is set in the great w/hole of history, including both the history that was recorded and the history that was left out. The landscape of the hole functions as a critical element of the
play, because as noted by Hamera earlier, space functions as “an actor, produced by, and in turn producing communicative possibilities materialized by embodied subjects” (76). Because space is practiced and dynamic, it is constantly being re-created.

By setting the play in the great hole of history Parks plays with the idea of space and time and tinkers with the traditional historical narrative. She places a black gravedigger dressed as Lincoln unearthing dirt in the great hole, this act imagines an alternate history. The Foundling Father begins digging in the hole and as he digs new “bones” emerge revealing history to be a hole rather than a whole. In Act II his son, Brazil, encouraged by his mother, Lucy, takes up the Foundling Father’s mantel and continues the digging:

LUCY. Dig on, Brazil. Can’t stop diggin till you dig up something. Your Daddy was uh Digger. (174)

Lucy tells Brazil he “can’t stop diggin” until he digs something up, he can’t stop looking for the stories that have been left out. Lucy has given him the responsibility of filling the gap (hole) of history. Lucy goes on to say:

LUCY. Go on: dig. Now me I need tuh know thuh real things from the echo. Thuh truth from thuh hearsay. (175)

Lucy needs to know the truth about her ancestors and the past; she is not satisfied with what has been written down, so she forces Brazil to dig on.

The traditional canonical narrative of American history fails to account for the history of African Americans because their stories have been, as Parks notes, “un-recorded, dismembered and washed out” (4). The America Play serves as an archeological project where the Foundling Father as Abraham Lincoln and later Brazil dig the w/hole of history to unearth the past. African Americans have always had a salient and problematic relationship with the dirt/land because of
the class markers white slave owners created through the slave’s relationship with the land. It is because of these class markers that African Americans still to this day struggle to feel like full first class citizens of the United States.

In “The Possession of Suzan-Lori Parks,” Shawn-Marie Garrett discusses Parks’ interest in dirt, which is a prominent element in many of her dramas. Parks affirms that she is interested in “memory and family and history and the past. . . . [And] a lot of dirt onstage which was being dug at” (qtd. in Garrett). 11 It is this relationship with the land that Parks returns to, this blurring of ecological, societal, and individual communities as the Foundling Father digs up the soil which is composed of layer upon layer of weathered rock, and then layer upon layer of decomposing organic matter such as plants, animals, fungi, and microorganisms mixed in with the rock. Upper layers of soil are more recently formed while lower layers are more ancient, and depending on location and depth could range anywhere from 10,000 to 144 million years old (“The Soil Beneath Your Feet”). “Our soil today is a result of our past. Past climate, management, industrial pollution and human settlement have all influenced the soil of today,” claims a soil formation brochure produced by the McCauley Land Use Research Institute. “Soil can be seen as a record of our cultural history and often harbours records of the past and protects archaeological artefacts. So, in some senses soil is history beneath your feet” (sic “McCauley Land Use Research Institute brochure” 14). As the Foundling Father digs down into the great hole, he is literally unearthing deeper and deeper soil, and therefore, deeper and deeper history the further down he goes. So, when he himself descends into the hole, he is inserting something

11 Parks’s first play, The Sinners’ Place, which she wrote while in college, was rejected for production from the Mount Holyoke Theatre department because they told her “You can’t put dirt onstage! That’s not a play!” (Garrett).
from the present (his body) directly into the past (the soil) and transferring something from the past (the deeper soil) into the present (the surface). He is unearthing geologic and biologic information, a diverse and ancient ecosystem that both witnessed and contains elements of the past. The plantation soil that the slaves worked with and that dictated their status is the same soil that exists today; it is simply covered by more recent history. As noted earlier, May maintains that the soil/land maps connections “between social injustice, human[s] and other bodies,” in this case between African Americans and their absent history (101). The Foundling Father digs through the dirt and unearths the “bones” in order to fill the gap in the record. This exhumation aligns with Parks’s confirmation of being “obsessed with resurrecting . . . with bringing up the dead . . . hearing their stories as they come into my head” (qtd. in Garrett). By finding new pieces of information the Foundling Father “re-writ[es] the Time Line—creating history where it is and always was but has not yet been divined” (Parks 5). Parks uses the act of digging/unearthing through the characters of the Foundling Father as Abraham Lincoln and later, Brazil, to create a new historical record that resurrects the bones of the past giving voice to the silenced stories of African Americans.

In Transpositions: On Nomadic Ethics, Rosi Braidotti presents a radical and complex post-human philosophy regarding transposing difference and becoming-other.

“Transposing is a gesture neither of metaphorical assimilation nor of metonymic association,” remarks Braidotti. “It is a style, in the sense of a form of conceptual creativity, like a sliding door, a choreographed slippage, a drifting away that follows a trajectory which can be traced. . . . Like a weather map, genetic printing or digital tracking, an account can be made of what will have been—in the first instance—a fluid flowing of becoming” (Braidotti 9). For Braidotti, transpositions are an ethics of-coming, of exchanges between bodies, of relationships in flux.
To become-other according to Braidotti, humans must push their bodies, stretching them perhaps past traditional limits, deterritorializing conventional functions and reterritorializing them into something new. The Foundling Father does just that, he pushes his body, his enslaved, dark body (to return to Foster’s notion of body type) to embody that of a white president by dressing as Lincoln and re-creating his death for customers. Through this process the Foundling Father’s body is deterritorialized as he becomes-Lincoln. This act of becoming-Lincoln functions as make-belief because the Foundling Father is dressing and performing the values of a very particular white man, Abraham Lincoln. By becoming-Lincoln and digging the great hole of history, however, the Foundling Father’s body is reterritorialized because he is in a sense creating a new story; a new imagined history, an alternate narrative that imagines Lincoln as a black man. His body and the discursive bodies of the past are being stretched past their conventional and traditional limits. Through this affective exchange between bodies, Parks “create[s] [a] new historical [event]” (5). To create this new event, Parks employs a philosophy of immanence, exploring concepts or virtual becomings that exist on the plane of immanence. Lincoln was a white man who held a significant position in a white system of power, through make-belief and affect Parks “re-writes the Time Line” imagining Lincoln as a black man who unearths the past in order to keep re-writing history.

The blurring of ecological and individual community, through the Foundling Father becoming-Lincoln and becoming-history, is how Parks “divines” a new historical record. The physical kinesis of his embodiment of Lincoln and the act of digging reterritorializes and remakes history. Dwight Conquergood discusses how performance can function as kinesis, “as movement, motion, fluidity, fluctuation, all those restless energies that transgress boundaries and trouble closure” (“Caravans and Carnivals” 138). Performance as movement has the power to
permeate borders, dismantle master narratives, and create new and different modes of understanding. Conquergood turns to Homi K. Bhabha’s definition of performance as an “action that incessantly insinuates, interrupts, interrogates, antagonizes, and decenters powerful master discourse” (138). “From [Victor] Turner’s emphatic view of performance as making, not faking,” notes Conquergood, “we move to Bhabha’s politically urgent view of performance as breaking and remaking” (138). Performance, for Conquergood, functions as transgression a “force which crashes and breaks through sedimented meanings and normative traditions and plunges us back into the vortices of political struggle” (“Beyond the Text” 58). According to Conquergood vis-à-vis Bhabha, performance, therefore, has the power to break and remake or reterritorialize discourse. Extending this logic to The America Play, the Foundling Father’s physical performance of Lincoln (and his becoming) within the landscape of the hole of history “interrupts, interrogates, antagonizes, and decenters [a] powerful master discourse,” (Conquergood 138), i.e., that of the canonized version of history, where much of African American history has been left out. Through becoming-history and acknowledging potential

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12 For Conquergood, performance functions as a way to decenter both the textual bias of Western culture and the emphasis placed on text by the academy. He argues “the move from scholarship about performance to scholarship as, scholarship by means of, performance strikes at the heart of academic politics and issues of scholarly authority” (“Beyond the Text” 58, emphasis in original). In other words, Conquergood advocates for an understanding of performance that includes ways doing, being, and moving in the world. These social actions function as performance because they possess the kinetic power to decenter and destabilize hegemonic systems.
events on the plane of immanence the Foundling Father dismantles master narratives and remakes history by unearthing conceptual possibilities. In the margins of “Possession,” Parks writes:

memory
un-remembered
dis-membered
re-member
“his bones cannot be found”
putting the body back together. (5)

These words poetically communicate the permeability of person and place, individual and ecological community, that the past exists in the dirt/land. To unearth dirt is to bring the past into the present. To exhume the “un-remembered,” “dis-membered” bones is to begin to “re-member,” creating “memory” where none had existed and in doing so the body can begin to be put back together. Through affect, the philosophy of immanence, and performative kinesis, the Foundling Father unearths the un-remembered past, excavating potential events and histories, therefore creating “‘new’ historical events” and allowing the silenced absent ‘bones’ to ‘sing’” (Parks 4-5).

Moving from a textual, dramaturgical analysis of dirt in The America Play, in the next chapter I explore the use of peat in Pina Bausch’s The Rite of Spring, as an element onstage with which the performers have to contend and negotiate. I analyze peat as a choreographic component that alters, inscribes, and marks the bodies of the dancers who partner with it.
CHAPTER III: “FILTHY” BODIES: PEAT AS VISCOUS PARTNER IN PINA BAUSCH’S

LE SACRE DU PRINTEMPS

A group of stagehands approach six dumpster-sized containers of peat which stand on a bare stage. They knock over the containers and disperse the peat across the floor with brooms, beginning downstage and working their way upstage, careful to smooth over their footprints so that the layer of peat bears no traces of their movement. Once the peat is evenly and smoothly distributed across the space, the stagehands disappear. A woman appears downstage left lying face-down on a silky swath of rectangular, red cloth.\(^{13}\) She begins exploring the space beneath her; she nuzzles her head down into the cloth, undulates her torso and legs, and oscillates her right arm and hand back and forth in the peat. As she does this, another female dancer runs downstage and then upstage. She crouches down in fifth position in an extreme grande plié, extending her knees far beyond her feet, she crosses her right arm across her chest, resting her hand on her left shoulder, while her left hand touches the ground, clenching and releasing fistfuls of peat that spill over between her fingers. Two more dancers appear upstage right and two other dancers cross from upstage left to downstage right, suddenly the stage is littered with dancers walking, running, dancing, and leaping through the peat. Soon, the level, evenly distributed peat is uneven and irregular, marked with footprints, lines, and inscriptions of the dancers’ movements. The dancers’ bodies also bear the markings of the movement as they become more and more coated with peat as the dance progresses.

\(^{13}\) As the piece progresses viewers realize that the red cloth is actually the dress that the Chosen One wears for her final dance.
The above is a description of scenes from *Le Sacre du Printemps* as captured by Wim Wenders in his 2011 documentary, *Pina*, which documents many of dancer and choreographer Pina Bausch’s creative works. The film presents scenes from several of Bausch’s famous shows including *Le Sacre du Printemps* but also offers rare glimpses of the handling and dispersion of the peat that was used in the production. In this chapter I shift my exploration of dirt as a metaphorical and dramaturgical mode of analysis, as in the previous chapter, to dirt as an actual physical element onstage. I perform a close reading\(^{14}\) of Pina Bausch’s *Le Sacre du Printemps*, hereafter referred to as *The Rite of Spring*, to examine the relationship between the dirt, or in this case peat, and the performers dancing in it. I explore both the symbolic utility and ultimately the implications of the actual physical presence of the peat on stage. I use ecocritical and feminist theory to investigate the interface between the natural element and human bodies onstage to illustrate how the peat challenges traditional Western notions of professional dance and performance.

Continuing my employment of the ecocritical theory of Una Chaudhuri and Elinor Fuchs, in this chapter I explore the symbolic and physical significance of the interactions between the peat and the dancer’s bodies. Adding feminist and ecofeminist theory informed by Stacy Alaimo, Karen Barad, Nancy Tuana, and Elizabeth Grosz, I investigate how the peat marks and inscribes the skin thus causing both the dancers’ bodies and the peat to become marked as “disgusting” or “abject,” per the cultural theory of William Ian Miller and Julia Kristeva. Finally I employ the performance theory of Philip Auslander to examine how the postmodern concept of absence and presence functions in the piece. In conclusion I argue that the peat marks the dancers’ bodies as

\(^{14}\) The scenes that I analyze are from the Wim Wenders film as well as recordings of several previous productions that are available on YouTube.
“dirty” and exposes a corporeality that is typically absent in traditional Western dance. I also contend that the peat, in *The Rite of Spring*, reduced to what Alaimo refers to as a “thing,” reasserts its agency by not remaining passive and immutable onstage, but rather acts as a partner in the movement pushing up against and inscribing the bodies of the dancers. Ultimately, I demonstrate Karen Barad’s claim that “matter matters,” in this case in performance ("Posthumanist Performativity" 140).

I begin by presenting a brief history of *The Rite of Spring* and Bausch’s implementation of peat in her version. The peat serves as both a symbolic and physical element onstage, and I explore both of these facets. To answer Chaudhuri’s call for “a turn toward the literal,” as a method for resisting “the use of nature as a metaphor,” I explore the environmental history of the peat discussing its inherent preservation abilities and commercial exploitation ("Ecological Theater" 29). Finally, I examine the peat, a more-than-human body, and the dancers’ human-bodies, to assert that the relationship between the two testifies to a rupture between people and the land they both inhabit and exploit. As Theresa J. May affirms, “ecocriticism . . . foreground[s] the body as a medium between material and metaphoric worlds” (101). In *The Rite of Spring*, the body, more specifically, the skin, acts as a medium upon which the peat and other bodily secretions inscribe. These markings, read by viewers as “dirty,” when examined through an ecocritical lens are revealed to be constructed rules and restrictions placed on the body that hierarchically categorize it as above non-human bodies and separate from the “natural” world.

**History of The Rite of Spring**

*The Rite of Spring* (1913) was first staged in Paris at the Ballet Russes by Vaslav Nijinsky with a score composed by Igor Stravinsky. Through dance and music, *The Rite of
Spring tells the story of a young virgin who is selected and sacrificed as part of an annual fertility rite. Once the virgin is chosen, she dances to her death, thereby ensuring the return of spring. Regarding Nijinsky’s original production, dance historian Joan Cass, in Dancing through History, situates his choices within the context of primitive Russian folk history:

Stravinsky’s score created the mood both for Nijinsky and for the audience. The composer had set out to create an exciting image of pagan Russia in its annual reawakening from the frozen sleep of winter. His explicit scenario describes an ancient rite of fertility in which tribal elders choose and dedicate the tribe’s fairest virgin, who must then dance until she dies of exhaustion . . . this sacrifice is intended to ensure fertility, both for the people in the primitive village and for their spring crops. (173)

In Theatre, Sacrifice, Ritual: Exploring Forms of Political Theatre, Ericka Fischer-Lichte affirms that the ritual portrayed in The Rite of Spring is probably based on an anthropological theory regarding the Spring Demon Ritual. “The dancers represented different groups or members of an ancient Slavic community, celebrating the coming of spring,” notes Fischer-Lichte, “The feast ends with a virgin sacrifice: one of the young girls sacrifices herself ‘in a great holy dance, the great sacrifice’” (65). Such religious festivals and rituals were tied to an agrarian cycle in which seasonal shifts were closely associated with fertility and crops.

Nijinksy’s jarring choreography set against Stravinsky’s dissonant score created a dynamic and provocative image of this ancient ritual. “The dancers were seen in strange, spasmodic, quivering motions, with their knees and toes turned in, and their heads leaning sideways on one arm which was in turn supported by the other fist,” describes Cass. “Bodies were rigid or bent awkwardly. Groups appeared in a mass, rather than in geometrically clear
patterns” (Cass 173). The choreography challenged traditional notions of Western dance, namely ballet, as the dancers performed with their bodies low to the ground and their feet turned in. These anti-balletic movements would not have been the conventional type of dance performed by the Ballet Russes. Furthermore, this “modern” form of movement would not have been the typical fare of this venue, so audiences viewing the production may have been surprised with the break from classical ballet. Stravinsky’s score also ventured out of the conventional form. Cass describes it as possessing “striking rhythms of pounding intensity,” “complex broken meter,” and “bitonal sound” (173). The combination of agitating music with spastic dancing bodies created a frenzied energy on stage.

The Rite of Spring has had many incarnations including adaptations by Mary Wigman, Leonid Massine, Martha Graham, Maurice Béjart, and Pina Bausch. Each choreographic adaptation illuminates different physical movements and facets of the ritual sacrifice. Concerning the adaptations Cass claims, “[a]ll of these works dealing with the rite of spring are about tribal sacrifice that celebrates the cycle of the year of life. They honor the promise of spring—the season of fertile growth, mating, and the rebirth after the frozen dead of winter” (xi). Even though choreographers create their own adaptation of the piece, at the core of each production is the ritual of virgin sacrifice, the spilling of blood into the earth, which must be completed in order for spring to arrive.

Bausch’s adaptation, first staged in 1975 at the Opera House Wuppertal in Germany, featured Stravinsky’s original score and new choreography. In contrast with Nijinsky who situated his staging in pagan Russia, Bausch’s production takes place in an unspecified time and location. The production does not use scenic elements or props; only a layer of peat covers the stage. The male dancers wear pants while the female dancers wear thin, translucent, beige
dresses. The Chosen One, the sacrificial virgin, wears a red, diaphanous dress. As the dancers move, peat flies into the air, sticking to their bodies and costumes, and when the production is finished the exhausted dancers are covered in dirt and sweat. As they dance, their bodies are frequently hunched over and close to the ground. All their movements radiate from the core, making it possible for the dancers to execute contractions and isolations in rapid succession. Once the Chosen One is selected she begins dancing slowly and quickly works her way into a frenzied, manic series of movements involving jumping, hunching over, contractions of the torso, isolation of several body parts, and circular motions of the arms. As her dancing accelerates, the movements become more frenetic, causing part of her dress to fall to her waist, exposing a breast. She continues dancing and the other side of her dress plummets. With her hands she gestures down to the earth and then up to the sky, she repeats these movements with fervor and passion until she collapses to her death. Her body, exhausted and covered with sweat and peat, becomes one with the earth.

Peat is not Bausch’s only foray into using natural elements in her work. She uses water, grass, leaves and sand in other pieces. On working with natural elements Bausch claims, “It’s a big joy to dance in the earth . . . we can get sweaty, we can have evening dresses get completely wet . . . [I]f you walk on the grass it’s silent, it’s soft, or there are mosquitoes around. It has smell. It has a certain temperature” (qtd. in Williams 107). For Bausch, it is about the kinesthetic experience of working with natural elements. What does the element feel like? Smell like? Look like? Sound like? How does it affect the way the body moves and experiences the space? The element is a partner in the choreography. In an interview with Glenn Loney, Bausch remarks on why she tends to use natural elements in her work:
It sounds funny to say it, but our work is a mixture of elements. I don’t know what it is. They dance; people talk; others sing. We use actors, too. And we use musicians in the works. It’s theatre, really. For us, the stage—the settings—are important, too. We aren’t just dancing in a room, in a space. Where it is, the location, the atmosphere where the movement happens, that matters in my work.

Location and natural elements are not mere settings or backdrops for Bausch’s work; they are an integral part of her entire composition. While Bausch discusses the joys of using natural elements in her work, the way she utilizes them is often not joyful or life affirming. Her implementation of natural elements, particularly in interchanges with human bodies, is often unnerving, violent, and jarring. Take for instance Viktor, where a dancer places bloody strips of packaged raw meat into her pointe shoes. As she dances, blood oozes from her shoes. Meanwhile, onstage performers placed above her shovel dirt that falls down on her body. Or Nelken, a piece where the stage is carpeted with thousands of carnations upon which the dancers perform various scenarios, eventually crushing most of the flowers. Or perhaps Gerbirge, where a dancer “drowns” in a sea of felled pine trees, their bright green needles making them look as though they were just plucked from a forest (Cody 127). These are not bodies and nature in harmony, but rather bodies and elements out of context and at odds with one another. In “Woman, Man, Dog, Tree: Two Decades of Intimate and Monumental Bodies in Pina Bausch’s Tanztheater,” Gabrielle Cody asserts,

Bausch’s necessary cruelty extends to her use of “real” nature, torn from its organic root and bluntly placed in the artificial enclosure of a theatre. This gesture—the mythical rendering of a catastrophic, global displacement—is in and
of itself her most powerful metaphor for the fragmentation of our condition through the cultural representation of organic bodies. Such violence can seem tasteless to some. (127)

For Cody, the excessive use of natural elements on stage seems vulgar and tasteless, and she critiques Bausch for her violent uprooting of “nature,” even though it could be argued that Bausch does it purposefully to make a point. Cody asserts, “In this sense, Pina Bausch—a quintessential witness of the postmodern condition, whose pieces are fraught with images of consumerism and waste—may be writing the truest most credible naturalism of our time” (129). Bausch’s work, which features bodies and “nature” unsettlingly out of sync both with themselves and each other, seems ripe for ecocritical examination.

The peat, layered on the stage floor, is an element brought to the production by Bausch and her scenic designer Rolf Borzik. In *Pina Bausch-Wuppertal Dance Theatre*, Norbert Servos claims that the use of the peat is “not only a metaphor relative to the piece, but directly influences the dancers’ movements, lending them a tangible weight by physically recording the traces of the sacrificial ritual. The bodies rewrite the story of Rite in the earth” (30). The peat is an integral component of the piece as it acts as another body onstage, a partner in the choreography. The peat aligns with Susan Leigh Foster’s conception of choreography as it “stipulates[s] the kinds of actions performed and their sequence or progression” (2). The dancers’ bodies must negotiate with this element as they move through the space. As the piece progresses and the dancers begin to sweat, the peat flying through the air begins to stick to them, becoming one with their body and movement. Servos remarks that by the end of the piece, “The initially smooth surface is at the end a desolate battlefield” (30). The peat functions both as material matter and symbolic metaphor. Metaphorically it represents the earth’s soil and the ritual spilling
of blood that must occur in order for spring to arrive. Physically it is a natural element on stage that the dancers must acknowledge as something that alters their movement and marks their bodies. “The dancers have no need to act their growing exhaustion,” notes Servos, “it is genuine as they dance against the resistance of ankle-deep earth” (30). Traces of the dancers’ movement are imprinted in the dirt, the dancing leaves marks, a physical record of the bodies’ movement pressed upon the earth. The dirt momentarily records the actions of the dance until it is written over by other movement. The physical presence of bodies in motion is jarring because it reminds the audience that one of these bodies will have to be terminated to complete the Rite. The present bodies moving onstage accentuate the fact that soon one body will be absent, it will cease to move, in order to bring about spring.

Peat

In *The Rite of Spring*, the peat creates an intersection between the physical land and the bodies performing in and with it. As discussed in Chapter Two, Chaudhuri asserts that “Theater ecology . . . will call for a turn toward the literal, a programmatic resistance to the use of nature as metaphor” (“Ecological Theater” 29). According to Chaudhuri, this “turn” will prompt questions such as “What does representation—the fact itself of mimesis, of mediation—do to the meaning of nature?” instead of previously asked questions like “What does the indoor wilderness stand for?” (29). In this section, I explore the “turn toward the literal” to contemplate what the use of peat communicates about conventional conceptions between humans and nature. While there were many sources of dirt that Bausch could have used, she choose peat, an element with unique properties, a complex chemical composition, and an ethically charged environmental
history. By unpacking the biological composition, environmental history, and historical implications of this element, I demonstrate that the use of peat in *The Rite of Spring*, as a natural element that affects the staging and the dancers, conveys specific meanings that are rooted in its distinct ecological, geographical, and cultural situatedness.

Ecologist John T. Curtis defines peat as “partially decomposed plant remains which form stratified layers in old lake basins or other wet grounds” (237). Peat is found in mires or bogs, wetland areas that are not purely land or water that are typically located throughout North America and Europe, with a particularly high density in Germany, Scandinavia, and Ireland. The peat’s chemical balance and acidic environment situate it as an excellent preservative medium of both organic and inorganic material. In “Bog Science” Jarrett A. Lobell and Samir S. Patel explain the chemical composition that allows peat to have such great preservative power:

> Bogs form when moss accumulates in low-lying patches of land. The moss saturates the soil with water and prevents oxygen and nutrients from circulating in. The bacteria normally responsible for the breakdown of organic material cannot function without oxygen, leaving behind a wet, mostly undecomposed mash. The growth of more moss on top continues the cycle, covering old peat with new. This buried organic material breaks down a little and releases a complex and poorly understood cocktail of chemicals, some of which have preservative properties. (“Bog Science”)

Bogs are typically nutrient poor because of sparse decomposition and recycling of elements in the soil, but their unique physical and chemical constitution makes them a hospitable habitat for

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15 While the choice of peat seems very specific, I could not find any sources detailing why Bausch chose peat instead of another element, or where the production team acquired the peat.
many rare carnivorous plants such as sundews, pitcher plants, and venus fly traps. Because of their unusual chemical amalgam, bogs are also excellent preservatives of organic matter, both of human and non-human bodies.

In many countries, peat is collected as a source of fuel. Farmers harvest peat by digging ditches and holes that allow for water drainage. Once the water has been removed, the peat is left to dry out; this process eliminates many of the organisms and chemicals that reside in the peat. Once dry, the peat is harvested, packaged, and shipped to be sold as fuel or gardening mulch. In industrial countries, peat is harvested faster than it can re-grow (approximately 1mm per year, or 1 inch every 25.4 years), therefore, most agencies do not consider it a renewable resource. Because of this, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), International Energy Agency (IEA), United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), and World Wildlife Fund (WWF), all classify peat as a fossil fuel (“What is Peat?”). The International Panel of Climate Control (IPCC), however, reclassified peat in 2000 as a “slow-renewable” fuel (“Peat as Energy Resource”).

Not only does peat harvesting cause ecological damage, as detailed above, but it also risks destroying or eliminating preserved historical artifacts. The mining of peat exhibits a literal destruction of the past, for the consumption of energy in the present, as bogs have been preserving bodies and other artifacts for thousands for years. According to Lobell and Patel, “For more than 10,000 years, peat bogs, mostly in northwestern Europe, have been the final resting place for hundreds, maybe thousands, of bodies. The first reports of their discovery appeared in the 18th century, and they have been found, usually by peat cutters, ever since” (“Bog Bodies Rediscovered”). “There are very old bog bodies,” assert Lobel and Patel, “the earliest is the Koelbjerg Woman from Denmark, dated to about 8000 B.C.—medieval bog bodies, and even the
remains of Soviet fighter pilot Boris Lazarev, who was shot down over northern Russia in 1943” (“Bog Bodies Rediscovered”). Farmers have discovered hundreds of human remains in Northwestern Europe that archeologists believe could date back to the Iron Age (500 B.C. – A.D. 100) (“Bog Bodies Rediscovered”). Archeologists believe that many of these remains may be connected to ancient Celtic rituals. Lobel and Patel note, “For the Celtic tribes that lived during this period, bogs were sacred settings for religious rituals, including dedications, offerings, and sacrifices” (“Bog Bodies Rediscovered”). Dr. Anne Ross, an archeologist specializing in Celtic history, conducted research on the “bog body” unearthed in 1984 that became known as the “Lindow Man.” After analyzing the body Dr. Ross came to the conclusion that the “Lindow Man” was probably killed as part of a religious Druidic rite. In “‘Bog Man’ Reveals Story of Ancient Ritual,” Malcolm W. Browne comments on the importance of such findings as the “Lindow Man”:

> Archeologists lament the fact that ancient Celtic civilization left no written history. Much of what is known about the history of early Celts, or Gauls, as they were known to the Romans, was recorded by their Roman enemies, notably Julius Caesar. The Romans sought to destroy Druidism because of the threat it posed to their power, and at least some Roman descriptions of the Celts must be discounted as propaganda. Scholars therefore welcome indirect evidence of the kind that Lindow Man has brought to light. (“‘Bog Man’ Reveals Story of Ancient Ritual”)

Preserved remains such as the “Lindow Man,” among others, aid archeologists and scientists in understanding elements of the past that have literally been buried. Much like the gravedigger in The America Play, archaeologists excavate peat like a historical record, digging into the earth to uncover fragments of the past in order to bring them to bear on our understanding of human
experience. Browne asserts that bodies and artifacts found in the European peat “illuminate the history of the continent’s myth-shrouded antiquity” (“‘Bog Man’ Reveals Story of Ancient Ritual”). Because peat harvesting risks destroying and/or eliminating preserved historical artifacts, Dr. Ross warns time is running out, “within several weeks the peat cutters will have removed all the Iron Age peat deposits where Lindow Man was found, and a great deal of archeological material may have been missed. It’s a pity that we never seem to find enough money or time to explore our origins as fully as we might” (qtd. in “‘Bog Man’ Reveals Story of Ancient Ritual”).

In “A Report Card on Ecocriticism,” Simon Estok claims, “ecocriticism has distinguished itself, debates notwithstanding, first by the ethical stand it takes, its commitment to the natural world as an important thing rather than simply as an object of thematic study, and secondly, by its commitment to making connections” (“A Report Card on Ecocriticism”). In other words, ecocriticism encourages not only literal connections between humans and the more-than-human world, but contemplation of the ethical relations between the two. In The Rite of Spring, ecological and historical traces of the bog from which the peat was removed charge the performance space. In this way, the biological and cultural context of the peat “matter” onstage. In “Posthumanist Performativity,” Karen Barad argues that all bodies, not just human bodies matter:

Material conditions matter, not because they “support” particular discourses that are the actual generative factors in the formation of bodies, but rather because matter comes to matter through the iterative intra-activity of the world in its becoming. The point is not merely that there are important material factors in
addition to discursive ones; rather, the issue is the conjoined material-discursive 
nature of constraints, conditions, and practices. (141)

For Barad, language has been given too much power, and materiality has been turned “into a 
matter of language or some other form of cultural representation” (120). She argues that matter is 
not passive or immutable, but, like language and culture, possesses its own agency and 
historicity. Barad proclaims that “matter matters.” In Material Feminisms, Stacy Alaimo and 
Susan Hekman concur with Barad when they state:

Nature can no longer be imagined as a pliable resource for industrial production 
or social construction. Nature is agentic—it acts, and those actions have 
consequences for both the human and the non-human world. We need a way of 
understanding the agency, significance, and ongoing transformative power of the 
world—ways that account for myriad “intra-actions” . . . between phenomena that 
are material, discursive, human, more-than-human, corporeal, and technological. 

(5)

Matter, for Barad, and nature, for Alaimo and Hekman, can no longer be understood as passive, 
and immutable, something controlled by humans, because matter has agency, historicity, and 
significance. Indeed, they argue, its acts affect both the human and more-than-human world. In 
“Transcorporeal Feminisms and the Ethical Space of Nature,” Alaimo asserts, “Acknowledging 
the agency of the more-than-human world is crucial for environmental ethics because it 
challenges the prevalent practice of “thingification” . . . which, in this case, means the reduction 
of lively emergent, intra-acting phenomena into passive, distinct resources for human use and 
control” (249). Acknowledging the agency of nature and matter rejects the understanding of
these complex phenomena as mere “things” and accepts that they are intricate intra-related phenomena.

The peat used in *The Rite of Spring* creates an intersection between the physical land and the bodies of those performing in and with it. Elinor Fuchs and Chaudhuri’s notion of landscape is particularly generative here, as it illuminates the ways in which the peat represents a distinct geography. In *Land/Scape/Theater*, Fuchs and Chaudhuri present landscape as the new spatial paradigm of theatre. “*Landscape,*” they assert, “has particular value as a mediating term between space and place . . . [in that] It is inside space, one might say, but contains place” (3, emphasis in original). For Chaudhuri and Fuchs, place resides within landscape, and landscape resides within space. Thus, landscape functions as a connecting element between space and place; it exists within a space but could include many places.

The peat in *The Rite of Spring* in this case acts as a connective membrane between the space of the theatre and the geographic place where the rite occurred. It is a physical manifestation of the earth on which blood was spilled to bring about spring. It represents not only the unspecified geographic location where the ritual occurred, but also the unspecified bog(s) from which it was extracted. The peat is another body onstage, a body with both symbolic and physical attributes. It functions as an element of landscape macrocosmically representing the earth and microcosmically representing European bogs. The literal presentation of a peat bog onstage is especially significant because bogs preserve human remains, some of which, like the Lindow Man, are considered to be the result of pagan and religious rituals. *The Rite of Spring* portrays a choreographic performance of a ritual in which the Chosen One is killed and collapses dead into the peat, the same peat that was harvested from a bog that potentially contains actual remnants of victims of sacrificial ritual. The dancers are performing a staged
version of a rite in an element that actually absorbed and preserved sacrificial human remains. The peat does not simply function as a scenic element but rather as an element of performative landscape, a membrane connecting the dancers, bogs, and the remnant ecological and historical particles that may reside within them (much like the African burial ground and hole of history in Chapter Two).

The peat as it is utilized in *The Rite of Spring* is reduced to a “thing,” something that is hauled out, spread on the stage, swept up, and stored in containers until the next performance. In fact, there is little to differentiate the appropriation of the peat onstage from its harvesting as a commercial resource. From an ecocritical perspective, the element’s use in the performance is a provocative reminder of the ethical implications of peat as a natural resource and source of fossil fuel. As May contends, ecocriticism “[maps] the connections between social injustice, human and other bodies, and environmental exploitation” (101). An ecocritical approach to this performance, therefore, highlights a connection between the peat’s reduction as a mere “thing” harvested as an energy source and as a “thing” used as a scenic element.

The peat (as part of nature, Alaimo’s broader claim), however, as Alaimo reminds us, is not a mere “thing,” “passive, immutable, something controlled by humans;” because it is an “intra-acting phenomena,” through its physical and chemical composition has the agency to preserve human and non-human remains as well as other artifacts. Located in a bog, the peat would “agentically” absorb and preserve objects and/or bodies, but removed from its habitat and

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16 While the exact etymology of peat is unknown, the *Oxford English Dictionary* notes that it could perhaps be a derivative of the word “piece,” an English word with a Celtic base. If indeed it is derived from piece, something cut from a whole, this would seem to have a significant connection to its environmental history as an element severed and harvested from its habitat.
placed onstage the peat is absorbed by objects and/or bodies with which it comes into contact thus, inversing its inherent relationship with these materials. In the subsequent sections I expand the idea that the peat “matters as matter” onstage by examining how peat asserts its agency through clinging, writing, and inscribing on the bodies of the dancers.

In “Viscous Porosity: Witnessing Katrina,” Nancy Tuana employs the conceptual metaphor “viscous porosity,” to “better understand the rich interactions between things through which subjects are constituted out of relationality” (188). For Tuana, Hurricane Katrina demonstrated the “viscous porosity” of categories like “natural,” “human-made,” “social,” and “biological” (189). “Katrina, then,” notes Tuana, “is emblematic of the viscous porosity between humans and our environment, between social practices and natural phenomena” (193). Tuana uses the concept viscous porosity rather than fluidity because fluidity “is too likely to promote a notion of open possibilities and to overlook sites of resistance and opposition or attention to the complex ways in which material agency is often involved in interactions” (194). Viscous porosity serves as a generative method for thinking through the relationship between the peat and the dancers’ bodies. The viscous porosity between the two demonstrates how traditional categories such as “nature” and “culture,” “dirty” and “clean” are vacillating constructions that testify to a rupture between people and place.

17 The peat still has absorption abilities and absorbs the sweat, skin cells, etc. of the dancers. The exchange between the organisms on the dancers’ bodies and the organisms in this element is an idea to which I will return and discuss at greater length in the next chapter.
“Dirty” Bodies

When *New York Times* journalist Alan Riding interviewed Bausch about her choreographic process for *The Rite of Spring*, she responded:

The first thing I did was to talk to them about what “Sacre” [rite] means to me . . . . The starting point is the music. There are so many feelings in it; it changes constantly. There is also much fear in it. I thought, how would it be to dance knowing you have to die? How would you feel, how would I feel? The Chosen One is special, but she dances knowing the end is death. The dancers listened carefully with big ears. They seemed very interested. (*The New York Times* 1997)

As Bausch indicates in the interview quoted above, her process for *The Rite of Spring* was true to her signature creative method, grounded in inquiry, which elicits choreography from individual’s particular emotions and experiences.18

Bausch, drawing on the European expressive modern dance traditions of Rudolf Laban, Mary Wigman, and her teacher Kurt Jooss, creates choreography based on the individual experiences of her performers.19 Bausch does not pick her dancers based on aesthetic or ability, 

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18 Discussing Bausch’s process, dancer Dominique Mercy remarks, “She starts with questions. For instance, in the one piece she says; “Tell me what you ate last night,” or something to do with Christmas, or six different ways to be sad or angry, and of course with time, because this lasts quite a while, the questions become more complicated. Each time it’s always your own experience. Even if you take things from the outside, it’s the way you see them. It’s yourself which is on stage” (qtd. in Williams 106).

19 Bausch’s training began in 1955, at the Folkwang School in Germany, under director Kurt Jooss. Jooss trained under Rudolf Laban and Mary Wigman, two dominant figures in the German
as she is not interested in creating a company with a uniform surface cosmetic or dance technique, but rather on their personalities. Her performers, however, are trained dancers, but many of them do not fit the mold of a “typical” dancer in terms or body type or age.

Discussing social and cultural constructions of the body, in *Volatile Bodies*, Elizabeth Grosz asserts:

> I hope to show that the body, or rather bodies, cannot be adequately understood as ahistorical, precultural, or natural objects in any simple way; they are not only inscribed, marked, engraved, by social pressures external to them but are the products, the direct effects, of the very social constitution of nature itself. (x)

For Grosz, bodies are not neutral objects; they are shaped and marked in specific ways through cultural and social structures. Grosz comments on the many ways that bodies are inscribed and marked:

> Not only does what the body takes into itself (diet in the first instance) effect a “surface inscription” of the body; the body is also incised by various forms of adornment. Through exercise and habitual patterns of movement, through facet of European Modern dance, who considered dance an external manifestation of an internal impulse. They taught that movement was initiated through the core of the body, employed gravitational force, was weighted and rooted in the earth.

20 Bausch extracts emotional performances “through a unique creative process in which she mines her dancers’ own experiences for movement gestures and phrases. ‘Do something you're ashamed of,’ or ‘Move your favorite body part,’ she might instruct them” (Tu, 70).
Through movement, diet, clothing, and other ornamentation, bodies are inscribed and read in certain ways. While this is true of all bodies, what I am interested in for the purposes of this chapter is how this applies to dancing bodies, particularly the dancers in Bausch’s *Rite of Spring*. Dancers’ bodies, in obvious ways, are shaped and marked through their training. Technique and diet are just some of the factors that shape dancer’s bodies and influence their movement patterns and potentials. Bausch’s company proves an interesting case study because she does not teach a particular technique; rather, dancers join her company with various dance backgrounds and skill sets. While Bausch will begin her rehearsals with a ballet warm-up, her choreography emerges out of the personal experiences, abilities, and techniques her performers bring to the table. Because her work, designated as tanztheater, exceeds “traditional” parameters of dance and often ventures into more “performative” realms, her dancers are prepared to surpass the bounds of dance, to push their bodies and performances past what “traditional” dancers may consider comfortable.21

21 The concept of tanztheater (dance theater) speaks to the marriage of dance, theatre, and emotion. In “Tanztheater: a new form,” Royd Climenhaga describes tanztheater thusly, “[t]anztheater seeks a form of representation that embodies the contradictions and frustrations of life and presents them in living form. We are confronted not with the stabilizing form we usually look to art to affirm, but with a dynamic system that provides an entrance point for our engagement with the world, and that destabilizes our assumptions and causes us to look anew” (130).
One way that Bausch’s dancers push their bodies in *The Rite of Spring* is by dancing in the ankle-deep peat. Instead of enveloping and preserving bodies as it would in a bog, the peat sticks and absorbs into the costumes and skin of the dancers, marking and inscribing the bodies as texts. “[The] analogy between the body and a text remains a close one,” remarks Grosz, “the tools of bodily engraving—social, surgical, epistemic, disciplinary—all mark, indeed constitute, bodies in culturally specific ways: the writing instruments—pen stylus, spur, laser beam, clothing diet exercise—function to incise the body’s blank page” (117). The peat, like a pen, laser, or diet regime, writes on the bodies, which become darker and more textured as the piece progresses.

The peat inscribes a particular organ of the body: the skin. It mingles with perspiration, causing different patterns, textures, and colors to emerge on each of the individual dancers. In *Thinking Through the Skin*, Sara Ahmed and Jackie Stacey argue that “the skin is always open to being read,” and therefore “we can consider the ways in which these various techniques for reading produce skins in specific and determinate ways” (1). Concerning different ways that skin is read, they assert “in consumer culture we are encouraged to read skin, especially feminine skin, as something that needs to be worked upon in order to be protected from the passage of time or the severity of the external world, and in order to retain its marker of gender difference in the softness of its feel” (1). Ahmed and Stacey point toward anti-aging, cellulite reduction, and stretch mark reducing cream, products marketed to smooth skin, and pressure to cover bodily traces of illness and surgery as ways that skin is policed and forced to adhere to conventional Western conceptions of beauty. The desire for smooth skin is a desire for something that conceals signs of time and labor. The many different methods used to achieve smooth, soft, blemish free skin indicate that this aesthetic is not something that is easily or “naturally”
attained. Ahmed and Stacey note, “The marking of skin is linked to both its temporal and spatial dimensions. Skin is temporal in the sense that it is affected by the passing of time or, to put it differently, it materializes that passing in the accumulation of marks, of wrinkles, lines and creases, as well as literal disintegration of the skin” (2). Skin as an organ of the body expands and contracts, it shifts and changes over time, it is a literal reminder that time is passing and that bodies have the capability of changing. Thus, skin is an aesthetic and biological indicator of age and mortality and in this way can be read as a text. Grosz reminds us that these “natural” and “unnatural” skin practices function as writing tools:

These writing tools use various inks with different degrees of permanence, and they create textual traces that are capable of being written over, retraced, redefined, written in contradictory ways, creating out of the body text a palimpsest, a historical chronicle of prior and later traces, some of which have been effaced, others of which have been emphasized, producing the body as a text which is as complicated and indeterminate as any literary manuscript. (117)

In The Rite of Spring, the dancers dance, run, fall, twist, and spasm in the peat. When the piece begins, the dancers and their costumes are clean but as the piece progresses they both accumulate more and more sweat and peat. As the sweat and peat continue to accrue on the dancers’ skin something interesting happens: the viewer becomes more aware of the dancers’ bodies. Take for example the women who are clothed in flimsy, beige dresses, underneath wearing only beige underwear. As the piece advances, the women begin to sweat, but as individuals their bodies produce sweat differently and it appears in different places on their skin. The viewer becomes aware of the individuality of the dancers as their sweat is visible on different and various parts of their bodies. Because each dancer sweats in specific areas, the peat
sticks to individual’s skin differently, causing the dancing bodies to become mixed compositions of sweat and peat. The sweat renders the already flimsy dresses see-through, so viewers now notice not only sweat and dirt, but the bodies underneath the dresses, specifically the dancers’ breasts, as they are not wearing bras. Through this act, the audience becomes aware of the various shapes and sizes of the bodies beneath the dresses. The peat, sweat, and visible breasts draw attention to the bodies and skins of the performers. Bodies, sweat, and dirt, elements typically camouflaged and absent from traditional ballet, call attention to the dancers’ labor, fatigue, and the demanding nature of the choreography. “The energy demanded from the dancers is not disguised, it confronts the audience directly,” remarks Servos, “No smiles mask the strain, it is made audible by the dancers’ heavy breathing” (30). Body parts and fluids, dirt, effort, and labor, elements that are typically made to appear absent from traditional ballet are very present in Bausch’s Rite of Spring. What is absent, though, is the sound of the dancing (traditionally audible on a typical bare sprung wooden dance floor) as the peat absorbs and muffles the noise, making the violent, weighted dancing eerily quiet.

Perhaps this raw and unapologetic presentation of bodies and their functions is what prompted the disdain of dance critic Arlene Croce. In her 1984 review of The Rite of Spring’s American premiere she proclaimed, “By getting sweaty dancers dirty, the earth floor adds an element of yuck to “Sacre” which the other pieces don’t have, but the dead leaves and the grass

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22 Perhaps most famous for a particular physical aesthetic in ballet is George Balanchine, who desired that his female dancers’ possess long, graceful legs, small hips and breasts, and absolutely no fat. He thought that the female ballerina should be tiny and delicate; audiences should not notice dancer’s bodies, but rather their movements, which should appear effervescent and effortless.
are bad enough: they made the Brooklyn Academy, which isn’t air conditioned, smell like a stable. Naturally, you don’t dance on such stages” (194). Croce articulates that the sweaty, dirty bodies dancing in the peat created a “yuck” factor, painting a picture of the production as “sweating, heavy breathing, clammy bodies slapping against one another, peeling wet clothes from clammy bodies” (193). The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines “yuck” as an “expression of strong distaste or disgust,” “messy, unpleasant, or distasteful material,” and “the feeling of horror, revulsion, or disgust” (“Yuck”). Thus, for Croce, the “dirty,” “sweaty,” “clammy” bodies dancing in the performance were unpleasant and disgusting. In *The Anatomy of Disgust*, William Ian Miller argues that, “[d]isgust. . . convey[s] a strong sense of aversion to something perceived as dangerous because of its powers to contaminate, infect, or pollute by proximity, contact or ingestion” (2). Feelings of disgust often signal that something may be potentially dangerous to the body. Similarly, in *That’s Disgusting*, Rachel Herz alleges that feelings of disgust are linked to “animal-like” behaviors, acts that are not considered “civilized,” or “polite” (43). “To maintain our separation from lowly beasts, we should not be seen, especially in public, behaving like beasts . . . having sex, grunting, farting, belching, being naked, scratching ourselves . . . being unwashed, and squatting to urinate,” asserts Herz. “We are disgusted by people who behave like this, because they do not uphold the conventions of civility that we expect and respect, and because by breaking these rules they bring our inherent animal nature to force” (Herz 43). For Miller and Herz, humans are repulsed and disgusted by certain acts and bodily functions because they remind us that we are, indeed, a part of the animal kingdom and that the viscous porosity between our bodies and other bodies make them susceptible to contagions and pollutants.
Croce’s disgust concerning the “yuck” onstage seems to illustrate the notion that particular cultural venues, such as the Brooklyn Academy of Music, come imbued with certain expectations, such as a “natural” element like peat or “dirty,” “sweaty” bodies do not have any place in a “cultural” venue like the Brooklyn Academy of Music because they remind viewers that the separation between the human and more-than-human world is a construction. As discussed in Chapter Two vis-à-vis the theory of Anne McClintock, dirt acts as proof of labor and its presence marks bodies as “dirty,” uncivilized, low-class, and immoral. The dirt and sweat visible on the dancer’s bodies is an indication of the viscous porosity between the “environment . . . social practices and natural phenomena” (Tuana 193).

Croce’s disdain of the “yuck” factor aligns with Julia Kristeva’s argument in The Powers of Horror, that abjection disturbs order. Kristeva, argues it is “not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite” (4). Abjection is threatening to order because it jeopardizes the system by transgressing boundaries and regulations. As an example of how the abject compromises systematized order Kristeva discusses the corpse:

A wound with blood and pus, or the sickly, acrid smell of sweat, of decay, does not signify death. No . . . refuse and corpses show me what I permanently thrust aside in order to live. These bodily fluids, this defilement, this shit are what life withstands . . . There, I am at the border of my condition as a living being. (3, emphasis in original)

Abjection is a liminal space that reminds humans of their mortality, while simultaneously emphasizing their state of being alive. The seepage of fluids and stenches from the body transgress constructed borders, positions, and rules, reminding humans that they are not above
death and that one day their bodies will return to the earth. Similarly, in *Purity and Danger* Mary Douglas analyzes dirt as an abject element that represents disorder. Douglas argues, “Dirt offends against order. Eliminating it is not a negative movement, but a positive effort to organize the environment . . . it is a creative movement, an attempt to relate form to function, to make unity of experience” (2). For Douglas, dirt creates discomfort because it creeps into our attempts to make sense and order of our environment.

The abject elements of sweat and dirt highlight the corporeality and viscous porosity of the body. The composition of perspiration and peat on the dancers’ bodies remind viewers that the skin, conceived as a smooth and blemish-free surface, and the body, understood as a neutral form, are constructions. Rather, the body is a porous assemblage that is often affixed with regulations as a means to impose order. Miller notes that rules are often placed on the skin, because skin is considered dangerous and “it threatens or promises (depending on the context) the prospect of nakedness” (53). “The suppression of skin means clothing, that surcharged emblem that marks us off from savage and beast and from one another by rank or status, gender and age,” asserts Miller. “Without clothing, man and woman were unaccommodated, unfit, unlocatable in the cultural order, neither man really nor beast, nor all that desirable either” (Miller 53). Clothing, or in other words, the repression of naked skin, creates order because it allows the human body to be hierarchically categorized above animals and other organisms, the exposing of skin and other abject elements, however, interferes with this order because it reminds humans that they are not distinctly separate from non-human animals. In this way, abjection in the form of peat and sweat create discomfort in *The Rite of Spring*, because they call attention to the constructed ways that bodies and bodily functions are presented, or, more accurately, camouflaged in mainstream dance performance.
The sweat and peat inscribe the dancers, and their bodies function as sites of knowledge and producers of meaning, per Donna Haraway’s theory of bodily production discussed in Chapter Two. Likewise, in “Saint Orlan: Ritual as Violent Spectacle and Cultural Criticism,” Alyda Faber discusses the work of performance artist Saint Orlan, who proclaims her body to be her artistic medium. Saint Orlan created a series of surgical performances in which she recorded and publicized multiple cosmetic surgeries she had performed on her body. In this way, her body is read as text when her skin is manipulated and inscribed by surgical tools. Faber contends, “[Orlan’s] intention is to expose the invisible practice of cosmetic surgery, ‘desacralizing the surgical act and making a private act transparent, public’” (119). Saint Orlan uses her skin as a medium to make public or present the private or absent act of cosmetic surgery. The surgical tools write on her skin, temporarily creating bruises, incisions, and blemishes, as a means to, in theory, eventually produce younger, smoother, more conventionally beautiful skin. Similarly, the skin of the dancers serve as a medium to make public the often absent or masked existence of bodily secretions and dirt, thus bringing these abject elements into the spotlight.

*The Rite of Spring* brings dirt, sweat, and bodies front and center in a way that forces the audience to view and confront these “unpleasantries.” “Bodies become emblems, heralds, badges, theaters, tableaux, of social laws and rights, illustrations and exemplifications of law,” notes Grosz, “informing and rendering pliable flesh into determinate bodies, producing the flesh as a point of departure and a locus of incision, a point of ‘reality’ or ‘nature’ understood (fictionally) as prior to, and as the raw material of, social practices” (118). By allowing the sweat and dirt to permeate the dancers’ costumes and imprint their skin Bausch does not try to impose order or constraint on the performing bodies: she allows their “natural,” “abject” functions to be seen. These elements typically hidden are made extremely present as viewers are forced to
acknowledge the fleshiness of the body and the unseemliness of these natural excretions. By depicting corporeality and bodily secretions Bausch calls attention to what we consider “natural,” and by extension what we consider “unnatural.” She emphasizes the materiality of human and earthy bodies and the viscous porosity between both. Thus demonstrating Barad’s claim “All bodies, not merely ‘human’ bodies, come to matter through the world’s iterative intra-activity—its performativity. This is true not only of the surface or contours of the body but also of the body in the fullness of its physicality, including the very ‘atoms’ of its being” (141).

Absence and Presence

In Presence and Resistance, Philip Auslander discusses the postmodern concept of absence and presence in theatre. He shows how absence and presence function in the Wooster Group’s L.S.D. (. . . Just the High Points . . .) through a close reading of the performance. “In modern Western theatre,” Auslander asserts, the question of presence cannot be separated from that of the authority of the text: the actor’s presence is conventionally defined in relationship to character, which in turn is delineated by the dramatic text. The ideological effectiveness of presence, however, requires that the authority of the text be conferred on the actor; the authorizing text itself must disappear behind the performance. (95) The dramatic text is traditionally absent from the performance, masked as it is by the performers. In L.S.D., however the performers have the text with them onstage and read from it, thereby acknowledging the presence of the text in the performance. “The text, which is supposed to disappear, remained stubbornly physically present, its pages cluttering the set,” remarks
Auslander. “By asserting their dependence on text yet radically problematizing their relationship to it, the group dissected the major structure of authority in traditional theatre” (96).

A parallel can be drawn between the absence of text in traditional Western theatre and Alaimo and Hekman’s claim that the materiality of the human body and natural world is absent from much feminist theory and practice. Just as the Wooster Group took the absent text and made it present onstage as a way to critique traditional Western theatre power structures, Alaimo and Hekman call for the presence of material bodies in theory and practice as a method to “make matter matter” (5).

In Bausch’s *Rite of Spring*, both human and more-than-human bodies are extremely present. The materiality of human bodies and the body of the earth is made viscerally present in several ways. First, in terms of the plot, the present dancing bodies onstage call attention to the fact that one will soon be absent, extinguished to complete the rite. The present peat is a literal reminder of the connection between body and land, i.e., that bodies have been sacrificed for the land. But the land, in this case a peat bog, has the ability—the agency—to preserve the bodies. Thus material bodies and history are contained within the land. The presence of the bodies and the land onstage illuminates the finiteness of both, that bodies have an expiration date and the land, if not respected as a body possessing agency, may also expire (just as peat harvesting is devastating the bog as a habitat.) Second, while the peat has been reduced to a “thing” in this piece, it does not remain passive. It reasserts its agency by pushing up against the dancers and absorbing into their skin and costumes, making their corporeality and bodily secretions present. By allowing “dirty,” “abject” bodies to be present onstage, Bausch highlights that categories such as “dirty,” and “clean,” or “nature” and “culture” are constructions. The material presence of human and earthy bodies could be connected to Bausch’s training in modern dance because
this method purported movement as an external manifestation of an internal impulse—or, put another way, a physically present representation of an interior emotion. The physical presence of dirt, sweat, and bodies could be considered a present manifestation of elements typically absent in conventional, Western dance.

“Like the damaged bodies of her dancers, and the damaged body of history, Bausch never forgets that the body of nature ‘bares the livid scars of dislocation, dissection and injury,’” asserts Cody. “It is not that her repossessed animals, earth, trees, water and leaves are merely out of place, inappropriately colonized, but rather that we no longer have a knowable, organic connection to them: we have forgotten ourselves in relation to them” (Cody 128). As Cody argues, Bausch’s work depicts scars, dislocation, and injury between humans and nature, that they are both bodies out of sync. Or to use Chaudhuri’s term, Bausch depicts the geopathologic rupture “between people and place” (Staging Place 55). “The underlying cause of geopathology, the dispossession of nature, now names itself clearly,” asserts Chaudhuri, “it is ecological catastrophe, the recognition that no heroism of departure can redeem the wasteland to which the world has been reduced by the forces of modernity” (Staging Place 251). For Chaudhuri, modernity and industrialization have reduced nature to an expendable resource. Bausch’s training, rooted in expressive, modern dance, also emerges out of the idea that bodily movement needed to be restored back to its “natural” rhythms because modernity and industrialization had alienated and reduced the body to a machine. Cody connects the concepts of damaged, alienated bodies and nature and contends that in Bausch’s work these bodies no longer recognize their relationship to one another.

“[P]ostmodern culture uses and abuses the conventions of discourse,” asserts Linda Hutcheon. “It knows it cannot escape implication in the economic (late capitalist) and ideological
(liberal humanist) dominants of its time. There is no outside. All it can do is question from within” (xiii). For Hutcheon, postmodernism acknowledges that ultimately it cannot escape the cultural constructions of discourse but that it has the capability to critique the structure from within the structure. According to Hutcheon “it inscribes and then undercuts both the autonomy of art and the referentiality of history in such a way that a new mode of questioning/compromise comes into being” (56). Postmodernism can simultaneously critique and re-inscribe dominant master narratives. Bausch’s *Rite of Spring* can be interpreted as a postmodern approach to these modern ailments of alienation and expendability. Bausch seems to critique the system from within the system by having the dancers and the peat interact in ways that demonstrate a geopathologic rupture between the land and the people who both inhabit and exploit it.

By creating a performance that stages the viscous porosity between human and earthy bodies *The Rite of Spring* demonstrates that “matter matters” both onstage and in daily life. Bausch’s staging is both problematic and complex as she uses a natural element that has been reduced into an expendable resource. Viewed through a postmodern lens, her implementation of peat can be interpreted as a critique of the system from within the system. A critique of this nature, nevertheless, runs the risk of reinscribing the very practices on which she is trying to comment. Even though the peat has been reduced to a “thing,” however, it does not remain passive; instead it asserts its agency by clinging to the dancers’ skin and costumes, and through this act exposes the labor and effort of their performance. The peat marks the dancer’s skin, demonstrating the viscous porosity between the two, and writes on the bodies in a manner that reads as “abject” to viewers. This bodily text, read as “disgusting” and “filthy” reveals that “yuck” factors are typically camouflaged in performance because their presence reminds humans that they are not separate from other bodies and that categories like “dirty” and “clean” are
constructions. The visceral and porous nature of human and more-than-human bodies in The Rite of Spring makes these absent elements present and therefore demonstrates that “matter matters” onstage.

In the next chapter, I delve deeper into the use of dirt in performance, this time to explore the organisms and species that live within it. I investigate the use of dirt in Las Mariposas, arguing that through the complex affective relationship between the organisms that reside in the dirt and on the dancers’ skin, the dancers actually become-dirt.
CHAPTER IV: A DIRTY *PAS DE DEUX*: BECOMING-DIRT IN EVEOKE DANCE THEATRE’S *LAS MARIPosas*

A dancer wearing a bright purple dress stands in a tall bin of dirt. She touches her chest, then her face. She commences a *port-de-bras*, arms out, up, and around as she slowly walks through the dirt. Another dancer, dressed in a brown shirt and pants, scurries on all fours towards the bin, executes a head stand and dips a foot into the dirt while the dancer in purple extends her leg into an arabesque. Suddenly, the first dancer drops the arabesque and begins to convulse, expanding and contracting her torso, pushing into the dirt with a spasmodic rhythm. The dancer in brown rolls upstage of the bin and begins digging out dirt with her bare hands. Large handfuls of dirt fly through the air and scatter across the stage floor. The digging becomes more frantic as the dancer begins to use her entire body to dislodge the dirt from the bin. Eventually she climbs into the bin and begins a choreographed struggle with the dancer in purple who tries to push her out. More dirt flies as the dancer in purple thrashes to resist the turbulent motion of the dancer in brown. Together, the dancers perform this tightly choreographed piece, until finally the dancer in purple ceases to move, her “life force” extinguished by the violent domination of the other dancer. This interaction between dancers and dirt in *Las Mariposas* serves as an example *par excellance* of a radical re-envisioning of the concept of dance partner—in this instance, the dirt, like the peat in *Rite of Spring*, acts as a dynamic body, a crucial partner in the choreography.

Many conventional Western approaches to performance and dance both privilege the human body and presume that relationships in performance will consist of interactions exclusively between human bodies. For instance, classical ballet focuses on moving the limbs of the body in a systematized way and executing precise technique. In modern dance, such as Pina
Bausch’s training discussed in the last chapter, movement radiates out of the solar plexus and affects the entire body, rather than just the limbs. According to Joan Cass, modern dance’s reaction against the rigidity and technique of ballet resulted in an “exploration of the middle body, the torso, to start waves of movement; the use of the bare foot; the free swinging motion of the whole body; the treatment of space as three-dimensional; and the importance given to the expression of feelings and ideas” (225). While classical ballet and modern dance differ technically and stylistically, what they share is that the core of their techniques center on the human body.

What I would like to suggest, building on my discussion in the last chapter, is that such anthropocentric tendencies in performance and dance reveal a speciesist hierarchy that subjugates animal and elemental bodies beneath human bodies; a subjugation that perpetuates the dualistic conception of the nature/culture divide. As discussed in the Introduction, for Cary Wolfe, relationships between species are “a fundamental repression that underlies most ethical and political discourse” (1). According to Wolfe:

Repressing the question of nonhuman subjectivity, taking it for granted that the subject is always already human. This means . . . that debates in the humanities and social sciences between well intentioned critics of racism, (hetero)sexism, classism, and all other -isms that are stock-in-trade of cultural studies almost always remain locked within an unexamined framework of speciesism. (1)

Wolfe “calls out” the humanities and social sciences for their general assumption that the “subject is always already human,” and claims that this assumption is a result of an “institution of speciesism”(2, emphasis in original). I aim to contribute to this dialogue by demonstrating how speciesism is explicitly and subtly manifest in performance practices and exploring the
ways in which this practice can be agitated and reconsidered. This discourse is critical to encourage a new paradigm within which performers and scholars can begin to think differently about relationships between species in performance.

Interrogating the relationship between human and non-human bodies in performance is one step toward a more critical comprehension of how these interspecies interactions inform our understanding of our relationship with the natural world. If these relationships can be troubled, perhaps we could begin to rethink traditional notions of anthropocentric approaches to performance and dance, exploring alternate methods that acknowledge the agency of “lively emergent, intra-acting phenomena” (Alaimo 249). These non-human participants or “intra-acting phenomena” can be extended to include performance environments, animals, natural elements, and even microscopic organisms, to name a few.

The non-human performance partner I consider in this chapter is dirt. Dirt is composed of myriad elements and an astounding number of organisms representing a vast diversity of species, and is a vital component in many natural processes. A discussion of dirt’s physical composition is vital in order to illustrate how the use of this natural element disrupts the nature/culture binary on multiple levels. The element’s composition also demonstrates interspecies interactions within the dirt and between the dirt and humans, and intraspecies interplay between the organisms that compose and reside in the dirt.

As discussed in the Introduction, dirt is composed of both abiotic and biotic elements. Depending on its geographic location, abiotic elements of dirt could include sand, silt, clay, rock, and various minerals while biotic elements are living or dead organisms such as insects and other animals, bacteria, fungi, and plants. James B. Nardi emphasizes that “A staggering number of individual organisms as well as species representing all kingdoms—plants, animals, fungi,
protozoa, bacteria—live in the soil” (xx). In a similar manner, Richard Bardgett reminds us that just one cubic centimeter of arable soil can contain up to 350 different species (31). The living organisms contained in the dirt are subject to the same pressures as organisms in any ecosystem, competing for resources and struggling for survival. Many of these organisms occupy niches that are involved in the decay of organic matter such as dead plants and animals, from which they acquire the resources necessary for survival and in turn release vital nutrients back into the soil. In this way dirt perpetuates itself, turning death into a vital source of life as nutrients are released.

Dancer Shayna Cribbs talks about her experience partnering with dirt in Eveoke Dance Theatre’s *Las Mariposas*, the dance piece described above in the opening anecdote. In an interview with dance scholar Evangeline Rose Whitlock, Cribbs states,

I feel like with the soil, I felt this like, energy in it, as I was digging it. And I don’t know if it was because of the physical exertion, that was creating this energy between me and the soil and I could just feel it at my fingertips as I was digging. And then the energy just was like, almost like this whirlwind and getting bigger and bigger and bigger. And some nights, I . . . lost all sense of self. I had no idea who I was. I wasn’t a person; I was just like all arms and dirt and flinging and energy and . . . I was like death. I was not me. It was really weird. There were those moments where I became like . . . I lost sense of time. It was really interesting. (Cribbs, n.p.)

Cribbs’ remarks illuminate how the use of dirt in *Las Mariposas* troubled traditional nature/culture binaries and perhaps as a result opened its dancers to a more affective state where their relationship with the dirt became, in Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s terms,
reterritorialized. How do we, then, as performance and dance scholars, approach the relationship between dancer and dirt in this production? How do we explore the interactions between species both human and non-human onstage?

In this chapter, I use Las Mariposas as a case study to explore the relationship between dancers and dirt in order to demonstrate how troubling traditional speciesist approaches to dance and performance can lead to alternate ways of thinking about ecologically complex interactions onstage. I interrogate the stratified relationship between human and non-human bodies in this production, and contemplate how the human/dirt relationship gestures toward an alternate approach to interactions between species in performance and perhaps also in the world that we all inhabit. Continuing my application of affect theory, in particular Deleuze and Guattari’s idea of the pre-personal affective state of “becoming,” Stacy Alaimo’s notion of bodily “transcorporeality,” and Rosi Braidotti’s post-human philosophy of “transpositions,” I explore the ways in which the dancers’ physical interactions with the dirt enabled them to become something other than themselves. Ultimately, this chapter investigates how the boundary between body, dirt, and species is blurred in Las Mariposas, deterritorializing the conventional relationship between body and dirt, and explores the ways in which they coalesce and reterritorialize into an affective, “trans-corporeal” relationship.

Las Mariposas and Dirt

Eveoke Dance Theatre was a non-profit dance company and school located in San Diego with the Mission to “cultivate compassionate social action through evocative performance”
In 2010, Eveoke created *Las Mariposas*, an imaginative adaptation of Julia Alvarez’s novel *In the Time of the Butterflies*. *Las Mariposas* features a thirteen-member company and four large bins of dirt to tell the true story of the Mirabal sisters who led an underground resistance in the 1950s against Dominican dictator Rafael Trujillo, who was known for his infamous establishment of a secret police, murdering of civilian dissenters, and authorizing a massacre of thousands of Haitian immigrants. The dancers interact with the dirt through their movement: they roll in it, kick it, hold it, throw it, and dig in it. Through its dispersion over the two-hour production, the dirt collects on the dancers’ bodies and saturates the entire playing space. *Las Mariposas* premiered in 2010 in California and in 2011 toured the Dominican Republic.

During the Dominican tour, the production was staged in three different venues, with playing spaces ranging from 32 by 40 feet to 24 by 32 feet. During each performance a large wooden altar was located upstage center; throughout the production performers crawled under the altar and danced on top of it. Three bins filled to the brim with dirt, each 5 by 2 by 3 feet, stood around the altar, two on stage right and one on stage left. Another dirt bin of the same size was located downstage right. Set pieces that abstractly resembled rocks and other landscape of the Dominican Republic lined the edges of the playing space both on stage right and left. Palm fronds rose from behind the set pieces, evoking the idea of life emerging from the rocks and dirt.

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23 In August 2013, Eveoke’s Artistic Director, Ericka Aisha Moore, announced that the organization was going on indefinite hiatus in order to reevaluate and reorganize.

24 See Eric Paul Roorda’s, *The Dictator Next Door* for more about the regime/resistance.
Through dance and recorded narration, *Las Mariposas* creatively presents the story of the Mirabal sisters, from growing up as young girls on a farm, to learning about the violence of Trujillo’s regime as young adults and converting their childhood home into a place of resistance, and their time spent in prison and ultimately their death at the hands of Trujillo’s subordinates. Four dancers portray young versions of Dedé, Minerva, María Teresa, and Patria Mirabal, and four different dancers portray older versions of the sisters. Four other dancers make up an ensemble that portrays various characters throughout the course of the piece. The ensemble, comprised of both male and female dancers, embodies the roles of the men who kill the Mirabel sisters under Trujillo’s orders.

In *Las Mariposas* the dirt, containing a rich biodiversity and full of decaying matter, accumulates on the stage and the dancers’ bodies, not only creating the landscape of the play, but a living, embodied history of the plants, animals, microscopic organisms, people, and places that reside in it. In this production, then, the bodies of the dancers partner not only with the dirt, but also with the myriad species that reside in the dirt, creating an ecologically complex *pas de deux* that evokes an intricate rethinking of our conception of species and the relationships between them.

It is perhaps helpful to pause here to describe in detail one of the key scenes. The murder of the Mirabal sisters is one of the most memorable and haunting scenes in *Las Mariposas*. The choreography is violent, frenzied, and unapologetic; it is danced with unbridled energy, agility, strength, and specificity. Each “sister” stands in her own bin of dirt, slowly walking through the dirt, their arms gracefully extend toward one another and then back to their bodies. Their arms grope their own bodies, grope the air; the tension in the air is apparent in their arms as they appear to search for an anchor. They finally reach down and touch the dirt in which they stand.
and for a brief moment appear to find a bodily foundation in this connection. But the moment is short lived as the sisters’ bodies begin expanding, contracting, convulsing and writhing into the dirt. While the sisters are dancing in their bins, the ensemble dancers, portraying the “murderers,” scuttle onto stage, moving on all fours as one unit, conjuring the image of some sort of arthropodal creature. They break apart into individual dancers, but remain in full frontal body contact with the floor, before each emerges onto all fours and slinks towards the bins in which the sisters are dancing. Once the ensemble of dancers reaches the bins they each move around them in ways unique to the particular dancer, using their arms and legs to embrace and tumble around the bin as though it were their partner in the dance. Then the ensemble dancers reach into the bins and begin throwing out handfuls of dirt; thus commences the choreography of the “murder.” The ensemble dancers dig enough dirt out of the bins with their bare hands for the sisters to fit within the bins. The ensemble dancers frantically accomplish this task by using their entire bodies to unearth the dirt from the bins; fingers, hands, and torsos collide with the dirt as they displace it from the bins and onto the stage. Once there is room for bodies in the bins, the ensemble dancers each grab a sister and force her down into the dirt that remains in the bin. The sisters and murderers perform the choreography of the killing, a violent and grotesquely beautiful performance of stylized, articulated frenetic movement embodying domination and resistance, brutal assault and the will to survive, all while dirt, and the species that reside within it, spews into the air, colliding with the bodies and faces of the dancers. The sisters vocalize the struggle through screams and grunts while the black dirt flies gracefully through the air and lands lightly on the ground. The thrashing movement between the sisters and the murders gradually becomes slower and less vigorous until finally the movement comes to a complete halt. This moment of stillness is a jarring and poignant juxtaposition to the frantic and violent movement that had just
occurred moments before. The “life force” of the Mirabal sisters has been extinguished, and the bins of dirt become the graves in which they are buried. Massive piles of dirt coat the stage. The ensemble dancers slowly back off the stage leaving traces and imprints of their movement in the dirt as they shrink away from the scene.

In this scene, dirt, as a production value and indeed a formidable equal to the dancers, functions as a critical choreographic element as it affects how the dancers perform the choreography. In the beginning of the scene, the sisters stand in the bins of dirt; the level and the composition of the dirt affects their balance and how they hold their bodies, and this positioning in turn affects how they perform the movement. When the ensemble dancers “kill” the sisters, the dirt is the third partner in the dance. As a partner, the dirt shapes the movement by affecting how the other bodies in the dance can move with and through it. Finally, when the ensemble dancers leave the stage, traces of the movement are temporarily imprinted in the dirt. Throughout the performance, minute particles and organisms also participate in the dance, clinging to the dancers and the stage creating a microcosm of interspecies relations.

*Becoming*-Dirt

The use of dirt onstage disrupts the nature/culture binary because this element, rich with decomposed organic elements and teeming with local biological diversity, creates a living

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25 This scene is a creative adaptation of the murder. The sisters were actually killed on their way to visit their husbands in prison. Trujillo’s men stopped their jeep along a dirt road, pulled them out of the vehicle, killed them and their driver Rufino de la Cruz, and then pushed the jeep over a cliff, to make it look like an accident.
history of the plants, animals, and microscopic organisms that reside within it. These become embedded on the bodies of the dancers, affecting them and ultimately their performance. As noted in Chapter Two, Cull describes Deleuzean affect as something that changes, varies, or becomes when two bodies encounter one another. In an interview conducted with ensemble members Bruce Walker, Becky Hurt, Molly Terbovich-Ridenhour, and Shayna Cribbs, the dancers articulated that when they rehearsed and performed the murder scene they lost a sense of self and became something else. Cribbs’ experience is detailed in the opening quote of this paper. Hurt describes her experience with the dirt in the murder scene in similarly compelling terms:

I actually appreciated the physical exertion that had to happen for us to get all the dirt out [of the bins]. And there was a goal, like we had to get a certain amount of dirt [out] before the [dancers portraying the sisters] would fall [into the bins], before we could actually do the choreography of killing them. And you are fucking tired and you have to keep going, and literally like—taking their life source, ‘cause soil is so representative of life, and also it’s so eerie—like we’re digging their graves almost! And so there was that physical like, oh your legs are in the way, fuck, you know, just completely out of—not out of body—but you just lose a sense of self when you are that physical. You lose a sense of like, reason, or why you’re doing it. (Hurt, n.p.)

The ensemble dancers contended that it was their relationship with the dirt that allowed them to access the “murderer” within them, which enabled them to “kill” the sisters. Affect theory allows an exploration of the possible ways that the dancers’ physical interactions with the dirt allowed them to become something other than themselves.
Deleuze and Guattari develop their theory of affect, what they term *becoming*, in *A Thousand Plateaus*. In their section on “Becomings” they state,

To every relation of movement and rest, speed and slowness grouping together infinity of parts, there corresponds a degree of power. To the relations composing, decomposing, or modifying an individual there correspond intensities that affect it, augmenting or diminishing its power to act; these intensities come from external parts or from the individual’s own parts. Affects are becomings. (256)

The rate, pace, and rhythm of a motion or the absence of a motion in a body can create or destroy that body’s ability to possess power. The elements that can affect a body, permitting or erasing agency, can come from external forces or components of that body. In *Las Mariposas* the movement of digging the dirt and the choreography of killing the sisters in the dirt intensified the power of the dancers’ bodies and allowed them to become something else. Cribbs articulated that the digging made her feel like she became more “animalistic,” while Walker stated that the frenetic movement of digging the dirt in the death scene made him feel like he became a “murderer” (Cribbs, Walker n.p.).

Even though each described it in slightly different ways, the ensemble dancers all agreed that during the murder scene they felt as though they lost a sense of self when their bodies connected and collided with the dirt that in turn allowed them to perform the “murder.” Deleuze and Guattari continue to describe affective relationships between bodies, maintaining,

We know nothing about a body until we know what it can do, in other words, what its affects are, how they can or cannot enter into composition with other affects, with the affects of another body, either to destroy that body or to be
Deleuze and Guattari assert that we know nothing of a body until we can comprehend how it is affected by or affects other bodies. When a body affects another body, the two bodies enter into a relationship that enables the initial body to either gain or lose power; thus the initial body becomes an entity different from what it had been previously. For the ensemble dancers in Las Mariposas, it seems that their interaction with the dirt affected their bodies in a manner that caused them to lose a personal sense of self and gain a power that enabled them to figuratively kill the sisters. As noted earlier, Cribbs expressed that she felt an exchange of energy between herself and the dirt:

I felt energy in the soil as I was digging in it, I could feel it at my fingertips and under my fingernails and as Jessica [the dancer who played Minerva Mirabal] fought more and more I became more animalistic with it, with my digging, and the energy was like this whirlwind, getting bigger, and bigger, and bigger.

(Cribbs, n.p.)

The energy Cribbs received from her physical relationship with the dirt affected the way her body moved in the scene. She describes the movement as an “animalistic whirlwind” that continued to build and build until the character she was playing finally “killed” Minerva Mirabal. Through the exchange with the dirt, the dancer’s body became something other-than-herself and it affected how her body moved and performed in the space.

When this scene was blocked, the dancers in the ensemble initially had a difficult time performing the murder. Ericka Aisha Moore, the choreographer, told them to think of the dirt as their struggle and also as an extension of their bodies. Concerning this process Moore noted:
The body is not always enough to convey all the things that I want to convey. Because sometimes you just can’t throw a body the way you can throw dirt. The way dirt moves through fingers. Through hands. Your body doesn’t move that way. The dirt is an extension of the body. An extension of the experience.

(Moore, n.p.)

Working with the dirt presented considerable challenges for the dancers, specifically Terbovich-Ridenhour, who declared, “I think [it] physically made me sick for two months. And so I hated the dirt. I hated breathing the dirt, I hated the smell of it” (Terbovich-Ridenhour, n.p.). For Hurt, the most difficult moment with the dirt was, “The dance after the death scene where the dirt is everywhere. We get dirty. It was awful” (Hurt, n.p.). The ensemble dancers concluded that working with this element did not feel natural; it felt “dirty” and uncomfortable and most of them confessed that initially they hated working with it.

Eventually their relationship with the dirt began to shift as the choreographer encouraged them to perceive the dirt as an extension of the body. Continued work with the dirt created enabling conditions for a deterritorialization and reterritorialization between the dancers and the dirt. The relationship that occurred between dancers and dirt is similar to that of Deleuze’s orchid and wasp, as discussed in Chapter Two. Just as wasp becomes-orchid and orchid becomes-wasp during pollination, the exchange between dancer and dirt is deterritorialized and reterritorialized. The bodily movement through the dirt, specifically the act of digging, (just as the Foundling Father’s digging and physical embodiment enable him to become-Lincoln), deterritorialized the conventional relationship that existed between the dancers’ bodies and dirt. This natural element, typically perceived as something found outside and usually only touched by bare feet or hands, was brought into the theatre, conventionally conceived of as a sanitary, cultural space, and used
as a production element that coated the bodies of the dancers and the stage (similar to the peat in *The Rite of Spring*). This new relationship between the performers and the dirt forced the dancers to perceive and interact with this natural element in a new way, a way that encouraged them to view it as an extension of the body, an element with which their appendages and full body could come into contact. Because the conventional relationship was deterritorialized, the *becoming*-relationship between dancer and dirt allowed a reterritorialization to occur. A new affective relationship emerged, where dirt and dancer coalesced, and where the dancers could not tell where body ended and dirt began. As Cribbs described it earlier, “Some nights I lost all sense of self and had no idea who I was. I wasn’t a person I was all arms and dirt, flinging and energy . . . I was like death . . . I was not me, it was really weird” (Cribbs, n.p.). Here, as with Deleuze's wasp and orchid, the deterritorialization and reterritorialization occurs, only instead of two entities, there might be thousands upon thousands of species in the relationship.

The dancers agreed that their perceived loss of self and *becoming*-of-other was distinctly connected with their corporeal relationship to the dirt, as each ensemble dancer noted that the movement of his or her body and state of mind was in some way altered by it. The engagement with the dirt deterritorialized the manner in which they had perceived and interacted with dirt in the past. No longer was the dirt comprehended only as an element in nature, it was now an entity onstage with which they had to physically interact.

After the deterritorialization occurred, a reterritorialization manifested when the dirt became a part of their bodies that they could not easily remove. The dirt not only altered their performance in the production but also their daily lives. Because the literal dirt as well as traces and reminders of the dirt remained on their physical bodies, several of the dancers reported having a hard time leaving the show at the theatre. They noted that the show, specifically the
murder scene, weighed heavily on their day-to-day interactions and became a mental preoccupation. In this manner, their relationship with the dirt was reterritorialized when it became a part of their body that altered their interactions both within and outside the production. The application of affect theory to the dancer-dirt relationship illuminates the notion that through their interaction with the dirt the dancers became-dirt.

As I contemplated the affective relationship between dancer and dirt for this chapter, however, I wondered: If the dancers did become-dirt, did the dirt in return begin to become-human? How does one investigate an affective relationship such as this in which the dirt cannot communicate in the exchange because, in human terms, the dirt is rendered speechless?

**Becoming-Human**

In “Skin Dreaming: The Bodily Transgressions of Fielding Burke, Octavia Butler, and Linda Hogan,” Stacy Alaimo presents several ideas that help to dissect and analyze the complex affects that can exist between humans and nature. She posits the notion of skin as a liminal space because of “its intimacy with the ‘outside’ word of oil, clay, ‘other bodies,’ and the ‘foreign land of air’” (134). As humans, our skin connects and collides with other bodies, serving as an ambassador between us and other objects. Skin crosses borders, enabling us to affect and be affected by other elements. Alaimo uses the weather as an example; skin remembers what hot and cold feel like. When the sun shines on your skin, your skin not only feels warm, but also becomes warm and remembers the feeling of that sensation. She asserts that, as a liminal boundary, skin has the power to “[dissolve] a distinctly human identity” (135). Skin as a permeable barrier allows the body to connect with elements of nature such as weather, water, air, and dirt, to name a few. The relationship between skin and such elements is a literal exchange of
molecules and cells. Concerning the relationship between skin and other organisms, Elizabeth A. Grice et al. in “Topographical and Temporal Diversity of the Human Skin Microbiome,” states, “The skin is a critical interface between the human body and its external environment . . . [it] is also an ecosystem, harboring microbial communities that live in a range of physiologically and topographically distinct niches” (324). Similarly, in Lousy Sex: Creating Self in an Infectious World, Gerald N. Callahan goes even further to note,

Our skin sprouts a cornucopia of microorganisms, including nearly 200 different strains of bacteria and several species of fungi—within human skin as well as upon it. And bacteria are not distributed uniformly across human skin. Some bacteria prefer the navel, others the forearm or underarm, and so on. And if you move bacteria from the forearm to the belly button, they don’t last. In a short while, the original geographic pastiche reestablishes itself. Human skin is a mosaic of bacteria, each piece with a deep sense of place and purpose. (52)

Human skin, as these commentaries show, is home to a vast amount of organisms including cells, molecules, and bacteria. According to Tiffany C. Scharchmidt and Michael A. Fischbach in “What Lives on our Skin: Ecology, Genomics and Therapeutic Opportunities of the Skin Microbiome,” “The human body is covered with microorganisms; in fact, bacteria outnumber our own cells 10:1 . . . [and] each square centimeter of our skin is home to approximately 10^6 bacteria” (373). Therefore, when skin touches dirt an interspecies interaction occurs; cells and bacteria leave the skin and enter the dirt and vice versa. A molecular transaction also takes place when elements such as lipids and water are transferred from skin to dirt. The dirt and skin affect one another, creating an ecologically intricate interchange, deterritorializing their previous relationship and reterritorializing it into something different.
Alaimo compares this understanding of skin to Deleuze and Guattari’s notion of the rhizome because skin, like a rhizome, “connects any point to any other point, and its traits are not necessarily linked to traits of that same nature” (135). Skin is the interface, a conduit between bodies and/or objects. Alaimo claims “By being precisely in the middle, skin disrupts the old dichotomies that sever nature from culture, subject from object, body from mind” (135). She quotes Elizabeth Grosz’s paraphrasing of Deleuze and Guattari to further support her argument:

subject and object can no longer be understood as discrete entities or binary opposites. Things, material or psychical, can no longer be understood in terms of rigid boundaries, clear demarcations; nor, on the opposite track, can they be seen as inherently united, singular, or holistic. (135)

From its liminal position, skin has the power to cross boundaries and disrupt the anthropocentric nature/culture divide. It possesses the ability to dissolve hierarchies of power where humans rule over nature and instead create new relationships where humans and other species exist on equal terms. Alaimo declares that in order for the human constructed nature/culture divide to be abolished we must begin to rethink the way we understand skin and the body. She maintains:

to effectively challenge the system of dichotomies that sever nature from culture, it is important that the body be not just a place that has been inscribed by cultural forces but a threshold where nature and culture dissolve, a rhizomatic place that connects “desperate distances” through elemental relations. (137)

The liminality of skin aids in the process of becoming; its permeable nature allows for affective exchanges between bodies and the elements. The transgression of these boundaries calls into question traditional anthropogenic categories and guides the way to a post-human conception of species. A post-human ideology would dismantle the dominant systemic concept
that humans rule over animals and nature as post-humanism endeavors to abolish anthropocentrism.

Using Alaimo’s understanding of skin as a liminal space with the power to dissolve the dichotomy between nature and culture incites the idea that the dancers in *Las Mariposas* could be *becoming*-dirt and that the dirt in exchange could be *becoming*-human. As the dancers move through the dirt, their bodies interchange molecules, cells, and numerous species with the dirt. The organic matter of the dirt seeping into their pores, clogging their nostrils, and impairing their eyesight alters their bodies. Concurrently, the composition of the dirt is changed when the dancers deposit their own remnants into the dirt, such as water, salts, oils, bacteria, fungi, hairs, and skin cells. The affective relationship between dancers and dirt ruptures their traditional relationship and reterritorializes it into something different. According to many of the dancer’s interviews, it seems that this reterritorialization dissolved their understanding of themselves as humans and opened them up to a more affective state where they were able to *become*-something other than themselves that, in turn, allowed them to perform the murder scene in the production.

**Trans-corporeal Transpositions**

Affect enables bodies to be open to experiencing other bodies, elements, and objects, it allows for the possibility of a body to *become*-something other than itself, to shatter the anthropogenic construction of humanity. Alaimo posits the term “trans-corporeality” to describe “the time-space where human corporeality, in all its material fleshiness, is inseparable from ‘nature’ or ‘environment’” (“Trans-corporeal Feminisms” 238). “Crucial ethical and political possibilities emerge from this literal ‘contact zone’ between human corporeality and the more-than-human nature,” asserts Alaimo. “Imagining human corporeality as trans-corporeality, in
which the human is always intermeshed with the more-than-human world, underlines the extent to which the corporeal substance of the human is ultimately inseparable from ‘the environment’” (“Trans-corporeal Feminisms,” 238). The human body is a trans-corporeal unit that is always interacting with other bodies, species, and organisms. In reality the human body is never functioning in isolation as a singular unit. Rather, it is a complex ecosystem in constant interplay with other ecosystems. “By underscoring that ‘trans’ indicates movement across different sites,” maintains Alaimo, “trans-corporeality opens up an epistemological ‘space’ that acknowledges the often unpredictable and unwanted actions of human bodies, non-human creatures, ecological systems, chemical agents, and other actors” (“Trans-corporeal Feminisms” 238). Trans-corporeality recognizes the agency of humans, more-than-humans, and other “intra-acting phenomena.” Apprehending the human body as a trans-corporeal unit dismantles the construct of the nature/culture divide and decenters anthropocentrism because it acknowledges the viscous porosity of all bodies, human, non-human, and more-than-human.

Rosi Braidotti’s radical and complex post-human philosophy regarding transposing difference and becoming-other, discussed in Chapter Two, aligns with Alaimo’s assertion that “the human is always intermeshed with the more-than-human world” (“Trans-corporeal Feminisms” 238). According to Braidotti, transpositions “[explore] the possibility of a system of ethical values that, far from requiring a steady and unified vision of the subject, rests on a non-unitary, nomadic, or rhizomatic view. The notion of ‘sustainability’ is the central point of reference” (5). Braidotti attempts to locate an ethics that is not centered on the human body, but rather values all living organisms. This ethic is not heterogenic in nature, but is constantly shifting, and its nexus is sustainability. She designates this as a transformative ethics, “an ethics
of sustainability, based on . . . interconnections” (5). Transpositions are an ethics of-becoming, of exchanges between species and bodies, of relationships in flux.

Braidotti presents several approaches toward engaging in transpositional ethics, one being the eradication of anthropocentrism. She asserts, “The becoming-animal axis of transformation entails the displacement of anthropocentrism and the recognition of trans-species solidarity on the basis of our being environmentally based, that is to say: embodied, embedded, and in symbiosis” (99). Thus, the construction of the nature/culture binary and vicariously the hierarchal relationship between humans and other life forms must be eradicated. All life forms, including humans, ultimately engage in a delicate symbiosis because they are each embodied, embedded, and inter-meshed in their environments. They cannot live in solidarity with one another, according to Braidotti, until anthropocentrism is eliminated.

One approach Braidotti posits to eliminate anthropocentrism in order to create trans-species community is becoming-animal. She asserts that this process has “nothing to do with metaphor of animality. . . . It is rather a case that requires a shift of the ontological ground of embodiment” (102). This ontological shift requires, for the human, attempting to experience and perceive the world through means other than the visual. Dogs perceive the world through olfactory images, horses through tactile images, and dolphins through acoustic pictures (103). For a human to become-animal they must forsake their dependence on perceiving the world through sight. Braidotti asserts, “A nomadic post-anthropocentric philosophy displaces the primacy of the visual. The process of becoming-animal is connected to an expansion or creation of new sensorial and perceptive capacities or powers, which alter or stretch what a body can actually do” (103). To become-other, following Braidotti’s charge, humans must push their
bodies, stretching them perhaps past traditional limits, deterritorializing conventional functions and reterritorializing them into something new.

In *Las Mariposas*, it is the very relationship between dancers and dirt that displaces the visual in order for dancer to *become* other. The dancers recall how the dirt affected their vision. Cribbs describes how the dirt agitated her eyes and thus made it difficult to see (Cribbs, n.p.). Similarly, Walker recalls dirt infiltrating his eyes, even though they were closed while he was submerged in a bin of dirt (Walker, n.p.). Because they were immersed in the dirt, the dancers could smell it and feel it against their bodies; they experienced the dirt through multiple senses, not merely visual perception, and it in turn affected their bodily movement. They danced with dirt in their eyes and on their bodies, they danced on stones that were in the dirt that caused them pain, and they dug the dirt out of the bins until their bodies were physically exhausted. Their interaction with the dirt pushed their bodies to the conventional limits of what a dancing body can perform. The dancer’s olfactory, tactile, and kinesthetic experience with the dirt reterritorialized their relationship, causing the dancers to *become* dirt.

The dirt and organisms within it, in a similar manner to the peat in *The Rite of Spring*, asserted its agency. It did not remain passive, but rather emphasized its presence in ways that were sometimes painful and difficult, but ultimately transformative for the dancers. This transformative, affective relationship testifies to the trans-corporeality of bodies. But what are the stakes of these relationships? If hundreds, thousands, perhaps millions of bodies, organisms, and species are in constant interplay how does that alter our understanding of our own bodies and their interactions in the world? In the next section I discuss two examples of the ways that trans-corporeality can change and/or alter the body. I then connect this back to *Las Mariposas* to consider how these “trans” relationships can shift our understanding of performance.
For the first example, Nancy Tuana draws attention to the case of Polyvinyl chloride (PVC), the material used to make Coke bottles, toys, pipes, credit cards, medical equipment, food wrap, among many other things, as a substance that has transformed human lives and flesh. “PVCs are produced by running an electrical current through salty brine in the presence of a catalyst, which is sometimes mercury,” remarks Tuana. “[A] series of interactions occur at the molecular level from which chlorine, sodium, and hydrogen are produced. And when the catalyst is mercury, there is mercury released, perhaps as emissions” (Tuana 200). The chlorine is then mixed with carbon, which creates vinyl chloride; this substance is then polymerized, creating PVC. Phthalates are frequently added to PVC to make it softer and more malleable. There are several studies linking PVC production to threats of cancer and PVC production workers have displayed “significantly increased mortality from cancer deaths, including lung cancer, angiosarcoma (liver cancer), and leukemia” (Tuana 200). The plastics industry, however, maintains that humans exposed to small amounts of phthalates are not at a significant risk for cancer. Tuana explains, however, that at a molecular level phthalates and vinyl chloride interact with human and non-human bodies in complex ways that can result in cancer. She elucidates,

When such a molecule hits such an organ, [like a lung or liver] it interacts with a receptor, which “recognizes” the molecule as a hormonal component. It then either passes through the membrane into the cell to interact with the DNA or RNA of the cell to either turn on or turn off a genetic process, or it releases a molecule that is part of the receptor that does the same thing. That interaction can lead to cancer. (201)

Molecules move through porous bodies and reterritorialize them into toxic bodies or what Tuana designates “plastic flesh” (201). Compounds, chemicals, and molecules harnessed and utilized by
humans reassert their agency in seemingly invisible ways that have the potential to manifest through the trans-corporeality of bodies.

In a similar manner, Callahan also discusses an organism that has transformed human, non-human, and more-than-human lives: bacteria. Describing the amount of bacteria that resides the world, Callahan affirms,

No organism on earth has had more biological success than bacteria. Bacteria outstrip every other living thing in numbers, in mass, in distribution, and in variety. And, because they came first and because there are so many of them in so many places, bacteria have extorted an agreement from all the rest of us. That agreement reads something like Live with bacteria or don’t live at all . . . we must live as bacterial symbionts—sharing our lives with unimaginable numbers of these creatures. (3, emphasis in original)

Bacteria are everywhere: in dirt and food, on doorknobs, computer keys, desktops, people, and pets, human and non-human animals share their entire lives with bacteria. “Bacteria rule the world of living things. All by themselves, bacteria account for well over 99 percent of all organisms. . . . Bacteria numbers are truly staggering—10^{29} on, in, and above the Earth; 10^{14} per person,” proclaims Callahan. “Inside our own skin, we carry around about 10^{13} human cells. Even within the space we call us, bacteria outnumber our cells by a factor of 10. Each of us, by cell number, is roughly 90 percent bacteria” (Callahan 49). According to Callahan, ninety percent of the human body is composed of bacterial organisms, organisms that have the potential to affect, alter, and sometimes drastically change the ecosystem they call home. Callahan informs that “Untold thousands. . . have lost their lives because of a single breath of air, a fleabite, a drink of water, a wound, and Mycobacteruim tuberculosis (TB), Yersinia pestis (bubonic plague),
*Vibrio cholerae* (cholera), or *Clostridium botulinum* (botulism)—all bacteria” (55, emphasis in original). All it takes is one microscopic organism to radically transform your body and flesh, as you know it. Callahan remarks that humans typically only take note of bacteria when they harm or kill them, but every day humans exchange and acquire thousands of bacteria. “[T]hose bacteria change us, change what we can do and change who we are,” he maintains. “Sometimes, as with syphilis, the change is obvious, other times less so. But there is always change” (Callahan 55). Just as the body absorbs PVC chemicals creating “plastic flesh,” the porosity between bodies and bacteria also creates trans-corporeal sites with dangerous potential. Callahan reminds readers “it happens all of the time. A touch, a breath, a spoon, a handrail, a kiss, and bits of us move from one to another. A shared bottle of spring water or a meal and we are no longer who we just were. Abruptly, I am you and you are me and we are all together” (50). Humans are not individual, autonomous units. Rather, as Callahan asserts, we are all together, humans, non-human animals, more-than-humans, and microscopic organisms. We live in a “trans” world and our relationships have effects on our own corporeality and in the world that we all share. The viscous porosity between humans and other organisms dismantles traditional speciest categories and hierarchies. This revelation situates humans within a post-human ideology where they do not rule over, but rather, are constantly interacting and intertwined with non-human animals and more-than-humans.

**Viscously Porous Bodies**

One has to look no farther than *Las Mariposas* to see some effects of the viscous porosity between humans and other organisms. In fact, the interspecies interface between dirt and the human bodies in the audience was of great concern for Andy Lowe,
the Theatre-in-Residence Program Director, who oversaw the production of *Las Mariposas* at the La Jolla Playhouse. Regarding the use of dirt in the production Lowe stated,

> When you’re in the theatre, [the dirt] goes up, and then it stays there, and it eventually falls down onto other things. And when you have a lot of sensitive equipment, lighting, sound, and so forth, when you have people who are trapped in there with those particulates, that gets very toxic. In a situation with dirt, where you have microbes, critters, spores, fungus, mold, that live in the dirt, and that’s just the reality of dirt, you are now inhaling all of that. (Lowe, n.p.)

Because the interspecies interactions between dirt and the audience had the potential of toxicity, Lowe was concerned about transgressing this boundary. This is, again, an example of the dirt and other “intra-acting” phenomena within it refusing to remain passive. The bacteria, microbes, spores, fungus residing in the dirt had the potential to affect not only the dancers, but also the audience members. These interactions open up questions regarding what it means to be interspecies in performance and the implications of bringing other species into a culturally constructed space such as a theatre—similarly demonstrated by Croce’s proclamation of “yuck” regarding *The Rite of Spring*. These literal and affective relationships demonstrate that boundaries between species are not as discrete as our constructions would have us believe. Rather, they are permeable, porous, and potentially dangerous.

The viscous porosity of bodies in a trans-corporeal world emphasizes Wolfe’s earlier claim that we cannot assume that the subject is always human. Because the world is a complex enmeshment of organisms and phenomena, humans need to work toward dislodging institutionalized speciest frameworks. If chemicals, bacteria, organisms, and other phenomena are present and have the potential to affect and alter bodies, how should we think about them in
relation to performance? What would an approach to performance that acknowledges the
presence of these other bodies look like? How do we consider the potential danger of these
bodies in performance? How and should we use natural elements in performance?

I think a start to contemplating these questions would be acknowledging the presence of
other bodies, the trans-corporeality of the human body, and the possible positive and/or negative
affects of these relationships in performance. As Alaimo notes, “Thinking across bodies may
catalyze the recognition that the ‘environment,’ which is too often imagined as inert, empty
space or as a ‘resource’ for human use, is, in fact, a world of fleshy beings, with their own needs,
claims, and actions” (“Trans-corporeal Feminisms” 238). “Thinking across bodies” in
performance can also expose “fleshy beings.” In the case of \textit{Las Mariposas}, the organisms and
elements that comprise the dirt bring into stark relief the “world of fleshy beings.” In \textit{Imaginary Bodies: Ethics, Power, and Corporeality}, Moira Gatens maintains,

\begin{quote}
The human body . . . is made up of a number of other bodies. Its identity can
never be viewed as a final or finished product as in the case of the Cartesian
automaton, since it is a body that is in constant interchange with its environment.
The human body is radically open to its surroundings and can be composed,
recomposed and decomposed by other bodies. (110)
\end{quote}

The human body is constantly interacting and reacting with other bodies and “fleshy beings” and
the human body in performance is no exception. Human bodies exchange elements, particles,
organisms, and bacteria that constantly shape and reshape their bodies and the bodies around
them. The partnering between dancers and dirt enact onstage this complex, affective, and often
invisible, trans-corporeal, ecological \textit{pas de deux}. 
The presence of other bodies, the trans-corporeality of the human body, and the possible effects of these relationships in performance raise larger questions that I believe merit investigation. Braidotti’s philosophy of transpositions may be a helpful framework for thinking about inter-species and “trans” interactions in performance. For Braidotti, transpositions are a state where anthropocentrism is abolished and trans-species reside in solidarity. She designates this state bio-centered egalitarianism, which she defines as “[a philosophy of affirmative becoming which activates a nomadic subject into sustainable processes of transformation” (110). To guarantee a sustainable existence for all life forms a subject or body must be open to the affective process of transformation. The nomadic state of this existence means that the subject or body will never be situated in one classification, standpoint, or geography but will instead be open to multiple forms of “trans” experiences.

Our planet is in the midst of an ecological crisis, with problems such as deforestation, over-fishing, depletion of natural ecosystems, dwindling natural resources, and global climate change, to name a few. As our planet faces these changes, which are anthropogenic in nature, earth’s inhabitants are left searching for a solution, a way to prevent impending ecological disaster. These ecological situations are often the result of humans not acknowledging the trans-corporeality and agency of other organisms and elements. While these are large scale problems with no easy solutions, perhaps performance and dance is an overlooked avenue that has the capability to challenge beliefs and practices that re-inscribe a divide between nature and culture, human and more-than-human. While performance can critique questionable ecological practices and serve as an activist platform, it can also agitate and work against anthropocentric, speciesist tendencies in more subtle ways. Inter-species interactions, such as becoming-dirt in *Las Mariposas*, when analyzed through an ecocritical lens, can serve as a reminder of how all
humans depend on micro-interactions, interchanges that perhaps many people take for granted. The dirt used in the Dominican performance was returned to the earth and continues in its functionality, as Dominican Ambassador Raul Yzaguirre, who attended a special performance of *Las Mariposas*, requested that it be placed in his personal garden. The dirt that contains biotic and abiotic elements of the American dancers now resides in the Dominican ambassador’s garden, where it will continue to interact with other species and organisms, a reminder of the trans-species exchange that occurred through the use of this organic element in the production. While this act is both complex and problematic (bringing to light some of the same issues as Kaprow’s “Trading Dirt”), in a subtle way it acknowledges the dirt as more than a “thing” (as per Alaimo’s definition) and perhaps, even in a small way, troubles the construction that nature is separate from culture.

The affective relationship between dancers and dirt in *Las Mariposas* can perhaps gesture toward a nomadic post-anthropocentric approach to performance. The exchange between dancer and dirt seems to fit within Braidotti’s concept of nomadic-becomings, which she describes as: the affirmation of the unalterably positive structure of difference, meant as a multiple and complex process of transformation, a flux of multiple becomings . . . a process of expression, composition, selection, and incorporation of forces aimed at positive transformation of the subject. (145)

In *Las Mariposas*, dancers and dirt engaged in a fluctuating relationship that involved expression and transformation. To *become*, one must attempt to empty oneself of traditional classifications, experiences, and perceptions and be open to experiencing other life forms in new ways, with multiple senses through methods that push and stretch the body. The interaction

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26 The dirt used in the Dominican performance was dirt from the Dominican Republic.
between dancers and dirt in *Las Mariposas* troubled traditional Western nature/culture binaries as it deterritorialized their conventional relationship and reterritorialized it into an affective, trans-corporeal relationship: dancer became-dirt and dirt became-dancer. This becoming between dancers and dirt opened the dancers to a new experience that pushed the limits of their bodies. By using performance, affect, and ecofeminist theory to explore the relationship between dancers and dirt in *Las Mariposas*, we can begin to rethink traditional notions of anthropocentric and speciesist approaches to performance. Instead we can contemplate a nomadic post-anthropocentric or “trans” approach where the viscous porosity between bodies, organisms, species, and phenomena are open to a “flux of multiple becomings” (145).

I gratefully acknowledge my colleague and collaborator, Evangeline Rose Whitlock (AEA Stage Manager), who generously shared her interviews with Eveoke Dance Company members in the months leading up to the *Earth Matters on Stage* conference in which we co-presented on the panel “‘And so I offered them our Land’: The Land/Body Intersection in Eveoke Dance Theatre’s *Las Mariposas*,” and allowed me to use them in this chapter. My close reading of the production’s staging and choreography is based on DVD recordings of *Las Mariposas* that I obtained with permission from Eveoke Dance Theatre.

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CONCLUSION: CONTACT ZONES

Suppose you offer to sweep a friend’s house, and then spread the gathered dust through your own place—you might learn something about friendship.

Allan Kaprow

_The Blurring of Art and Life_

Mud, dirt, soil, grime, and dust hold one of the keys to selfhood. It is literally true that we are dirt and unto dirt we shall return. But that is not just because the soil feeds the plants and animals that feed us and that we will one day feed in return. Nor is it because some god cursed us with mortality. Soil holds bacteria and we cannot construct an “I” without bacteria.

Gerald N. Callahan

_Lousy Sex: Creating Self in an Infectious World_

I pick up my right foot and place it on the muddy ground.

SLLUUURRPP

The mud sucks in my right foot, encasing it past my ankle.

I feel cold water seep through my boot.

I balance on my right foot and pick up my left foot and place it in front of me.

SLLUUURRP

The mud sucks in my left foot, encasing it past my ankle.

I feel cold water seep through my boot.

I balance on my left foot and pick up my right foot and place it in front of me.
I continue in this rhythm
Right
SLLUUURRP
Left
SLLUUURRP
Right
SLLUUURRP
Left
SLLUUURRP...

I tread alongside three botanists through a swampy, lowland forest in backwoods Virginia. At first the quicksand like mud feels overpowering, suctioning my feet and encasing my boots with thick, viscous mud. After a while, however, I develop a rhythm and my body adjusts to the way that the terrain has altered my movement. As Susan Leigh Foster maintains, “A body, whether sitting writing or standing thinking or walking talking or running screaming, is a bodily writing” (Choreographing History 3). Through my movement, I am writing on the muddy landscape, depositing sweat, skin cells, and countless unseen organisms that cling to my skin, clothes, and shoes, into the forest habitat. The terrain is also writing on me, as vegetation and insects scratch and bite my skin, altering the invisible bacterial and fungal cultures that reside there. “In their movements, past bodies also rubbed up against or moved alongside geological and architectural constructions, music, clothing, interior decorations,” remarks Foster, “whose material remains leave further indications of those bodies’ dispositions” (Choreographing History 5). For Foster, bodies connect and collide with other bodies, both material and discursive, and these exchanges re-compose those bodies. In other words, the exchange between myself and the terrain alters both
our bodies as I leave parts of myself in the forest and elements of the forest adhere to my skin and clothes, altering untold other organisms and bodies as they accompany me when I exit the forest. My movement and the affective and trans-corporeal exchanges that occur blur the boundaries between individual and ecological communities, person and place. In this space, my body produces meaning per Donna Haraway’s concept of the “material-semiotic actor,” and my movement with and through the mud acts as a form of partnered choreography, vis-à-vis the theory of Foster. As discussed in the Introduction, these interactions create a “contact zone,” a space “where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other” (Pratt 34). Similarly, Stacy Alaimo declares, “Crucial ethical and political possibilities emerge from this literal ‘contact zone’ between human corporeality and the more-than-human nature” (“Trans-Corporeal Feminisms” 238). It was this “contact zone” between my body and other organisms and phenomena that pushed the limits of my corporeality and challenged me to reconsider my relationship to nature. These challenges prompted the conversations and questions that eventually led me to write this dissertation.

In this study, dirt functions as a complex site of interaction between human and non-human bodies that structures or choreographs the movement of the participant or performer. By analyzing these case studies through the discourses of ecocriticism, ecofeminism, postmodernism, and performance studies I have aimed to create greater awareness of how social, performative, and theatrical representations of the natural world inform humans’ understanding of their relationship with it. Additionally, I have emphasized the notion that performance is capable of transgressing, subverting, and/or dismantling the nature/culture construct and offers alternative visions for understanding humans’ relationship with the natural world. Each of these case studies demonstrates the permeability between people and place and disassembles the
construct that humans exist separate from nature. Instead, each chapter builds toward the argument that interchanges between humans and more-than-humans are porous and transcorporeal. Ultimately, I argue that the performative examples in each chapter testify to the notion that humans are not separate, but rather part of a complex interspecies interchange.

In Chapter One, “(Un)Trammeled by Man: Wilderness as Symbol and Simulacrum,” I argue that the construction and spatial orientation of the national parks choreographs visitors’ movements, affects their perceptions of wilderness, and seemingly perpetuates a reification of the nature/culture binary. Using Shenandoah National Park as a case study, I explore the ways that the construction of the park, through the movement and dislocation of dirt, trees, people, animals, and other inhabitants of the land, constructs an orientation to the park that places people as subject and nature as object. Thus, humans are placed outside of nature rather than made to be part of it. The history, construction, choreography, and performance of wilderness in the national parks, in this specific instance Shenendoah, inscribe the mythology of the American frontier and initially seem to promote the notion that nature and culture are separate. While national parks claim to be places where humans are a part of nature, their spatial arrangement, performance, and rhetoric of wilderness at first glance indicate otherwise. However, a deeper investigation dismantles these constructed binaries of “nature” and “culture,” “real” and “artificial,” “live” and “mediatized,” because the parks themselves are “hybrid technologies” that possess varying degrees of each of these elements (Grusin 10). The performance of wilderness within the borders of the national parks demonstrates how dominant political and social systems have the power to inform humans’ perceptions of what constitutes as “nature.” I analyze the national parks through cultural and performative lens to demonstrate the ways that human’s orientation to nature (and by extension elements such as dirt) is constructed in particular ways. This chapter functions to
situate the relationship between humans and nature and to demonstrate the far-reaching implications of these boundaries. It also serves as a launching point into discussions of more specific relationships between humans, dirt, and other organisms. The subsequent chapters complicate the constructed relationship between humans and nature and eventually demonstrate the trans-corporeality of the world that humans, non-human animals, and more-than-humans all inhabit.

In Chapter Two, “Digging Up the Past: Excavating and Exhuming History in Suzan-Lori Parks’s *The America Play,*” I continue my exploration of human perceptions of nature but in this instance focus on the use of dirt in Parks’s *The America Play.* I execute a textual and dramaturgical analysis to explore how the movement and choreography of dirt in the play functions as a mode of historiographical inquiry and excavation that has the potential to create “new” historical events. Through the use of dance, affect, and immanent philosophy theories, I argue that *The America Play* problematizes notions of “genuine historicity” through kinesthetic movement, affective relationships, and virtual *becomings.* Ultimately, I assert that through digging, *becoming*-Lincoln, and *becoming*-history, the Foundling Father unearths the past, excavating forgotten and buried “bones” or events and also creates “new historical events,” that stand in for the absent “bones” and give voice to the vanished, silent stories of African Americans. The Foundling Father’s digging functions as a performative historiography that illustrates the permeability of person and place, individual and ecological community. Thus, the past exists in the soil/land and to dig up the dirt is to bring the past into the present.

In Chapter Three, “‘Filthy’ Bodies: Peat as Viscous Partner in Pina Bausch’s *Le Sacre du Printemp,*” I move from a textual, dramaturgical analysis to an exploration of peat as a literal element onstage that affects the staging and choreography. The use of peat in *The Rite of Spring*
demonstrates that “matter matters” in performance by staging the viscous porosity between human and earthy bodies. As Bausch uses a natural element that has been reduced into an expendable resource, her staging is both problematic and complex. Even though the peat, in this instance, has been reduced to what Alaimo calls a “thing,” it does not remain passive. Instead, the peat re-asserts its agency by adhering to the dancers’ skin and costumes, and ultimately exposes the labor and effort of their performance. The peat marks the dancers’ skin, writing on their bodies in a manner that reads as “abject” to viewers. This inscription reveals the viscous porosity between the dancers’ bodies and the elements and organisms that compose the peat. This bodily inscription generally read as “disgusting” emphasizes that elements of “yuck” are commonly camouflaged in performance, in this way Bausch’s choreography makes these absent elements present. The use of peat in *The Rite of Spring* exhibits the visceral and porous nature of human and more-than-human bodies, demonstrating that in performance “matter matters.”

In Chapter Four, “A Dirty *Pas De Deux*: Becoming-Dirt in Eveoke Dance Theatre’s *Las Mariposas,*” I delve more deeply into the use of dirt as a choreographic element in performance. I explore the use of dirt, and the organisms that reside within it, in *Las Mariposas* to argue that through the complex affective relationship between the dirt and the dancers, the dancers actually become-dirt and the dirt becomes-human. In *Las Mariposas,* dancers and dirt engage in a fluctuating relationship that involves expression and transformation and ultimately gestures toward a nomadic post-anthropocentric approach to performance. This interaction troubles traditional Western nature/culture binaries as it deterritorializes conventional relationships between humans and other phenomena and organisms and reterritorializes them into affective, trans-corporeal relationships: dancers become-dirt and dirt becomes-dancer. Performance, affect, and ecofeminist theory allow an exploration of the relationship between dancers and dirt that
enable humans to rethink traditional notions of anthropocentric and speciesist approaches to performance. Instead we can begin to contemplate a nomadic post-anthropocentric or “trans” approach where the viscous porosity between bodies, organisms, species, and phenomena are open to a “flux of multiple becomings” (145).

The chapters build toward the argument that performance has the power to dismantle master narratives, permeate borders, and create alternate modes of understanding in regards to anthropocentric tendencies. While activist performance is one explicit way of critiquing conventional belief systems, I believe that performance can also work in subtle ways to challenge beliefs and practices that re-inscribe a divide between nature and culture, human and more-than-human. In this way, Dwight Conquergood’s understanding of performance “as kinesis, as movement, motion, fluidity, fluctuation, all those restless energies that transgress boundaries and trouble closure” applies to the entire study (138). This notion of performance as movement that “interrupts, interrogates, antagonizes, and decenters powerful master discourse,” does not just apply to the Foundling Father’s becoming-Lincoln, it also applies to becoming-dirt and ultimately the viscous porosity between bodies. Examining each of these case studies through an ecocritical methodology “breaks” previous understandings of the exchanges between bodies (human and non-human) in performance and “remakes” or reterritorializes them into something different. This “breaking” decenters the master narrative of the nature/culture divide and thus “remakes” or shifts the understanding to that of a trans-corporeal, viscously porous world. This reterritorialization of how humans understand themselves in the world is vitally important, because as Callahan remarks in the epigraph, “[s]oil holds bacteria and we cannot construct an ‘I’ without bacteria” (2). Thus, humans are not isolated from other organisms, nor are they individual, autonomous units. Human bodies are complex ecosystems comprised of
numerous other species that are constantly being composed and recomposed. “[W]ith little or no effort on our part,” affirms Callahan, “we become a menagerie, a walking ecosystem, a universe apart—10 percent human 90 percent other (maybe)” (52). The viscous porosity between humans, non-humans, and more-than-humans dismantles traditional speciesist categories and hierarchies because it reveals that humans are not separate from, but rather composed of and enmeshed with other organisms and phenomena. This revelation disassembles long-established master narratives where humans are separate from “nature” and instead situates them within a post-human ideology where they do not dominate, but rather, are constantly interacting and intertwined with the world around them. Thus, the “human” is both a physical and discursive “contact zone” as he or she exists in a dynamic space of becoming and trans-corporeality that is constantly being re-composed.

As discussed in Chapter Four, Alaimo maintains, “[b]y underscoring that ‘trans’ indicates movement across different sites, transcorporeality opens up an epistemological ‘space’ that acknowledges the often unpredictable and unwanted actions of human bodies, non-human creatures, ecological systems, chemical agents, and other actors” (“Trans-Corporeal Feminisms” 238). The trans-corporeal exchanges of becoming-Lincoln and becoming-history in The America Play, becoming-peat in The Rite of Spring, and becoming-dirt in Las Mariposas, open up an “epistemological space” that allows humans to understand the past and the present differently. In The America Play, The Foundling Father digs a hole and brings the past, the deep dirt, into the present. The dirt he unearths is comprised of elements of the past and contains ancient geologic and biologic information. In the same way, the peat and dirt used in The Rite of Spring and Las Mariposas contain ecological, biological, and historical remnants of the past, as they both consist of organic and inorganic, biotic and abiotic elements. The peat, however, is also potentially
comprised of ancient human bodies, some of which may have been sacrificial victims. While the Dominican dirt contains human bodies as well, possibly even those killed under Trujillo’s regime like the Mirabal sisters.

In each chapter dirt and peat created a performative landscape that blurred history, science, archeology and culture. Just as my body affected the terrain and conversely the terrain affected my body during the botanical fieldwork, actual and virtual “trammelers” of the national parks become one another as they exchange physical and discursive elements. Bodies moving through the choreographed space of the parks create “contact zones” and produce meaning as they connect and collide with other bodies and phenomena. The use of dirt and peat in *The America Play*, *The Rite of Spring*, and *Las Mariposas*, also created a space where remnants of the past were unearthed and allowed to tell their stories. Through the unearthing of history, *The Foundling Father* becomes-Lincoln, thus imagining an alternate history for African Americans. Through dancing with peat and dirt, the performers in *The Rite of Spring* and *Las Mariposas* become-dirt and peat, imagining alternate ways to interact with species in performance. These affective exchanges enable an exhumation of the past, or a performative historiographic inquiry, that allows forgotten remnants and absent histories to become present. These case studies demonstrate that land can quite literally contain information that changes and influences the ways that we understand and interpret the past. Altering our understanding of the past can also shift our interpretation of the present and the future, thus, giving voice to bodies and events that had previously been silenced. Moreover, allowing those that have been rendered speechless, to speak, understanding, however, that it may be in a different language.

These affective processes also demonstrate that the most minute organism or event has the potential to alter how human bodies operate in the present and potentially the future. The
affective exchanges in each chapter demonstrate the permeability between ecological communities and that these becomings offer avenues to change the past, present, and future. As Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari argue, “We are not in the world, we become with the world. . . . We become universes. Becoming animal, plant, molecular, becoming zero” (Philosophy 169). Bodies, per Deleuze and Guattari, are not separate from the world, they become with the world, exchanging elements, particles, organisms, and bacteria that constantly shape and reshape their bodies and the bodies around them.

While this dissertation demonstrates that performance has the potential to permeate boundaries and disrupt anthropocentric tendencies in the arts, it barely scratches the surface regarding ways these theories and philosophies can be practically applied to theatre and dance. As I endeavor to push these inquiries further, I will continue researching theoretical approaches to inter-species relationships in performance but also venture into ways that these philosophies can be practically applied to methods of acting and dance.

I have begun some brief excursions into thinking about how to use affective and transcorporeal approaches in performance. For example in a Post-Modernism class I took in the summer of 2013 I created a performance that explored the ecology of skin, not as a single organism, but rather as an entire ecosystem. For this performance, I had the audience members place adhesive strips of gauze on their arms and at various points during the performance I approached them and took the gauze off their body and adhered it on my own. When I approached audience members I had them read aloud text that dealt with skin in different ways: scientifically, theoretically, practically, and theatrically. I thought the exchange of the gauze pads might illuminate the constructed boundaries between bodies by drawing attention to the fact that we all exchange molecules, skin cells, germs, and other organisms more than we realize.
Similarly, the same year, my friend and colleague, Slade Billew and I co-directed and choreographed a production of Naomi Iizuka’s *Skin* during which we began tentative steps toward a system of physical movement that considered affective relationships between human partners and contemplated non-human participants, such as performance environments. The choreography of the show emerged from physical partner work and actors were generally paired with other actors. When actors had monologues or were not partnered with other actors, however, we encouraged them to think about something else in the space—floor, rehearsal space, prop—as their partner in the exchange. When developing the physical movement sequences for the production, we encouraged actors to listen to their partners with their whole body and let the acting and speaking emerge from the physical relationship.\(^{28}\) The affective explorations we began in *Skin* were very elementary, but they were a starting point and raised questions and ideas that I intend to pursue in the future.

I would like to continue investigating what it means to incorporate non-human participants such as animals, organisms and/or “intra-acting phenomena” like environments and natural elements in performance. Another avenue I would like to pursue is how to facilitate discussions with non-academic audiences regarding non-human participants in performance. In academia, one can apply an ecocritical lens to examine the complexities of non-human bodies in performance, but outside of intellectual circles how does one commence conversations about these issues? I think perhaps pedagogical and dramaturgical avenues may be some methods to

\(^{28}\) I would like to note that by no means were these performances post-human, in many ways they were actually quite anthropocentric. Theoretically, however, I was interested in exploring and acknowledging other bodies and organisms in the performances.
begin dialogues regarding how ecocritical issues in performance can be circulated and discussed in performance venues and theatres outside of academia.

As discussed throughout this dissertation, we live in a world inundated with ecological dilemmas and disasters, from nuclear waste, water contamination, and oil spills, to hurricanes, deforestation, over-fishing, and ozone depletion. These phenomena affect human, non-human, and more-than-human bodies creating the potential for “plastic flesh” and “toxic bodies” (Tuana 201). While these are complex problems with no easy solutions, perhaps a shift in our understanding of human and non-human as separate and distinct to a consideration of the trans-corporeality between all bodies might alter ways that humans interact with other bodies. Regarding this shift in understanding, Kate Sopher asserts,

Rather than becoming more awe-struck by nature, we need perhaps to become more stricken by the ways in which our dependency upon its resources involves us irremediably in certain forms of detachment from it. To get “closer” to nature is, in a sense, to experience more anxiety about all those ways in which we cannot finally identify with it nor it with us. But in that very process, of course, we would also be transforming our sense of human identity itself. (278)

Sopher does not call for a “touchy feely” return to nature but rather a comprehension of nature as both something humans are a part of and something that is also able to assert its independent agency. In other words, Sopher claims that humans need to acknowledge the viscous porosity between themselves and the other organisms that inhabit the world, while at the same time recognizing nature as an “intra-acting phenomena” with the capabilities of asserting agency. Sopher suggests that a shift in the understanding of bodies and environment could transform how humans comprehend their own identity. I believe that one place we could start instituting this
shift is in performance. The Foundling Father becomes-Lincoln and imagines an alternate history for African Americans, and performers in *The Rite of Spring* and *Las Mariposas* become-dirt and imagine alternate ways to interact with species in performance. These examples illustrate new methods of considering human, non-human, and more-than-human bodies in performance and ultimately in the world that we all inhabit.
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